



## “sicut tu quaedam vinum?”

- “Would you like some wine?”

This must have been a fairly common question back in Roman times, but in Alchester – surely not?

I’m not sure how many of you managed to visit the Ashmolean Museum at the end of last year to see the “Last Supper in Pompeii” exhibition. It explored the ancient Roman love affair with food (and wine), showing where the Romans got their culinary inspiration and how they exported sophisticated ingredients and recipes across the empire, as far afield as Britain. Modern technology allows scientists to look at residues left in pots, cookware, etc., and see what people were eating – they’re called archaeobotanists! So comparisons have been made with not only the deposits found at Pompeii and Herculaneum after the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 A.D., but also with deposits found at Roman sites in the UK, such as at Silchester (Hants), and Alchester (2 miles south of Bicester). The Ashmolean exhibition had a number of exhibits from Alchester,

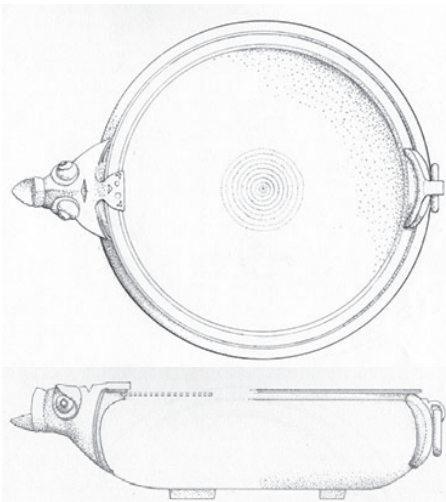


Profile of the fish-head spout

not least the remains of a late Iron-Age work of art, a strainer with a fish-head spout. It had been found in a trench on the site of where the Roman fortress stood and probably dates from AD 43/44 – c. 55/65.

Parts of it were covered in patina but other parts looked like a shiny bronze vessel made very recently. This was due to the anaerobic conditions of the site (waterlogged). The bowl was 9½” in diameter and 2¾” high – a shallow bowl with a spout, with a perforated disc between the spout and the bowl which acted as the strainer – a bit like a very squat tea-pot! It probably had a lid but that was missing. From its design and comparison to similar vessels found at other sites, it is virtually certain that it originated in the south east of Britain and before the conquest of Britain.

No deposits were found in the bowl but the spout and strainer did have traces of substances which were subsequently analysed and found to be mostly celery seeds. Celery seeds and other parts of the plant were



Strainer seen from above and the side

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### Dates For Your Diary

Bicester Advertiser Local History Article	26th March
April Newsletter Submissions Deadline	6th April
Bicester Advertiser Local History Article	23rd April

often mixed with various drinks and liquids either to improve the taste or to create potions for a wide range of medical applications. The Roman author, naturalist and philosopher, Pliny the Elder wrote that if the maidenhair plant was boiled in wine with celery seeds and olive-oil, it could make one’s hair grow curly and dense and prevent hair loss! In Alchester, it is thought that it was used for flavouring wine or possibly to mask the taste of bad tasting wine. The Alchester excavation team did in fact prepare celery-flavoured mulled wine. Opinions were divided but some thought it pleasant enough! But I leave you to decide whether you want your mulled wine at the BLHS Christmas meeting to be flavoured with celery – I suspect it might not be to everybody’s taste!

- Bob Hessian

## Bicester, From a Brook Between Two Fires

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

A countryman, agog with excitement, comes into Burcester and joins a company of the townsfolk gathered at the hostel of the "Six Bells".

"They do say", he remarks, indicating by a pointed finger east and west "that there's soldiers nearly all round this place. I've seen some of them as I came through Chesterton, a lot of them with their horses, and some afoot. They are King's men. And there is talk of the parliament army being as near as Wadsden - some at least, and Brill folks say they can see the watch-fires burning beyond".

