

Nobby Clark's Commandos

More than six thousand conscientious objectors served in the fourteen companies of the Non-Combatant Corps. Set up in 1940 as a section of the army they gave conscientious objectors the opportunity to help in the war effort, but with a guarantee that they would not be asked to carry arms. The only other army corps which could not be asked to carry weapons was the Royal Army Chaplain's Department.

In the late 1930s, with the prospects of war looming, it was realised that the existing ordnance depots in the country were totally inadequate for supplying a wartime army. Although the construction of a totally new site at Donnington had already begun it became obvious that another large depot was needed. Project "X" as it was initially called, looked for a site in southern England that would allow for the rapid processing of large quantities of stores with easy access to road and rail networks, aerodromes, electricity and water supplies. It also needed to be near a sizeable town for the supply of civilian labour. In 1941 they opted for an area just a few miles south east of Bicester – namely the land around Arncott and Graven Hill. Land was requisitioned and by July of that year the rail connection was made with the Oxford-Bletchley line just south of the Oxford end of Bicester London Road Station. The exchange sidings that would handle trains from off the main line and onto the military site were then built and then a line towards Arncott was started and had reached and crossed the Arncott-Murcott Road by November.

By January 1942 over 1,500

Royal Engineers, 607 Royal Pioneer Corps and 550 Italian prisoners of war were engaged in building the massive depot and the associated rail network. But practically all constructional material still had to be delivered by road along narrow winding roads through old villages. A marshalling yard was needed before they could bring materials in by rail. But delivery couldn't happen until that yard was completed. Work was hampered by bad weather and the Oxfordshire clay, and progress was falling hopelessly behind schedule. Blame was being passed from one department to another and it was the men – the workers – who were getting the brunt of the criticism.

Then along came a detachment of men from the NCC. Known as "Conchies" by the personnel of other military units, and according to their commanding officer, Major G.W. Clark, M.C., they were regarded as "Less than Nothing" to nearly everybody – all except the Engineers. The NCC contingent had already been briefed as to what was required and applied themselves to the job in hand. They worked hard because it was fun to do so – it was the only way to get back at those who doubted their willingness to work.

In an unpublished report written by Major Clark after the war, he tells the story that the Royal Engineers were due to march out in a fortnight's time and were concerned that the job of completing the marshalling yard would not be completed and that would be like getting a black mark against the R.E. Company. As one of the Sappers explained to the Major, "but then these gluttons for

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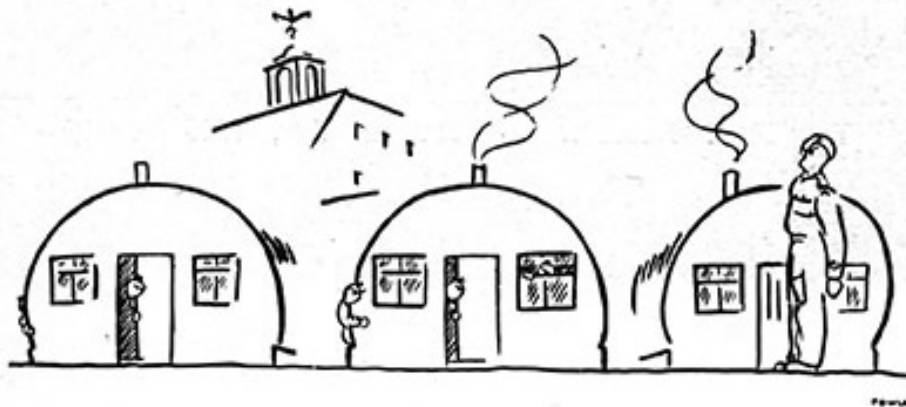
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work arrived (the N.C.C.), men who knew every detail of the job and the situation changed. The work was completed with two days to spare and everybody knew why and were proud of their achievement". The Sapper concluded by telling the Major – "They (the N.C.C.) have set a standard, and our Sappers and other working parties are having to work twice as hard to keep up with them!"

And that's how it continued until over 56 miles of track and sidings had been laid linking the Graven Hill and Arncott sites. That was towards the middle of 1943 when the job of the N.C.C. switched from constructional work to maintenance work. During all this time the N.C.C. (the same as most of the other divisions of army personnel) were housed in Nissen huts spread around the two sites.



