



## Busy Year Ahead

This year sees the society with rather a busy calendar of events, some of which we have done before and others that will be a first.

In the coming months we hope to repeat the success that the Oxfordshire History Centre and Bodleian Library had with their recent maps exhibition by hosting one of our own in the Library. We hold an interesting selection of old maps and are looking forward to getting them out on display for a few days.

Hopefully we will be able to arrange an outing to the Oxfordshire History Centre, in Cowley around this time too. Anyone who hasn't been there already will find it fascinating, and for anyone who has been before it's always worth a second look, you never know just what you'll come across.

The Early May Bank Holiday being moved to coincide with the 75th anniversary of VE Day gives us the opportunity to help the Town Council with their commemorative events, and we also hope to have the official unveiling of our World War One memorial bench at that time too.

In the summer we are again planning to lay on a selection of village and town walks. We are currently looking at Charlbury, Bloxham and Witney, but have yet to confirm any arrangements. There won't be any



The 'Talking Maps' event last October.

accompanying countryside walks, but we are planning to do a few town walks in Bicester once again.

The Bicester Festival in September has the theme of 'Fire' this year, so expect to see the old fire engine out in Sheep Street putting on a good show, as well as a display talking about the history and preservation of it.

At the same time St Edburg's Church will be hosting their Open Doors event, with the theme of 'Hidden Nature'. We will also be involved with this, providing a Cemetery Trail to guide people around some of the more interesting and noteworthy graves in the cemetery and churchyard, as well as putting on a display in the church to give further details.

That will be quickly followed by our AGM on Monday 21st September, which will include a bit of a trip down memory lane and a look at the history of the society itself.

In early December the church will again be hosting their annual Christmas Tree Festival, for which we will again be putting our craft skills to the test.

Then we finish off the year with our usual social event in place of the regular monthly talk. Its always a lot of fun, and you may even learn something!

- Matthew Hathaway

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### Dates For Your Diary

- Bicester Advertiser Local History Article  
*27th February*
- March Newsletter Submissions Deadline  
*6th March*
- RAF Upper Heyford Talk  
*16th March - 7:30pm*  
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- Bicester Advertiser Local History Article  
*26th March*
- Dating Old Photographs Talk  
*20th April - 7:30pm*  
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Our 2020 calendar. On sale now in **Coles Bookstore.**

## 11th February 1860

### SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE JEWS

On Sunday last, the Annual Sermons in aid of the above society, were preached in this Parish Church, afternoon and evening, by the Rev. William Ayerst M.A., Incumbent of Egerton, Kent, and late Missionary to the Jews in Germany and Poland.

On the following evening a large meeting was held in the Old National School Room. The Rev. J.W. Watts was in the chair; the Rev. W. Ayerst was also present and delivered a long and interesting address, in which he related much of his own personal experience, as a missionary among the Jews for nearly 30 years, and he showed that during the last few years a great change had taken place among the Jews, and that they were far more ready to listen to Christian teaching than in former days.

Collections were made on behalf of the society amounting (with some annual subscriptions) to about £14.

## 23rd February 1900

### ENLARGEMENT OF THE CEMETERY

A special meeting of the Bicester Urban District Council was held at the Council Chamber on Friday evening last. After considering the tenders received for supplying and fixing the pump to be placed near the public well, the main business was the consideration of a letter from Messrs. Beachcroft, Thompson and Co., agents to the Page Turner Estate, on the subject of the enlargement of the cemetery by taking in a piece of Mr Quartermaine's rickyard as already decided upon. From a statement made by the Clerk it appeared the council could now enter into possession of the land almost immediately.

Mr Hunt said he understood from the grave-digger there was still room for another 60 or 80 interments, he would not be sure which, and therefore he advised the council not to rush into the matter. The Clerk said a number of the spaces included would probably have been purchased already. The Chairman thought they might safely let it go on for another six months.