Another turn of the Time Wheel brings us to the troubled days when the last English civil war recorded in history, Roundhead against Royalist, was rife. Eight engagements were fought in and near Burcester - the first a skirmish and a swirl of galloping hoofs through the town. The dust rises on the narrow rough road, little more than a simple trackway, from Burcester to Aylesbury on a summer morning, for Sir Philip Stapleton, of the parliament forces, has had information that 400 of the enemy have been discovered at Burcester. Though outnumbered, four to one, a hundred horseman canter in this direction, and it is not long before they see the King's cavalry drawn up in the fields at Wretchwick. The attackers charge and the Royalists thunder in retreat past the Town Hall, through Sheep Street, with the others in hot pursuit. The second encounter was at Hillesden House, which the men of Cromwell attacked from Claydon and sent a strong detachment to Chesterton to cut off any retreat that might be attempted during the night.

The third occurred at Gosford Bridge, and was followed by others at Islip, two desperate affairs at Burcester, at



Finmere, Islip, again. Four thousand men of the King's Army were quartered near Burcester at a later date, and it may be mentioned that, according to tradition Cromwell stayed in this town and slept at the premises, next to the Red Lion Inn, now occupied by Messrs. Lambourne.

It was in this century that John Troughton preached in the town, and originated here a Congregational Church. This denomination can trace its descent, says Green's History of the English People, from the days of Elizabeth when "The Brownists" so called from a clergyman named Brown, rejected the idea of a national church and insisted on the right of each congregation to perfect independence of faith and worship. At the close of the Queen's reign these Brownists had almost entirely disappeared. One of the congregations produced the Pilgrim Fathers. The others took refuge in Holland where under Robinson they freely developed their system of independent congregations, each forming in itself a complete Church, and to them the name of Independents at a later time attached itself. It was when their numbers were increased by the return of emigrants from New England that the Congregational or Independent body began to attract attention.

At this period "The Kings Arms", "The Kings Head" and "The Crown" Inns were built. A grammar school was opened in the Parish Church and occupied the present Lady Chapel; with a good library attached. The dovecote now standing in Old Place Yard was erected and a bowling green was made near by. The shock of an earthquake was felt throughout Oxfordshire and the Midlands in 1683.

What of town life in this time? Guy Fawkes Day was celebrated very keenly, and the Burcester Constable fired gunpowder in a calliver (or small cannon) which he lighted with a fuse. The town watchmen parade the streets reminding the people to hang out lights in front of their houses to augment the light of the very few street lamps. At midnight you hear their bell ring, and the call "Twelve o'clock and a windy night".



# Caversfield County Primary School



For centuries Caversfield was a Buckinghamshire enclave within Oxfordshire. The reasons for this seem to be unknown and in 1832 it was returned to Oxfordshire. It was a tiny community until the RAF decided in 1921 that it wanted an aerodrome just outside Bicester. A large number of houses were built pre-war for RAF families but the estate was expanded considerably after the war. A primary school for the children of the RAF families was built in 1969. It opened with 188 children and by 1972 had 220 on the roll. The high numbers were maintained with children from the Greenwood Homes estate being sent two miles by bus to Caversfield. This was necessary as the Americans were leasing the county council school in Shakespeare Drive, King's End. By 1986 it was known that the Americans were planning to vacate the school and the Oxfordshire County Council had decided that the Shakespeare Drive school would become an English primary school. The county council then confirmed that the Caversfield school would close when the Shakespeare Drive school opened. This decision was taken after hearing from the school's own governors, led by their chairman, Mrs Jane Warde-Aldam, who felt that there were not enough children in the village to support a school when the Greenwood Homes children had moved. The school roll at the time showed a total of 183 pupils with only 14 from the village.

As Sylvia Gatehouse (former Head of Caversfield School and then King's Meadow School) has written:

When the Americans bombed Tripoli in April 1986, it is improbable that anyone guessed the impact that would reach Caversfield County Primary School. In fact, the school was affected in an unprecedented and unusual degree.

