



Bicester's Hidden History

When BLHS published its 2018 calendar highlighting the often-unnoticed elements of Bicester's history, it was a topic to which we felt we could return, so varied are the hidden features which contribute to the town's heritage.

Looking to the western side of the town, we have a tribute to the residents of The Oval on Highfield.



This plaque, high on a lamp post at the junction with Bucknell Road, records the street's success in the Best Kept Street competition in 1981, exactly fifty years after the street was built. A stroll in the area reveals that occupants still take pride in their neighbourhood. A campaign is currently underway to persuade Oxfordshire County Council to further enhance the estate with a tree planting programme and, in doing so, contribute to the climate change challenge.

A feature of the layout of the town is the yards which exist behind Sheep Street, Market Square, Causeway and elsewhere. Their origins lay in the mediaeval town plan and accommodate a multitude of uses. Some are familiar to us today, such as Old Place Yard or Evan's Yard, but others, like Tebby's Yard or Berry's Yard have been lost from living



memory. The cottages pictured are tucked away in a yard behind Market Square and Sheep Street, specifically at the rear of the old County Courthouse.

Hadland's Yard was situated near to where Sheep Street becomes Market



Square not far from the White Hart PH. Its sign is preserved in the vicinity, on the garage at Rojean, Victoria Road, the former home of Roland and Jean Ashmore of the much-missed hardware shop.

Venturing up the lane adjacent to the former Congregational Chapel (known as Tubb's Yard) reveals an array of outbuildings, some of which have undergone recent conversion.



The building, bearing the legend, 'GEORGE TUBB LICENCED MALTSTER', forms part of cottages which back on to the yard behind the King's Arms - another area which merits exploration! Early in the 19th century, two brewers and seven maltsters were listed as operating in

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the town and by 1846 Shillingford's brewery had been established, so George Tubb was part of a flourishing industry. George and Susannah Tubb, well-known benefactors of the town, have a memorial erected in St Edburg's Church in 1887 by 'the poor of this parish'.

The bracket which once supported the sign for the White Lion PH is still in place in Sheep Street. Probably built in the 16th century, the



pub closed in 1982 and substantial demolition of the rear premises took place. Fortunately, the frontage, with the clue to its former use, was retained.

The 'island block' in Market Square



contains buildings from the 16th/17th/18th centuries and includes a hidden gem - a 'wooden 3-light mullioned and transomed window with old leaded glazing', according to its listing. It's in the passageway adjacent to number 48-51 (Jaflong). Here's a sneaky photo.

These are just a selection of the delights which are there to be discovered. But

some mysteries remain, not least of all this interesting stone at the base of the wall of the former stables in Priory Lane. You may have seen it if you've walked the lane past Pingle Cottage and on to Old Place Yard. But what was its purpose?

Please tell us about any interesting finds you've made.

- Sally James



Roll of Honour

The following are the men buried locally who died in the Second World War, 80 years ago.

Flying Officer George Holland Thevenard, of Hull.

Died: 1st August 1940 Aged: 33 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried at Middleton Stoney)

Sergeant Alan James Fetherston, of Bristol.

Died: 6th August 1940 Aged: 19 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried at Middleton Stoney)

Sergeant Henry Algernon Miller, of Hastings, New Zealand.

Died: 13th August 1940 Aged: 25 Served in: Royal New Zealand Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Bicester, buried at Caversfield)



Bygone Bicester - July (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

28th July 1860

THE NEW CEMETERY

On Friday last a public meeting was held at the vestry room of the Congregational Chapel, Bicester, to take into consideration the proposal of the Burial Board to appoint a separate entrance for dissenters' funerals to the new cemetery. The proposal of the Burial Board appeared to be, that the funerals of dissenters should not enter the cemetery through the churchyard, as was agreed on at the parish meeting, when the consent of the vestry to the adoption of the piece of land at the back of the church was given, but that the entrance for dissenters should be through Palace Yard, in front of Messrs. Painters' stables. This proposition was disapproved by all present, and the meeting considered the entrance a most suitable one.

The following resolution was proposed by Mr William Johnson, seconded by Mr John Baker, and carried unanimously:

"That this meeting having heard with much surprise and dissatisfaction that it is intended to have two

entrances into the new cemetery; one for Nonconformists, and the other for members of the Established Church, object altogether to that arrangement, and desire to enter their strong protest against their being more than one entrance, and if two entrances are persisted in, they shall feel compelled to lay the case before the Secretary of State."

6th July 1900

SUNDAY SCHOOL TREATS

Following closely upon the anniversary services the children attending the Wesleyan Sunday School had their annual treat yesterday afternoon, the event being made a double one through the Congregational treat having been postponed to the same day from the previous Thursday.