MARKET END HOUSE, BICESTER.
 "OUR HOME!" — 1944 — 1946



AS IT REALLY WAS !!

Photo & Illustration taken from Major Clark's unpublished memoirs

These had "double-decker" bunks and straw palliases, no cupboards or lockers with personal kit being stored in old ammunition boxes. Toilets consisted of a row of latrine buckets surrounded by a corrugated screen.

But maintenance work was a far cry from the satisfaction of completing yet another length of track, level crossing, etc. And it soon became known by the the staff at Arccott of the varied talent lying dormant or being "wasted shovelling ashes under sleepers or digging filthy drains". As Major Clark comments in his memoirs - "It is a waste to have a bank manager unloading waggons, an architect driving spikes in sleepers, or a surveyor packing ashes. It is a waste to have a trained

clerk as a cook-house orderly or a good tradesman doing general labouring work".

At one time the O.C.C had over twenty carpenters and joiners and enough bricklayers, builders, painters, plumbers and mechanics to furnish a work's company. Soon various constructional departments at Arccott were clamouring for their aid. Then word got out that the N.C.C. had various specialists - a radio expert, a watch repairer, a piano tuner, a chiropodist, a masseur, sign writers, a clerk for the dental officer, someone to play the organ in church, a wine waiter for the officers' mess, gardeners, orderlies for the hospital. As Major Clark comments: "What did we not do?! We did everything but fight!"

There's another part to this story that I'll leave for another time - the N.C.C.'s involvement with sport, recreation, welfare, the choir and drama and their interaction with the people of Bicester and the surrounding area.

In the latter part of the war, the N.C.C. were billeted at Market End House (what had been the Bicester Workhouse). They lived not in the house itself but in Nissen huts erected in the grounds. But here there was more contact with the locals. The sign near the entrance indicated who was living there: "No. 3 Company N.C.C - Commanding Officer: Major G.W. Clark". Or as one local girl nicknamed them: Nobby Clark's Commandos.

- Bob Hessian

Bicester, From a Brook Stop Coachman!

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

Sheep Street, at the 18th century period of the town's history, is practically completed.

A century before, it was an open field. Gradually the Market has overflowed beyond the Square and there is a long line of cattle pens. A gangway is required on each side of this, and this explains the greater width of Sheep Street compared with the other thoroughfares of the town. The houses of refreshment and business then built had to conform more or less to a building line demanded by the pens and passage ways. The Hairmarket was held there.

Now arrives the time for the improvement of the local roads, with the consequent increase of wheeled traffic through the town. The Bicester to Oxford road was a trackway, it could not be called a road, nor could the track to Fimere and Buckingham. The better class roads were made in the following order:

First, from Bicester to Middleton Stoney.

A through road from Oxford to Buckingham, via Bicester, was proposed, but the townspeople did not like the idea of it; they were afraid of too many soldiers on the march being billeted here. Therefore it was taken through Weston-on-the-Green, and by way of Middleton and Ardley. The old house at Middleton where the toll was taken as payment for the privilege of travelling on the highway, stood on the Ardley side of the village and just outside it.

Then came that part of the Oxford main road running from Bicester to Weston-on-the-Green. Later still, from Bicester to Buckingham.

All travellers rode on horseback till the 16th century when covered carriages were invented, but they were then used only by ladies of high degree "for it was thought a shame that men should ride in them". First, in 1758, is seen in Bicester the post-chaise. W. Shillingford runs it to neighbouring towns, as well as saddle horses with a guide to all parts of England.

Thirty five years later a rumble and a clatter of hoofs are heard in Water Lane (Chapel Street) as George Claydon's stage coach, a cumbrous affair, runs into the town from London via Aylesbury, turns into the Square and to its headquarters, the King's Head Inn. At dead of night the sound of the guard's horn breaks the silence

as the Highflier, the Birmingham coach, sweeps on its way to London. A bald-headed gentleman inside is in a rather ruffled state. The last stop, before passing through Bicester, had been at Aylesbury, and the old gentleman, seeing the inn, had begun "I hope we can have a little light refresh-" when his head bumps the back of the coach, and the vehicle is off. "Why", he exclaims "I thought we were to change horses at Aylesbury".

"Change horses, sir", replies the proprietor in the distance "why we changed them whilst you were putting on your spectacles and looking at your watch! Only one minute allowed".