Fearful of Libyan retaliation the USAF withdrew its pupils from the American school on Shakespeare Drive, to be housed in premises on the USAF base in Upper Heyford, where – we were told- they could be guarded 'with live ammunition'. The building was left empty apart from two American servicemen acting as caretakers, and a tame rabbit that had been left behind, hopping around, to fend for itself. The Council, or someone, realizing that it was silly to bus two lots of pupils from the King's End estate to and from Caversfield every day, devised a plan to close and demolish Caversfield School, re-housing all these pupils in the American school building instead. We visited the empty school to see what was in store for us. It was eerie: signs of an abrupt exit included cups of tea, open exercise books on desks, chairs tipped over, and the rabbit. We were impressed by the sheer size of it: sixteen classrooms in four clusters with central areas for art, music, cookery, etc. We were told that its spaciousness was due to it being designed and built to American specifications, more luxurious than ours.

The Caversfield site was to be sold subsequently for private housing and today an echo of its past lies in its name: Old School Close. The official Caversfield School notice board is in King's Meadow School hall: a permanent reminder of its history. The decision to close Caversfield was eminently sensible although tinged with sadness. It had been dubbed 'the school in a garden' as its grounds were beautifully landscaped with many flowering trees. The building itself consisted of a large central hall, with two clusters of classrooms and workshops on either side. Once a large thriving school serving the large RAF estate, it had suffered a large reduction in the number of pupils when the RAF was suddenly posted to Cyprus. It no longer had a community to serve, but remained viable because of the coachloads of pupils from King's End.

Caversfield school closed in 1986 at the end of the summer term, and once we knew that it was to be demolished we set about stripping everything we could, taking the phrase 'lock, stock and barrel' seriously. However, the American school had not been well maintained, and a wholesale renovation took over six months to complete. The entire staff adapted superbly and shared a determination to make a success of the move. One teacher moved her class five times in one term, chased by plumbers, decorators, roofers and electricians. We also suffered for a while from vandalism caused by resentful American ex-pupils. Nasty magazines pushed through the letter-box, semi-naked groups sunbathing in alcoves, even tubs of shrubs tipped over leaving the plants to die and a mess to clear up. In the end the American commander at the base was asked to help as far as he could. Eventually we were left in peace as the Americans left their houses for accommodation on the base. During this trying period we were grateful for the support and wisdom of the governors, not least the chair, Mrs Jane Warde-Aldam, who kept our spirits high and persuaded us to see the funny side of things.

The number on roll expanded swiftly. In September 1986, there were seven classes of approximately 30 pupils. We rattled around the huge building with about nine classrooms spare, as well as large, central art areas and quiet rooms for smaller group work. The Americans had also installed rather beautiful folding partitions to separate rooms from each other as needed. The nature of the building, as it emerged from its extensive renovation endeared itself to us: the spaciousness, the improved appearance of its exterior including the quadrangle, the enormous playing field (part of which was sold off for housing), the light and squeaky-clean classrooms- what was there not to like? We loved it!

- Martin Greenwood

## 17th March 1860

### BICESTER LITERARY INSTITUTION

On Tuesday evening last, the Rev. F. Trench, of Islip, kindly gave a lecture to the above society, in the old National School Room.

The subject was "Conversation," and the Rev. gentleman delivered a most admirable and useful lecture on this familiar topic, showing that though we were not apt to consider conversation a thing of great importance, yet it was most essential that all classes should know how to conduct their conversation aright, and he compared its influence to the quiet good, and benefit caused by the dews of heaven. Its constant recurrence almost caused us to forget its great influence. So conversation apparently a simple talent can be daily made a source of much good.

The lecture was listened to with great attention and a vote of thanks was heartily given at the close.

## 2nd March 1900

### TRIAL OF THE PUBLIC WELL

In accordance with the decision of the Urban District Council at their last meeting the fire engine was taken to the new public well at the top of the town, for the purpose of emptying it, on Saturday afternoon last.

