



Nurturing Future Local Historians

What got you interested in local history?

That's a question with any number of answers, but I would hazard a guess that, for most of our members, the enthusiasm didn't stem from their childhoods. I would contend that an interest in family and local history is more likely to creep up on us in our adult lives triggered, in my case, by a chance encounter with a long-lost relative at a family gathering and the chance to explore our shared family history and, in the case of local history, a desire to feel part of the places I've lived by knowing something of their past.

An opportunity to enthuse youngsters about the history of their town presented itself with the instigation of the Cherwell Young Citizens Project way back in 1988, followed by involvement in the Children's University and, subsequently, through my job in a local primary school.

Donning a 'Saxon' costume and venturing into the town centre with thirty seven- and eight-year-olds in tow is an outing I look forward to. Some members will have spotted me recently, clearly not so well-disguised as I supposed!

So we set off... As soon as we leave the school grounds, I attempt to whet the children's appetites with grim tales of the workhouse and link the start of our walk to their recent study of the Victorians. I want them to assume the role of history detectives and I pose a few questions to get the ball rolling. A 'town trail quiz' is designed to keep them focussed and enable them to gather some information about the town's history from their own observations.

This document has undergone much editing over the years, but has its origins in work done for the Cherwell Young Citizens Project at a time when I'd only just nailed my colours to BLHS's mast, didn't feel that I knew much about the town's history and undertook all research with a pram and a one year old!

Back to our journey of discovery! By the time we reach the town centre, I hope to have intrigued the children with stories of mysterious stones in the church wall; the sad reality of the cholera stone; a hidden town centre island; a puzzle over the shape of the Market Square; the prevalence of foxes; the strange naming of The Tewel and Crumps Butts, and anything else that takes their fancy (provided I know the answer!) If the children are as amazed as I am by decisions taken hundreds of years ago that influence our lives today, then I'll be happy. (I use the example of the grant of a Friday market in 1441). If I can convey the thrill of having a Roman brooch on my hand, which was dug up in the area, that's a bonus.

As a society, we've made efforts to interest young people in the town's history and heritage, whether it be by producing a children's trail to accompany our exhibitions and at the Big Lunch; giving talks in local schools; having a child-friendly timeline on our website or supporting children's events in the library. But I feel that there's more work to be done to nurture the local historians of the future, even if it does mean dressing up in a silly costume!

- Sally James



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Dates For Your Diary

Oxford University Talk

19th February - 7:30pm
see page 3

March Newsletter Submissions Deadline

2nd March

Window into Bicester's Past Talk

19th March - 7:30pm
see page 3

AVAILABLE NOW!

Our new DVD, **Bicester's Buildings**, is on sale now.

See the website for more details.



24th February 1882

SHADY BOWER OF A CHURCH PORCH - A rather curious instance of the secular use for a church porch comes from Steeple Aston, where that portion of the sacred edifice has been recently utilised by a well-known female of the village, who has not yet thought it necessary to join the temperance movement.

No respectable innkeeper will permit a female to drink to excess in his house, although the sale of any amount may take place for drinking off the premises. The individual in question, so report says, armed with a couple of quarts, resorted to the church porch to take the potatoes at leisure, and be free from the interruptions of any officious policeman.

Somehow or other, however, the shady bower - with its occupant - was discovered in the twilight and the game was spoiled; but no doubt the cups were empty before the music began.

7th February 1908

MATCHING THE TINDER-BOX - An elderly matron at Weston-on-the-Green the other day was calling to mind the introduction of lucifer matches, and the use of the flint and steel and tinder-box before matches came into general use. She was about five years old when they first had matches, and she is now 75, so that at Weston the tinder-box gave way to the match-box about the year 1837.

Her mother said it would not do to have such dangerous things about, because of the children. But matches, like motor-cars nowadays, came to stay, although the dangerous nature of "lucifers" among children was quickly recognised at Weston-on-the-Green; but, despite the danger, everybody took to matches, although it was but a small wooden box of them for a penny.

"How did you get tinder for everyday use?"

"Oh, every bit of rag had to be saved. If there was a bit of rag about not fit for anything else, that must be put aside for tinder." If by chance the tinder was damp, or sufficient had not been made, they had to go to beg a bit of a neighbour before a light could be had; and it was very awkward sometimes to get a light.

In winter time, when darkness prevailed and the climatic conditions were not favourable - say at five o'clock in the morning - no doubt things looked serious, and it was on such occasions that tradition says more doubtful adjectives we used than at any other time in what is called "the good old times." Evidently the modern match leans to the side of virtue.

5th February 1932

THE GHOST TRAIN - A new form of railway vehicle, known as the Ghost Train, has made its appearance this week on the Oxford to Bletchley line. The single car, which has the characteristics of a motor-coach, is driven by petrol and is fitted with balloon tyres held to the railway track by a steel flange.