The rate of travel is ten miles in the hour and that is thought very good. A "slow coach" makes eight miles an hour.

The old gentleman eventually arrives at a town and enters the inn. "Pray, sir" says he to the landlord "have you any slow coach down this road today?" "Why, yes, we shall have the Regulator down in an hour". "Just right" says our friend "it will enable me to break my fast which I have not done today". "Oh, sir," replies mine host "these fast drags are the ruin of us. It is all hurry scurry today". We hear of our traveller later putting his head out of the window and then shouting "Stop, coachman, stop, I have lost my hat and wig".

In 1850 that part of the old London Road which led from the Turnpike to Water Lane was enclosed at the making of the railway, and a new access to the more modern part of the town was formed via the level-crossing gates. At about this time a public conveyance from Bicester to Oxford for the Saturday market day began to run.

A few words about employment in the town at this period may be of interest. Besides a few professional men, the traders, artisans and agricultural labourers, a large number of persons were engaged in making sack-cloth, leather slippers and the combing of wool. Women had their spinning machines in use and earned about 2s 6d per week with them; others made pillow lace:

"Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
Pillow and bobbins all her little store
Content though mean, and cheerful, if nor gay,
Shuffling her threads about the livelong day,
Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night
Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light."



Horse racing took place in King's End Field, and bull-baiting and cock fighting were in vogue.

The first Church of England school was originated in Bicester in 1721, by the Bishop of Oxford, Lord Abingdon, the Rev. Airson and others, and 30 boys from the town and district were taught. This free school admitted boys from 7 to 14 years of age, who wore a blue coat, leather breeches and a cap.

14th April 1860

THE NEW CEMETERY

A meeting of the ratepayers of this parish, was held in the vestry room, on Thursday last (market day). The meeting was called by the Burial Board to obtain the sanction of the vestry to purchase a piece of land, selected by them for the new cemetery. The Rev. J.W. Watts, was in the chair. There were only six ratepayers present.

The notice calling the meeting was read. The draft agreement between Mr George Kirby, and the Burial Board for the purchase of the freehold close of land belonging to him, situated in Bicester Market End, between the turnpike roads leading from Bicester to Banbury and Buckingham respectively, now occupied by Mr William Morris, was read and the sanction of the vestry was given to the same.

The motion for the sanction of the vestry was made by Mr Charles Fowler, and seconded by Mr William Johnson and carried unanimously. These resolutions were afterwards rescinded by the order of the vestry, and the following adopted instead. That the Rev. W. Ferguson, Messrs. Fowler, Johnson, Litten, and the surveyors; (Messrs. J. Smith and W. Palmer) be empowered to examine thoroughly the ground above mentioned, and to report thereon at a future meeting.

Then, yesterday, a vestry meeting was held at the parish church, to receive the report of the committee appointed to examine the land selected by the Burial Board, as to its fitness for the purpose. The gentlemen appointed were all present, and were unanimous in their decision, "That the land selected was wholly unfit for the purpose." At a depth of little more than four feet was a very hard rock, averaging three feet in thickness, so that the labour and expense of digging graves in it would be very great.