When pumping was commenced there were 12ft 6in of water in the well, which was emptied in 32 minutes. A trial at the present time, however, is not much to go by, as in a wet period like that we are experiencing there is certain to be plenty of water. If in the summer water comes just as freely so much the better.

We understand the well is to be emptied again tomorrow, and if considered clear enough a sample of the water will be sent for analysis.

The work in connection with the fixing of the pump has been commenced, and it is to be hoped it will prove a good deal more useful than it will ornamental.

## 8th March 1940

### BICESTER BUTCHERS' MEAT SUPPLIES

There was no improvement in the meat allocation in Bicester last weekend, and the butchers in the town and neighbourhood experienced another harassing time. Most of them were unofficially closed on Friday - normally one of their busiest days - and two closed down altogether for the best part of the day. A last minute consignment in the evening, however, following urgent representations to officials concerned, improved the position slightly for Saturday, but the allocations fell far short of requirements.

From enquiries we learn that there was some improvement on the "Graf Spee" lambs which have been distributed lately, but beef was again all too short yet, apparently, in nearby towns, there was enough and to spare. Bicester butchers rightly claim they have been treated badly from the start of the scheme, and while to a great extent they have had the sympathy of

their customers in their unfortunate predicament, local consumers in general have added their complaints.

It is common knowledge that despite repeated efforts the Ministry refused to allow a slaughtering centre to be established at Bicester and that, the town butchers claim, has been the root of all the trouble. There are some excellent slaughter houses in Bicester, one of which considered as good as any in the county.

What has been most exasperating is the fact that at such places as Witney, Buckingham, Banbury and Chipping Norton, where slaughtering centres are established, there has been, apparently, no appreciable shortage of meat. The inclusion of Bicester in the Oxford area was, the butchers claim, an unwise step. There has never been any definite knowledge of when each week's allocations were to be made, and in several instances butchers from villages in this area have driven in for their supplies on certain days, only to be disappointed, which has necessitated another journey. In these days of petrol shortage, this has been a hardship. The system of allocation has been that where a butcher had one quarter of beef he also had to take ten or so frozen lambs.

The quality of the meat has been another source of grievance, for we understand that after others have had their picking Bicester has had to be content with that left. As one butcher put it, "It's a case of plum and apple jam all over again, and old soldiers will know what that means."

However, it is expected that now Bicester has been included in the Banbury area there will be an improvement all round, but this move will delay for the time being any proposals to establish a slaughtering centre here. This is confidently expected to materialise, eventually, and the Bicester butchers are now hoping that with the advent of rationing on Monday there will be better supplies and no predominance of "Graf Spees" or "Whippets" in the supplies allocated to them.

## 26th March 1980

### OLD TOWN REVEALED

A bit of old Bicester has surfaced, briefly, under the archeologist's trowel. Robert White, of Oxford University extra mural studies department, is leading an expedition to rediscover mediaeval Bicester.

He and his team (pictured) started digging two weeks ago, and so far they have got down to the early 17th century. They have found two yard surfaces and a wall, dated around 1600, and have come across several fragments of pottery from the 17th century and later.

The site in the Causeway is soon to be developed, and the next-door site in King's End is already being built on. "When they started developing King's End a lot of evidence of mediaeval settlement was found." said Mr Richard Chambers, of the Oxford Archeological Unit, who is supervising the work.

"It was an agricultural village dating from the 11th

century to the 15th century, when it seems to have been deserted as the population turned from agriculture to commerce, and became more wealthy. What we hope to find now is evidence of this later settlement.”

Robert White is staying in Witney, and his team, Mandy Wright, Alan Hardy and Stuart Lord are from Oxford and were assigned to the dig by STEP, a government job creation scheme for the unemployed. They have until Easter to trace mediaeval Bicester. Then the trench will be filled in again, and covered by shops, a bank and - rather ironically - a job centre!



## Talks Update

As the coronavirus outbreak continues to develop we are following the government’s instructions and suspending our programme of talks until it is considered safe for public gatherings to resume. No one yet knows just how long that is going to take, but we will keep you informed as the situation unfolds.