Mr Hunt said the addition was only a small piece, and they must not go at it as though it would last a generation. Besides it would be a heavy expense, and the rates would be very high. They must guard against alarming the ratepayers.

Mr Hedges suggested adjourning the matter in order that the number of grave spaces left might be ascertained, which would be a better guide. Mr Phillips proposed that the Surveyor draw up a specification of the work required to be done in accordance with the conditions under which they bought the land, and that tenders for the work be advertised for. This could be done but it would not be necessary to start the work for two or three months. The Vice-chairman agreed with Mr Phillips. It was true there were still a number of spaces

left, but by using them they were filling up room which might bring in a revenue to the Council, and therefore he considered it a matter of urgency. As to frightening the ratepayers he admitted the expense would be heavy, but took it a certain sum would be borrowed to defray the cost. The old debt on the cemetery was now paid off, and he thought the ratepayers would be quite satisfied if the money was borrowed. He seconded the motion.

The Clerk said they were rather anticipating matters. The correct thing was to get an estimate for the cost and then apply to the Local Government Board to sanction the loan. They must not do the work and then ask for the loan, as probably the Board would want to make an enquiry into the matter.

Mr Hunt moved an amendment that the consideration of the question be postponed for three months as there was no hurry whatever in the matter. Mr Campin seconded, remarking that if Mr Hunt had not risen he intended moving an adjournment for six months. After the discussion the Clerk mentioned that if they intended borrowing the Local Government Board would require notice, and it might perhaps be three or four months before they found it convenient to hold an inquiry. In view of this Mr Hunt withdrew his amendment, and the motion was carried.

## 9th February 1940

### WEATHER HOLD UP

In common with other parts of the country, Bicester has experienced especially severe weather recently, arctic conditions prevailing. The heavy fall of snow, now almost disappeared, made travelling extremely difficult, and in some cases impossible. Trains and buses were delayed, and in the case of the latter certain services had to be curtailed.

The repeated frosts made conditions very bad, and postmen on out-town rounds had to walk, deliveries to the villages for a few days being reduced to one. In the less frequented parts of the district outlying homes were isolated by snowdrifts, in which not a few vehicles were marooned. Schools in some villages were closed, children being unable to reach them from any appreciable distance.

The severe frost which preceded the snow also caused considerable inconvenience to householders in the matter of frozen pipes, and for several days in some homes no water supply was available. Burst pipes also added to the discomfort.

One unfortunate result of this weather was the suspension of all outdoor work, and the number of unemployed in consequence was excessive, and the largest for some years.

The snow-covered ground forced birds to search for food in unusual places, and in consequence allotments were infested with starlings and wood pigeons, which have ravaged the green stuff.

The weather has curtailed most of the activities of the evacuees from Hallsville School, but practically all the children are well and smiling. Sport has been completely stopped, and the first half of the new Oxford League soccer games has been abandoned. When the grounds are normal again the fixtures will be resumed.

The children have been busy preparing for the concert they are giving in aid of Toc H canteen. This takes place on Monday, February 19th, for children only (3d. and 6d.); and on the following Thursday for adults (6d. and 1s.) in St Edburg's Hall. It will be remembered that both at the concert the school gave in aid of Earl Haig's fund and for the pantomime the sale of tickets had to be stopped, so great was the demand. It is hoped that, without wishing to disappoint, a similar state of affairs will exist for the forthcoming concert, thus benefiting to an appreciable extent a worthy object. Local child talent will be included in the programme.

### 13th February 1980

#### WI BRING DINAH BACK TO LIFE

The ladies of Weston-on-the-Green Women's Institute certainly don't do things by halves. They are writing and acting their own play, for the national WI Drama Festival, based on a village character, Dinah Tuffrey, who lived at Weston in the last century.

The WI members are researching the life of Dinah by talking to the oldest residents in the village, reading old local newspapers, looking up ancient records and travelling to Somerset House.