The Wesleyan children met at Wesley Hall at 1:30pm, and proceeded to a field near Bicester House, lent for the occasion by Captain H.G. Fane, where the afternoon was spent in sports and games and the usual tea, after

which there were races. Before departing the children assembled on the lawn in front of the house and sang to Mr and Mrs Fane, for whom hearty cheers were given.

The Congregational scholars went in the opposite direction to a field on the Launton Road belonging to Mr H. Tubb, where the children enjoyed themselves as only children can with games, tea and racing. A happy holiday concluded about 9:30pm with cheers for Mr Tubb.

The teachers and others connected with both schools did all in their power to make the day pleasurable, and although threatening at times the weather fortunately held fine.

26th July 1940

H.M. THE KING IN BICESTER

His Majesty the King inspected a number of RAF stations on Friday, and in the course of his journey he passed through Bicester.

Although there was no official indication, numerous residents knew of the impending visit, and when the King arrived at the northern end of the town quite a large number was there to greet him. From his car he smilingly acknowledged, with a salute, this gesture.

His Majesty, in the uniform of an Air Marshal, was accompanied by Wing Commander E.H. Fielding, Captain of the King's Flight, and other high officers, and looked surprisingly fit. When it became known that the royal car would traverse Sheep Street, Market Square and King's End, people quickly lined the route and gave him hearty cheers as he passed.

His Majesty inspected Bomber Commands, and saw pilots handling their machines in the air and he talked to the crews before they took off on their flights. He also spoke to instructors who had taken part in raids abroad. He was very interested in the mechanism of the machines and tested gun turrets and sights himself.

During his tour he decorated Flight-Lieutenant S.F. Coutts-Wood with the DFC, and Sergt. G.A. Craig with the DFM.

29th July 1976

SQUARING UP

The saga of the ownership of Market Square is really dragging its feet. After something like two years the matter is still unresolved and from my own inquiries it seems as if the whole matter will rest with Cherwell District councillors.

In the reorganisation of local government three or more years ago, Bicester Town Council - successors to the old Urban Council - agreed to let the Market Square be transferred to the new Cherwell District Council. Bicester Town Council retained some parts of the town, notably The Garth and its attendant park.

Subsequently, it was around the time when Cherwell decided to impose car parking fees for the Square that Bicester Town Council woke up to the fact that they really should not have agreed to the Square's transfer. After all, the former Urban Council had twice thrown out any suggestion of parking charges on the Square.

So the Town Council said to Cherwell - in effect - "give us back the Market Square". Cherwell, realising it was on to a good thing with income from market fees and car parking charges, said: "No".

Not surprisingly, Bicester Town Council was a bit upset at this reaction and there were rumblings in the town that the Square was really owned by the property owners of the Square - the shopkeepers.

Undeterred by Cherwell's rebuff, the Town Council, with the help of others, burrowed deep into documents and referred the whole matter to the Department of the Environment. Then last week the Department told the Town Council that "detailed legal examination could be considered if the Town Council and Cherwell District Council informed the Department that they were prepared to agree to the transfer of the Market Square, and presumably its rights, to the Town Council." In other words, both councils were told to sort it out themselves. Cherwell told the Town Council that their secretary, Mr Jeremy Baker, was now going to look at documents submitted by the Town Council to investigate the matter.

As all this seemed to be getting nowhere fast, I posed the simple question to Cherwell: "If Bicester Town Council wants the Square back, why can't you give it back to them?"

Mr Baker replied that he had not completed his investigations and had not reported to the Cherwell environmental health and control committee. But he did go so far as to say that, as he saw it, there was no question of transferring the physical land back. "I don't think the Town Council realise this. All the evidence they supplied does not really relate to the Market Square, to the land, but it relates to the market rights." said Mr Baker.

He went further to say that the Square was transferred automatically to Cherwell in the change over legislation like the council houses. The Town Council, he said, did not need to agree to the transfer. The Town Council, he said, kept The Garth as it fell within a recreational category, which was a function of the Town Council and not District Council.

Although he had not reported to his committee, Mr Baker said that the only way the Square could revert to Bicester would be if Cherwell, as landowners, agreed to give the Square to the Town Council. So it would seem everyone will have to wait upon the recommendation of the Cherwell environmental health and control committee and the full Cherwell council's decision.

If this is the course events will eventually take, I can - being a pessimist - foresee a couple of cliffhanger votes being taken. Let's hope Bicester's five counsellors on Cherwell vote with one voice on this.

But I still cannot, personally, see what prevents Cherwell from simply handing the Square back. Legislation is not irreversible.

Was it wrong for the Square to be transferred automatically to Cherwell, and if so, will the Town Council have to have recourse to the courts to wrest the Square from Cherwell?