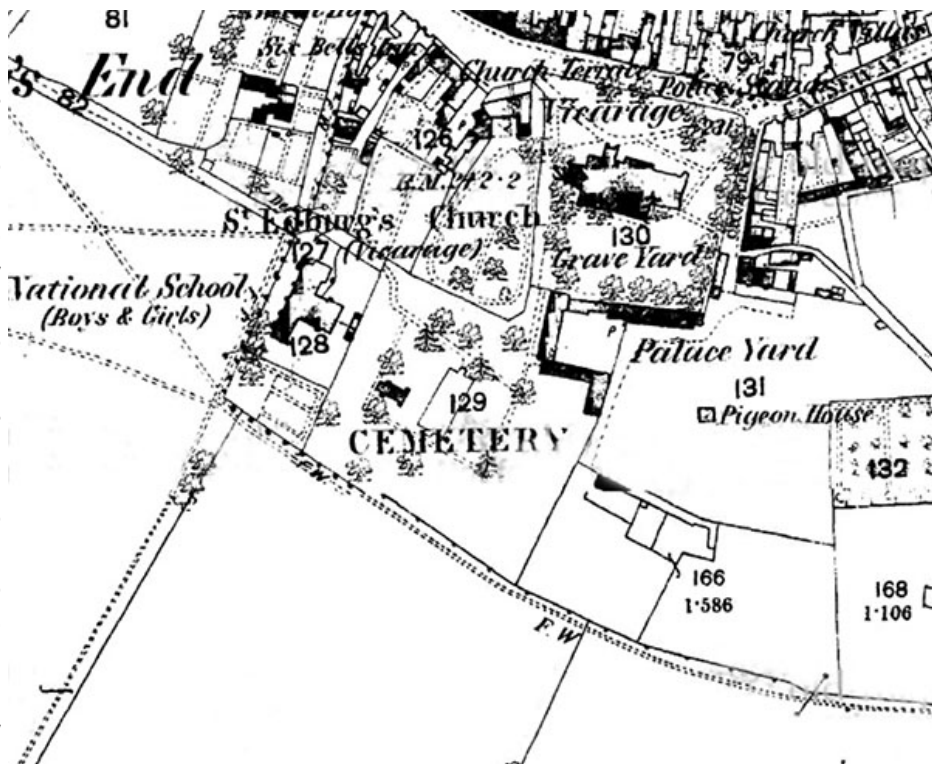
The upper part of Numbrill close was suggested to the Board, as a desirable spot, if the nature of the soil should prove favourable.

21st April 1860

PARISH MEETING

At a vestry meeting held on Thursday, April 19th, business was transacted including a report from the Burial Board that the piece of land in Numbrill close, suggested by the vestry at their last meeting for the cemetery, would be very costly, on account of the ornamental timber thereon, and the expense of making a road to it.

They recommended that the piece of land at the back of the present churchyard should be adopted, if the



sanction of the Privy Council could be obtained. This suggestion was agreed to by all present.

6th April 1900

THE WAR AND CHRISTENINGS

The daily papers have drawn attention to the effect of the war on the names chosen for infants born at this interesting period of the country's history, but we have not heard that it has made any impression on parents in Bicester.

One recent case, however, deserves mention. A son was recently born to an old Bicester soldier who is the only local man so far as we can hear who has responded to the Queen's invitation to old soldiers to rejoin the colours, and it has been christened "Roberts Baden Herbert" after three famous soldiers now at the front.

There were two instances at Marsh Gibbon recently, a boy being christened "Sydney Joseph Belmont", and a girl "Violet Pretoria Louisa".

There should be some discretion used as to the choice of male and female names, as the selection of the same for either sex might possibly lead to confusion later on.

6th April 1900

PRESENTATION AT THE BOYS' NATIONAL SCHOOL

On Friday evening last Miss Darby, the senior assistant teacher in the Boys' School, was presented with a handsome silver plated cake basket, by her fellow teachers and the boys attending the school. The presentation was made by Mr Piggott, the headmaster, who said, how sorry they all were to part with Miss Darby. She had been with them for more than five years, and although he had had twenty-one different assistants during the long time he had been master of the school,

yet from none had he received more loyal and efficient assistance than he had from Miss Darby, and he knew that he should very greatly feel the loss of her valuable service.

Miss Darby had given them a parting gift - the picture of Lord Roberts, which was now hanging up in the school. And now they wished to offer a small present to her. They had learnt not only to value her as a teacher, but also to love and esteem her for herself.

He wished, in the name of her fellow teachers - Miss Johnson, Miss Collins, and himself, as well as in the name of the boys, to beg her acceptance of a silver plated cake basket, as a small token of their kindest regards and best wishes for her future happiness.

Miss Darby briefly thanked the boys and teachers for their very handsome present, and said that she should ever treasure their gift most highly. Amid ringing cheers for Miss Darby the boys then broke up.

12th April 1940

BICESTER BOYS' CLUB BOXING TOURNAMENT

Boxing tournaments in Bicester have always attracted a large following, and St Edburg's Hall was packed to capacity on Friday evening for a tournament between the Bicester Boys' Club and the Rose Hill (Oxford) Boys' Club. Under the auspices of the Oxfordshire and Oxford City Education Committees, boys' clubs in the county have received expert tuition in the noble art of "fisticuffs," the Bicester club being fortunate in having the experienced instruction of Mr Pat Mills, who is boxing instructor to the Oxford University.