It is known as the Michelin rail car, and tests are being made to discover its speed and adaptability for use between the two termini on this route. The car carries 16 passengers, and the larger type, it is stated, will



accommodate 48. Various speeds have been attained during the tests, and it is hoped to cover the 30 miles of the route in half an hour.

The vehicle weighs five tons, and is of 27 horse power, running 12 miles to the gallon. There are five forward gears and one reverse, the latter being on the opposite side as an anti-accident device. A burst of a tyre is indicated in the coach by the sound of a warning bell.

The distance from Bicester to Bletchley, 19 miles, has been covered in 23 minutes, and on some of the runs the coach has made an average of 70 miles per hour. Two Frenchmen are in charge during the tests. The car is noiseless in travel.

This is the first rail vehicle to be fitted with pneumatic tyres in this country. The adhesion of the tyres to the rail is three times as great as that of a steel wheel.

15th February 1957

NEW LIGHTS FOR OLD - Work on the Urban Council's scheme to improve Bicester's main street lighting began this week. The scheme will cost approximately £3,000.

The streets and roads involved in the scheme are London Road, Market Hill, Sheep Street, St John's Street, Field Street and North Street. The existing 24 street lamps will be replaced by 43 sodium vapour lamps, similar to those recently installed in Market Square.

In addition to a number of new reinforced concrete columns 25 feet high, wall brackets will be used and some lamps will be fixed to existing poles. A suspended lamp will be installed at the Market Square end of Sheep Street. When completed the lighting will conform with Ministry of Transport standards for trunk roads.

Contractors for the scheme are the General Electric Company, one of the largest electrical contracting firms in the world. Connecting to the mains will be carried out by Southern Electricity Board engineers.

Fifty per cent of the cost of the scheme is being met by a grant from the Ministry of Transport. The remaining money comes from Urban Council balances.

Marj's Memories The Garth in the Forties

Until the forties the Garth was a private house. Mrs Keith-Falkoner who lived there was a keen huntswoman. My mother told me that she was a very tiny lady and when seen on horseback she looked like a little doll. It was said that her wish was to die on the hunting field, but that did not happen.

I remember the delight when we were told that the



big house and grounds had been left to the people of Bicester. The children were so pleased to go in and see. An amusement park had been built for the children which was well used and much enjoyed. We hadn't had anything like that before. I was very interested in the little cemetery which still exists (I hope it will for years

to come). It is much the same now but one little grave is missing: it was on the right as you walk in and the epitaph read "To my little cat Zulu". I always wondered what that little cat was like!

The grounds were perfect, like today, and at one time dance music was played on a Sunday night and couples danced on the lawn near the house.

On one occasion, around 1953, there was talent competition in the open air and the stage was a flat surface where a massive tree had been felled. It was a beautiful summer's day and some lovely singing took place.

One particular contestant that I never forgot was a young teenage boy who sang word perfect, a song that was very much like the gramophone record of the time. The chorus went "That was a cute little rhyme, sing me another one do"!

Apparently he did such a good rendering of the song in the afternoon that he was asked to repeat it in the evening. His mum dressed him up in his best suit to do the evening performance.

The boy was our very own Brian Clifton!

- Marjorie Dean MBE

Roll of Honour

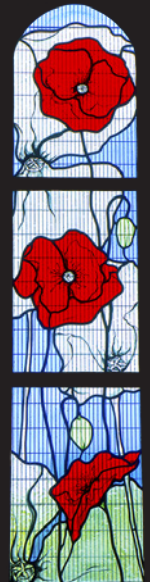
The following are the local men who died in the Great War, 100 years ago this month.

Private John Warner, of Islip.

Died: 8th February 1918 Aged: 38 Served in: Devonshire Regiment

Lance Corporal Wilfred Paxton, of Finmere.

Died: 15th February 1918 Aged: 19 Served in: Royal Berkshire Regiment



Talks Update

Over the next few months we have a varied itinerary of talks that we hope will prove very interesting.

Monday 19th February

Chris Day talks to us about the history of Oxford University in his talk, the **Home of Lost Causes & Forsaken Beliefs**.

Monday 19th March

BLHS member Pat Snelson gives us **A Window into Bicester's Architectural History**.

Monday 16th April

Professor Greg Stores tells us about **Charles Dickens as 19th Century Social Reformer and Medical Observer**.

Village History Stoke Lyne

The village of Stoke Lyne lies about 4 miles north of Bicester.

Tostig Godwinson, Earl of Northumbria, held the manor before the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. When Tostig's elder brother, Harold Godwinson, was crowned King Harold II in January 1066, Earl Tostig encouraged Harald III of Norway to invade England. He did, but in September Harold II defeated the Norwegian army at the Battle of Stamford Bridge and both Harald and Tostig were killed in the fighting.

The Domesday Book records that in 1086 Stoke Lyne's feudal overlord was Walter Giffard, who William II made 1st Earl of Buckingham in 1097. The manor remained part of the honour of Giffard until Walter Giffard, 2nd Earl of Buckingham, died without an heir in 1164. It then passed to Richard de Clare, 2nd Earl of Pembroke, who was descended from a sister of the first Walter Giffard.