We shall just have to wait and see...

Bicester, From a Brook The Bobbies

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

Bicester streets in the olden days were guarded by watchmen, who carried pikes or halberds as defensive weapons or for offence. They were illiterate men, very different from the intelligent constabulary of today. They can be visualised from the delightful study of Dogberry, the watchman, in Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing".



In early times the watchmen were hefty, well-armed men, but gradually they degenerated into decrepit and feeble old men who became a laughing stock. A more modern descendant of the Bicester watchmen was the "beadle", appointed by the parish vestry, and it was his duty "to guard and watch the town and precincts of Bicester from being annoyed by beggars, tramps or vagrants, and to cause such to be apprehended and taken before a magistrate; to watch and guard against all labourers who are in the habit of bringing home wood (a common offence) when returning from their labour, and

to give information of the same to the Overseers in order to make them account from whence they had the said wood". It may be mentioned here that at the same vestry a resolution was made "That the labourers working on the road, who have had 2s per week over and beyond their weekly pay, to have the overplus allowance in coals instead of money; this in order that they should have no pretence for stealing wood, and to encourage them to act as good labourers ought to do."

When Sir Robert Peel was Secretary of State for Ireland he established the present constabulary force. The new policemen were for many years known as Peelers and even today the nickname "Robert" or "bobby" indicates the origin of the police. As shown in the sketch, the Peelers wore tall hats with a chin strap; followed the customs of the day by sporting whiskers all round the face and had frock coats with black leather belts.



Talks Update

As social distancing measures remain in place for the foreseeable future the committee has decided to suspend all talks until January 2021 at the earliest.

We will be distributing this year's AGM reports in next month's edition of the newsletter. We also remain open to any suggestions of ways we could resume the talks and still maintain social distancing, if it remains necessary in the new year.

Bygone Bicester - August (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

11th August 1860

BICESTER AUGUST FAIR

This fair was held on Monday and Tuesday, the 6th and 7th instant.

There was a very large supply of stock in the fair. There were 2000 sheep, and more horses and cows than for many years past. There was also a large attendance of buyers, and most of the stock changed hands.

In the pleasure fair there was rather more than the usual supply of amusements, but the number of pleasure seekers seemed smaller than formerly, and consisted chiefly of young folks from neighbouring villages.

But the Ram Sales by Mr Paxton were the chief attraction and drew together a large concourse of agriculturists.

10th August 1900

THE CATACOMBS IN THE CEMETERY

At the recent monthly meeting of Bicester Urban District Council the clerk read the report of the Burial and Finance Committee, which held a meeting on Friday, August 3rd.

They reported that they inspected the catacombs in the cemetery and recommended that the rubbish deposited near them be levelled along each side and the York stone flags in front of the catacombs be removed and stacked, and the catacombs filled in one at a time. They also recommended that a few laurels be planted along the front, each side of the steps to the catacombs.

There was some discussion of the recommendations, and it was decided to adopt the report with the exception of that part having reference to removing the stones and filling in the catacombs.

16th August 1940

AIR RAID SHELTER

The air raid shelter on the Market Square, which was completed this week, is now ready for use in air raids. It is provided for persons caught away from their homes in a raid, and is not for the use of residents in its vicinity.

26th August 1976

COUNCIL IS TO SELL HOMES

Council houses are to be sold to tenants by Cherwell District Council. A scheme for the houses to be sold at discounts on the current market price depending on the length of tenancy is provisionally due to start from September 1st.

After a lengthy debate on Monday, Cherwell council accepted its housing services committee's recommendation to sell. A Labour amendment from Mr John McElligott, that the council should only sell houses when the waiting list had been reduced to the minimum housing need, was lost by 25 votes to 11. He said he felt it was wrong to sell council houses when the waiting list was increasing all the time. More than half the 2,300 applicants on the list were in the priority category and following a Government circular on house building, the situation was likely to get worse.

Mr McElligott added that to sell council houses would reduce the number available to be re-let and the council's housing programme was based on 200 houses being re-let each year. Mr Ron Groves said he could not see that it was economic sense to replace houses sold with new council houses that were more expensive to build.

Mr John Caperon challenged Mr McElligott to define what he meant by "minimum housing need" and suggested that, as that time would never come, he really meant he did not want to sell council houses at all. Mr Caperon suggested that as the Government circular was calling for a halt on the council house building, the selling issue should be referred back. But he did not find a seconder.

Mr Robin Moffatt said what was being proposed was a small change in the council house system. While nationally the council house building programme had collapsed, it was one of the most worthwhile things to allow tenants to buy a council house if they wanted one.

Mr George Lester said the committee wanted to sell to people their homes, in which they had lived and which they had improved.

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