With his usual thoroughness, Mr Paul White, who was M.C. for the evening, carried out the arrangements, and was ably assisted by Mr N.E. Fox, of Hallsville School (who has now succeeded him as honorary warden of the club), Mr A.G. Golder, Mr G. Clifton, Mr W.F. Brooks, and others. Mr Ellis Chinnery and Flight-Lieut. Cockell were judges, Mr Pat Mills, referee, and Mr J. Samuels (Hallsville School) timekeeper. There were nine inter-club bouts down for decision on the programme, but two of them did not take place.

Slogging predominated rather than boxing science, but in one or two instances there were honest endeavours to box. There was no lack of excitement, and interest never flagged, while at times there was cause for amusement. The difficulty the promoters had to contend with was the matching of the weights, and distinct advantage was gained in this respect by some of the contestants.

The first bout of the evening provided a satisfactory opening to the programme, two Hallsville School youngsters - Gale and Hunt - setting about each other with a will, to the delight of the spectators. Really it was a pity there had to be a winner in this, Hunt gaining the verdict by a narrow margin.

The first contest between the clubs resulted in an easy win for Bicester, Cox stylishly mounting up the points against his Rose Hill opponent (Hinton) in the first round. Hinton tried to mix it at the commencement of the second round, with unfortunate result, and when he

went down without being struck he was disqualified. Cox was not extended and deserved a better opponent.

Rose Hill secured the next victory, for Smith, their representative, was much too strong for Edmunds (Bicester), who received a "grilling" before the referee stopped the fight in the first round. Edmunds, however, came up smiling, which earned him a cheer from the audience.

After the unsatisfactory endings of these two bouts the spectators welcomed the display of the contestants in the next fight. Gibbard (Bicester), although at a disadvantage in the matter of height, reach and weight, gave a good exhibition against his Rose Hill opponent (Bowles). The first round was quiet, but Gibbard, boxing confidently, got through his opponent's guard cleverly. Bowles forced the pace in the second round, but could never properly get at his man, the Bicester lad boxing the better of the two. Bowles was twice cautioned in this round for hitting with his open glove. Gibbard showed a willingness to mix it in the last round, one or two hard blows by Bowles failing to disturb him, and the Bicester boy won a very popular verdict.

Reeves (Bicester) and Eaton (Rose Hill) were two hefty youths, and at the start of this fight Eaton rushed his man all over the ring, administering severe punishment, so much so that an early ending to the bout appeared certain. Reeves weathered the storm, however, but was cumbersome, and allowed his opponent too much breathing space. He managed to get in one or two telling blows, but was unable to follow up any advantage. The fight was stopped in the second round, to the disappointment of the spectators, the referee considering Reeves had had enough, although he was still gamely coming up for more.

Cook and Barker (Hallsville School) kept the onlookers interested until the next fight, these diminutive youngsters mixing freely, Barker earning the verdict.

It was a pity the contest between Glyn Jones (Bicester) and Trinder (Rose Hill) ended so abruptly in the second round, for two well-matched boxers gave an interesting exhibition. Jones scored with a number of well-timed blows, but Trinder kept away from punishment cleverly and there was not much in it in the first round. After a quiet opening to the second round Jones went after his opponent and had him in difficulties with a heavy blow under the heart, the referee stopping the fight in favour of the Bicester man.

The most exciting affair of the evening was that between Parker (Bicester) and Allen (Rose Hill), in which fight there was plenty of action, but little science. Parker continually forced the pace and pranced and danced around his opponent, but Allen returned blow for blow, and at times the audience could not restrain its excitement as the two threw caution to the wind and sailed into one another ferociously. With short pauses for breathers the two contestants continued to hammer at each other, Allen occasionally being glad to relax on the ropes and cover up to get away from Parker's onslaught. Three rounds of this whirlwind fighting ended in favour

of Parker.

The pluckiest loser of the evening was Scarrott (Bicester) who, in meeting Cox (Rose Hill), was giving away much in the matter of weight, but he nevertheless fought a clever fight, and his quickness kept him from the punishment Cox intended for him. Once or twice the Rose Hill lad got home with heavy punches, but Scarrott was in no distress at the end of the third round. A victory for Rose Hill.

Turner, a Bicester evacuee, and A. Richmond, of Rose Hill, were next in the ring, the former being too strong for his opponent and the fight was stopped in his favour before the end.