Even some of their costumes will be authentic, as 83-year-old Mrs Cis Beecroft is lending some of her grandmother's clothes for the occasion. Mrs Beecroft, who remembers seeing Dinah when she was a little girl, will also be playing a type of accordion called a Melodian for the show.

The original research on Dinah was done by Miss Ruth Clark of Islip, who was born and bred in Weston. Mrs Margaret Fissenden of West WI has done further research and written the script.

"Some of the older people in the village can remember their parents talking about Dinah and have given us all sorts of tales about her which we are trying to verify," says Mrs Fissenden. "We live and breathe Dinah Tuffrey at the moment!"

Dinah was the village carrier who used to walk the seven miles from Weston to Bicester every week with huge panniers of things to sell, and return home with shopping for people in the village. She had nine children, could not read or write and used to tie pieces of coloured wool round her fingers to remember who the shopping belonged to. On her wedding day her husband was sent to jail for a year and a day for poaching, so the story goes.

"A lot of the tales and hearsay have turned out to be true," said Mrs Fissenden. "One tale was that Dinah's husband was buried in the churchyard at midnight. We thought that could not possibly be true, but records show he died of smallpox in Bicester workhouse, and people with contagious diseases had to be buried discreetly."

The WI will be staging their play at Little Tew Theatre on February 27th and 28th, and if they impress the national adjudicator enough they will go on to perform in the national WI concert at Stratford-on-Avon. But first they are doing a special show for the villagers of Weston to thank them for their help in reconstructing Dinah's story.



*Mrs Beecroft in her grandmother's cap and shawl, showing samples of lace worked by her granny at Weston-on-the-Green.*

## Talks Update

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

### Monday 16th March

We learn all about **RAF Upper Heyford**, from the Great War to the Cold War, with Ian Lough-Scott.

### Monday 20th April

Tom Doig guides us through **Dating Old Photographs**, and people are welcome to bring their own for consultation.

### Monday 18th May

Heather Horner tells us about observing dateable features in old buildings in her **Straight Joints & Curved Braces** talk.

## Bicester, From a Brook Another Royal Visitor

This is the eighth part in a series of articles that were originally published in the Bicester Advertiser in 1932.

It would be of some archaeological interest if it were possible to discover where exactly "Moore's House" stood in the town. Has anybody who occupies a house near the Market Square any relic in the form of a very old wardrobe, probably worm-eaten, and held together by ancient nails, or a partition which is evidently not of modern design?

This residence was, in the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth, the home of an important family, the Moores, but all that the records have to say of the place was that it stood "near the market". The parish papers indicate by a deed of sale that the messuage or tenement exchanged hands in 1598 but are silent concerning its location. In the year 1568 all was bustle and excitement at Moore's House - which may have stood near the brook end of the Causeway - for carpenters and locksmiths were busy "mendinge of staires, makinge of newe dores and partycions and a press for robes" in readiness for a visit to Bicester from Queen Elizabeth. Whenever her Majesty travelled through her kingdom a careful note was made by her Controller of the expenses incurred for her reception, and the items were written in a "paye booke". Humphrey Parker and William Awstene (Austin) were then Bicester carpenters who colloquially speaking, "got busy on the job". At the same time a great tent was conveyed from Stowe House to Bicester, presumable for the royal garden party.

The Queen came in state from Buckingham on a day in September. She was then 35 years of age, and had been reigning just ten years. In the words of Blomfield "No local record or tradition has kept this visit in remembrance but we can well imagine the stir which it created. The preparations and then the entertainments at the chief house in the town; the scene of gaiety in the streets, the quaint windows and gabled ends of houses decked with bright colours and all the inhabitants flocking together to pay homage to the stately queen". She, with her lords and ladies, passed down St John's street (the old road connecting Crocwell with St John's Hospital), past the Church to the market place, and thence, when her visit was over, to Ricot near Thame.