In the mean time, please stay safe, and enjoy the extra time you’ve now got to get all those niggly little jobs done around the house that you keep putting off.

## Picture Oxon Talk

Oxfordshire History Centre’s photographic archive, Picture Oxon, traces its origins to the Oxford City Library in St Aldates. The library opened in the old town hall in 1854 and included a local history collection. The new town hall, when it opened in 1896, benefitted from extended library facilities.

The archive rapidly expanded through the 20th century acquisitions of the Taunt, Packer and Thomas collections, affording substantial coverage of the region, from Cotswolds to Chilterns and right through the Thames Valley.

William Henry Taunt’s collection was acquired in 1924 at a cost of £98 10s 0d. Lack of storage space postponed further collecting until after WW2 and, indeed, Taunt’s negatives were stored in Swindon

for this reason. Taunt rose from poor beginnings in St Ebbe’s, Oxford to be a professional photographer, author, publisher and entertainer. In 1868 he established a shop in Cornmarket, Oxford and focussed on photographs of Oxford city and the Thames Valley.

These were sold as souvenirs and, later, as postcards, totalling 60,000 images, of which 14,000 survive.

He wrote local histories and guide books, and recorded local customs and recreation such as St Giles Fair and the beating of the bounds. When rival photographer, Frederick



*Tennis in the vicarage garden - 1880s (POX0117440)*

Ault of Stanford-in-the-Vale, died in 1914, Taunt bought his negatives and added them to his own collection, a sure sign that he appreciated their quality.

1964 saw the escalation of post-war collecting and expansion based around the newly-established

Oxford City & County Museum, and the city library service. At this time, Harold Crawley was commissioned to photograph every street in Oxford and Picture Oxon includes 2,500 of his images.

The influence of Dr Malcolm Graham, who arrived in the city to be the first full-time local history librarian in 1970, cannot be underestimated. His programme of collecting, copying and photographing culminated in 10,000 images recording historic buildings and change in Oxford and Oxfordshire up to 2009.

After the reorganisation of local government in 1974, the county council took over the archive collections, although the library service and the museum service continued to collect independently. This came to a head when the Packer collection came up for sale and, ultimately, resources were transferred to the Oxfordshire



Rear of 6 Causeway, now Webb Court - 1977 (POX0570617)

Photographic Archive. In 1989, English Heritage brought together the whole of the Taunt collection and digitisation commenced.

Heritage Lottery funding enabled the purchase of J W Thomas's collection of 100,000 images. He had set up as a photographer in Oxford after the Second World War and became famous for his images of Oxford's historic buildings, being awarded an honorary M.A. by the University of Oxford in 1963. His photographs, taken over a fifty-year period, had been poorly stored and although now all conserved, only 10% have been digitised due to lack of time and funds.

Gaining its first online presence via the Heritage Search website in 2007, the photographic archive now looks to Picture Oxon to provide a catalogue of 400,000 images of local people, places and buildings. Picture Oxon's resources include not only photographs, but engravings, drawings and maps. From 2014, the Picture Oxon website has been run by House of Images, a responsive company who ensure that the accessibility guidelines are met.

The historic maps collection consists of high-resolution images of maps of the county, city, towns and villages. Also included are aerial photographs from 1961, in addition to over 5,000 oral history recordings (which can be accessed free-of-charge in libraries).



Crockwell School - 1906 (POX0163246)

Among on-going work is the linking of the Percy Elford images to catalogue material. Elford was appointed Oxfordshire's chief education officer in 1903 when the county council took over the county's elementary schools. An early motorist and a keen photographer, he took over 3,000 photographs of the schools under his care.

Mark also guided us through the comprehensive search facility on Picture Oxon found at:

[www.pictureoxon.org.uk](http://www.pictureoxon.org.uk)

- Sally James



Rose & Crown PH, Causeway - 1970 (POX0012338)

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