This was the final bout of the inter-club boxing, and at this stage the Bicester boys had won five contests and Rose Hill three. Unfortunately, however, two Bicester boxers were unable to appear; one through illness, and thus their opponents from Rose Hill (Turner and L. Richmond) had walk overs.

Taylor and Wilkins (Rose Hill) later gave an exhibition three rounds.

Rose Hill were adjudged winners, and awarded the cup, although as will be seen above both clubs had won five contests each.

At the conclusion of the boxing, Mr Paul White expressed sincere thanks for the wonderful support accorded the tournament, and also to the County Education Authority for their co-operation. He said the value of the training the boys received from Mr Pat Mills was plainly evident, and apologised that the trophy had not arrived in time for presentation to the winners.

Mrs Hitchens, of North Aston, (a member of the Higher Education Committee) presented medals to the contestants, and was thanked by Councillor E.G. Colby (chairman of the Bicester Boys' Club), who also called for cheers for the boxers and all who had assisted in the evening's arrangements.

26th April 1940

ULTIMATUM TO TRADESMEN WHO EMPLOY CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

The annual meeting of the Bicester branch of the British Legion was held at the headquarters on Wednesday, when Major L.A. Coker (chairman) took the chair, and was supported by Lt.-Colonel N.V. Blacker (president), Mr O.H. Gilbey, Mr L.G. Moir and Dr J. Holmes (vice-presidents), Mr J.D. Tyrrell (hon. secretary) and Mr W.H. Morgan (hon. treasurer). There was a large attendance of members.

Before the business commenced, Dr Holmes made an appeal for first-aid workers, and this was followed by the usual silence for fallen comrades.

After the secretary's report and the election of officers were taken care of, the chairman said they were all aware that there were a number of conscientious objectors in Bicester. He felt it would be wrong, and they would not get the support of headquarters if they, as a branch, pass the vote of censure on any individual who might employ such a person. But he thought it could be left to the discretion of the relief committee of the branch

to see that no money, in the form of the vouchers they issued, found its way indirectly into the pockets of any conscientious objectors, or tradesmen who employed them. (Hear, hear.) They were his own personal views.

Colonel Blacker said it was most unfortunate that the government had allowed certain people to be classed as conscientious objectors – he had another word for them – damned funks (cheers). They should discourage that type of person in every possible way, and he agreed with Major Coker as to preventing any money from the branch reaching them, either directly or indirectly.

Mr Gilbey expressed himself as thoroughly opposed to conscientious objectors, none of whom he would have on his farm, a decision, he said, which other farmers beside himself had arrived at. "These people make all sorts of excuses," Mr Gilbey said, "for not wishing to protect the lives of their families, and I, for one, intend to boycott them. They are not worthy to be called Englishmen."

Eventually the meeting unanimously agreed that any tradesman who voluntarily employed a conscientious objector should not benefit by any of the branch's funds which might be issued in the form of relief vouchers.

The chairman said there was one other matter concerning this business of conscientious objectors. A letter had been drawn up for the the meeting's approval, and would be sent to the Executive Committee of the County Branch of the British Legion, asking what action, if any, Bicester, as a branch, could take in the matter.

The letter contained the following –

"The members of this branch have to pay their rates as ratepayers. Part of such payments go towards the salary of the Clerk to the Bicester Urban District Council. This Clerk, we understand, employs to assist him a junior clerk, whom he himself pays, so this latter is not directly employed or paid by the Council. This under-clerk is a conscientious objector, and, as ex-servicemen, many with relatives now fighting on active service, we object very strongly to being forced to help pay, even indirectly, such a person."

The members unanimously approved the forwarding of this communication.

Mr Gilbey warned the meeting that there were certain individuals who were having a bad influence on the young, and said they should see to it that their sons had nothing to do with these people.

The meeting concluded with the singing of the National Anthem, and cheers for their Majesties the King and Queen.

16th April 1980

MEMORIAL PLAQUE TO MAORI PRINCESS

A memorial plaque to a Maori Princess buried in Oddington churchyard is to be unveiled today by the High Commissioner for New Zealand, the Hon. Leslie Gandar.

The plaque replaces a wooden cross which was erected on the grave of the Princess, Maggie Papakura, of Oddington Grange, who died in 1930. She was the



The New Zealand High Commissioner with the wooden cross to be replaced.