Exactly twenty years after this visit the townsfolk saw, blazing on high Muswell Hill, one of the beacons that flamingly announced the approach of the Great Armada, and later took their part in the rejoicings over its severe defeat. Bicesterians, no doubt, handled some of the special coins that were minted to commemorate the occasion. One side of the coin showed a fleet flying with full sails, and had the inscription "Venit, vidit, fugit", which, translated, means "It came, it saw, it fled".

The earliest recorded murder in Bicester occurred during the reign of Elizabeth. The church register has a note of a burial in 1590 of "a stranger who was murdered

in the field"; the name of the victim is unknown.

What of social life at this time in Bisiter, Bircester, Bicester or Burcester (one document alone has all four versions of the name in a period when people were not too particular in their spelling). To shear sheep on a Sunday was an offence ecclesiastical, and Richard Sherborne and three or four others had to appear before the Court of the Archdeacon of Oxford for doing it. People of quality passed along Causeway carried in litters by footmen or rode on gaily caparisoned steeds. A great improvement took place among the agricultural classes, who, instead of eating salt-fish, had meat. Farmhouses made of wattle or mud and lath were replaced by dwellings of brick and stone. For the first time Bicester houses were seen with chimneys, instead of the smoke-escape hole in the roof. Pillows were in general use for beds, and carpets instead of rushes on the floors. Possibly there was a House of Correction in the town for compulsory work for tramps and the levying of the poor rate was transferred from the magistrates to the churchwardens. The breed of horses and cattle was improved, and a far greater use made of manure and dressings. One acre under the new system produced as much as two under the old. The whirr of spinning wheels was heard around the town, for farmers' wives began to spin their wool from their own sheep's backs into a coarse "home spun".

At that time you would see a pillory in the market place for the punishment of all offences except the worst. There was no lawyer in the town. Travellers along the road to London (via Stratton Audley and Grendon) may have occasionally fallen into company with the young stage-player, Shakespeare, in his various journeys between Stratford and London. A tradition has always been current in Grendon that Shakespeare used to pass through that village, and a house is still pointed out (that of Mr Harrington Mann, the portrait painter) as that in which he used to stay to sleep.



*A special coin, (enlarged) circulated in Bicester*

# Cotswold Stone Barns Talk

Tim Jordan, who lives in a converted barn in Eynsham, told us that stone barns have been part of the landscape since the middle ages. Examples from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries can still be found throughout the Cotswolds. Most of the present-day barns, however, were built between 1600 and 1900, usually grouped around farmsteads or on the edge of villages. They provided essential storage space, shelter for livestock and facilities for shearing sheep and processing crops. Added to which are many hundreds of small field barns high on the wolds or down in sheltered valleys.

In the Cotswolds, a limestone belt produces stone of varying tones: grey in the south and a warmer hue in the north. Stone tiles may be used for roofing, although early barns would have been thatched, particularly in the north Cotswolds. Concrete tiles, blue slate or iron sheeting offered alternative roofing materials, all



*Middle Littleton Tythe Barn*

of which kept the building in good order.

Countrywide, construction was similar, but regional differences are apparent. Some barns reflected the wealth of the original owner, not only by their size but by the quality of the stonework and embellishments. Early examples were cruck-built with the frame only visible from the interior.

The threshing floor was, originally, constructed of peat or soil, but later oak or elm floors proved better, although they still required maintenance and grain was liable to fall between the cracks. Boards which held the threshed material gave rise to the

term 'threshold'.

Tythes were an ecclesiastical tax to support the clergy and were an early incentive for the building of barns. Examples include Middle Littleton (13th century), Stanway (14th century – built by the Abbot of Tewkesbury), Bredon (14th century – a manorial barn owned by the Bishop of Worcester).

Stone barns have accommodated changing farming practices such as the introduction of belt-driven machinery during the 18th century agricultural revolution and the later innovation of steam-powered threshing. However, modern farming methods have impacted on the use of old barns. Many have been converted for community or commercial use, or, more commonly, for housing, thus preserving this important part of our agricultural and vernacular heritage.

- Sally James



*Bredon Manorial Barn*

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