It remained with his heirs until Anselm Marshal, 6th Earl of Pembroke, died without a male heir in 1245. Anselm's estates were divided between five co-heiresses and Stoke

Lyne passed to Richard de Clare, 5th Earl of Hertford and 2nd Earl of Gloucester, whose mother, Isabel Marshal, was a daughter of William Marshal, 1st Earl of Pembroke.

Richard de Clare's grandson Gilbert de Clare, 7th Earl of Hertford, was killed at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 leaving no male heir. His estates were divided between his three sisters but there is no record of Stoke Lyne being one of them.

Thereafter the Earls of Oxford held Stoke Lyne as part of their honour of Whitchurch until at least the 16th century.

The Church of England parish church of Saint Peter has

a late Norman nave and chancel. A north aisle was added in the 13th century and a south tower was added early in the 14th century. Most of the north aisle was demolished, leaving just the easternmost bay as a north transept. It is now a Grade II* listed building.

The tower has three bells, all cast by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. Thomas II Mears cast the second bell in 1812, while Mears and Stainbank cast the treble in 1869 and the tenor in 1925.

The stained glass window in the tower of St Edburg's Church, Bicester, which has recently been repaired following an act of vandalism, is dedicated to, amongst others, Rev. Charles Marsham. He was the nephew of the Honourable Charlotte Coker (1761-1794) and during his career he held the livings of both Stoke Lyne and Caversfield.

A Church of England school for the village was built in 1864 and reorganised as a junior school in 1930. It was still open in 1954 but has since closed.

- Matthew Hathaway



St Peter's Church

Summer Walks Programme

This year we have decided to focus on two villages for our village and countryside walks, as well as another of Liz Woolley's Oxford walks.

As in previous years these walks are open to members only and will require a small contribution to cover refreshments. Further details for each walk will be released nearer the time.

Folly Bridge & Grandpont, South Oxford
Sunday 8th July 2018 - led by Liz Woolley

Chesterton Countryside Walk

Sunday 5th August 2018 - led by John Roberts

Aynho Countryside Walk

Sunday 19th August 2018 - led by John Roberts

Chesterton Village Walk

Sunday 9th September 2018 - led by Bob Hessian

Aynho Village Walk

Sunday 23rd September 2018 - led by Bob Hessian

Excavations at the Westgate Talk

Ben Ford, director of the excavations at the Westgate is a Senior Project Manager at Oxford Archaeology.

Archaeology took place on this site in central Oxford from 2015 to June 2016, and represented a unique opportunity to understand the history of this area prior to the redevelopment of the shopping centre. The principal focus was on the mediaeval period, but archaeologists also investigated the 19th century housing, an old channel called the Trill Mill, a possible water mill and a possible Iron Age village.

In the 1960s Oxford City Council began a major redevelopment of the city in the south western part of the town around the mediaeval church of St Ebbe's. At this time, a large part of the church and fragments of the cloisters of the Oxford Franciscan Friary or Greyfriars were discovered. This dated from 1224 and was located between St Ebbe's Church and the city wall. When the original site was outgrown, permission was given to extend the precinct to the south and build a church across the line of the wall. This was marginal land outside of the well-drained gravel promontory on which the city had developed. However, the friars were expert builders and were able to exploit the terrain to channel water for fishponds and flushing toilets.

Evidence of a stone-lined channel and sluice have been found in the



recent excavations. This was the friars' water supply. The complex consisted of dormitories, two libraries, a toilet block, a kitchen range, store houses, a buttery, a servery, an infirmary and a eating hall. Teaching rooms and the libraries were situated around cloisters, the whole being surrounded by a precinct wall.

Pits for kitchen waste located in a yard between the kitchen range and the precinct wall gave an indication of the friars' varied diet of wheat, oats, barley, rye, nuts, herbs, meat, fish, eggs, poultry and shellfish. This was further supplemented by homegrown produce. The area known as Paradise was used to grow food and graze animals.

The friars enjoyed considerable status as teachers within the university and produced books for the papal library. A stylus, a lead pencil, parchment, prickers (for

planning the layout of a document) and book clasps were excavated in support of this reputation.

After the Reformation the buildings of Greyfriars were pulled down and much of the stone used to provide building materials.

During the Civil War, Oxford was used as the royalists' military base necessitating the construction of new fortifications. A map dating from 1644 shows the extent of these works and conforms with the discovery of a large flat-bottomed ditch which follows the line of the defences. A well-preserved halberd was found in this area.



Between c. 1820 and the 1860s, the site was built over with streets of terraced housing, known as 'The Friars'. The development, which included small shops and a number of public houses, suffered from poor drainage and a lack of piped water. The proximity of cesspits and wells ultimately led to serious health problems among the residents and outbreaks of cholera in the mid-1800s. By the mid-1900s the area was scheduled for clearance and redevelopment and was finally demolished in the 1970s. - Sally James

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