23rd April 1980

MAORI CUSTOM 49 YEARS LATE

A small group of Maoris visited Oddington on Wednesday to fulfil an obligation they felt should have been carried out a long time ago. They were there to unveil a memorial to a Maori chieftain's daughter who crossed the world, married a local landowner and died in Oxford 50 years ago.

Makeriti Papakura was buried in Oddington churchyard in the heart of the Oxfordshire countryside under a plain wooden cross - more than 12,000 miles from her birthplace in New Zealand.

The New Zealand High Commissioner in London, English and Maori relatives, local people and friends from the other side of the world gathered in the church to remember Makeriti, the first Maori woman to be educated at Oxford

University, the author of a major book on Maori culture - and once the lady of the manor of Oddington.

After a short service in the church the small party went into the churchyard and the kiwi feather cloak was pulled away to reveal a small plaque over the grave. Maori chants and speeches were recited in the cold air of a misty Oxfordshire morning as English culture temporarily receded into the background.

Even the High Commissioner, the Hon. Leslie Gandar, spoke in the old Maori language. He quoted a song written once in honour of Makeriti: "Your arrival was like a flash of light."

The arrival of a Maori woman in Oddington in 1913 must have been just like that. Makeriti came to England and married Mr Richard Staples-Browne who farmed in the village and lived at the Grange, as some of his descendants still do today.

It is customary for Maoris to erect a memorial to commemorate their dead a year after the burial. That tradition has been properly carried out for Makeriti now, just 49 years late.

daughter of a Maori Chieftain from Roturua, near the Bay of Plenty, in the North Island of New Zealand.

The Princess became Mrs Margaret Staples-Browne, of Oddington Grange, after meeting her husband at an exhibition in London. The exhibition was part of the coronation celebrations for King George V in 1911. She had brought a troupe of Maori dancers to London for the celebrations and married Mr Richard Staples-Browne the following year.

The party of New Zealand visitors at the unveiling of the memorial plaque will include the wife of the High Commissioner and the president of the New Zealand Rugby and Sports Club, Mr T. Stermor.

Arrangements for the plaque unveiling have been made by Mrs Toni Curtis, a niece of the late Mrs Staple-Browne, who lives in New Zealand, and who will be at the ceremony. A short service will be conducted by the Vicar of Charlton-on-Otmoor, the Rev. David Wainwright. Guests will afterwards visit Oddington Grange where the Princess lived until her death.

Oddington Church also has a fine memorial to the Maori people who gave their lives fighting for Britain in the First World War. This memorial was presented by Maggie Papakura in memory of her people.

Talks Update

As the coronavirus lockdown and social distancing continues we are continuing to follow the government's instructions and our programme of talks remains suspended until it is considered safe for public gatherings to resume. We will keep you informed as the situation develops.

Interesting eBay Item

This is how it was described on eBay:

“Vintage bone handled fleam by Carthew Bister. Some chips on handle & damage to one blade. Refer to photos for condition. Any questions please ask.”

So some of you may be asking - “What’s a fleam and who was Carthew Bister”. Or, more to the point - “Why did Bob buy it?”

A fleam? I had to look that one up! It’s described in the dictionary as a sharp lancet formerly used for bloodletting. Used mainly in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the multi-bladed versions are usually used by veterinary surgeons but I suspect I’d be arrested for carrying an offensive weapon if I was found with this in my pocket!

As for Carthew Bister – Well Mr Carthew was a cutler based in Crockwell. I already have a carving knife made by him. And on the knife the name of Bicester is spelled the same way “Bister” which was quite common in the 17th/18th century.

So now you know.

- Bob Hessian



Committee & Contacts

Editor:

Matthew Hathaway
editor@blhs.org.uk

Website:

www.blhs.org.uk

Committee Members:

Bob Hessian (*Chairman*)
chairman@blhs.org.uk
01869 350662
Sally James (*Treasurer*)
01869 243804
Sally Dexter (*Minutes Secretary*)
John Roberts (*Membership Officer*)
Matthew Hathaway
Peter Crook

Meetings Address:

The Clifton Centre
Ashdene Road
Bicester
OX26 2BH

Postal Address:

BLHS c/o Sally James
14 George Street
Bicester
OX26 2EG