



Changing Bicester



Whilst working on a project recently I was reminded of just how much Bicester has changed over the years. Not only in its ever expanding size and new developments, but also in the core of the town where changing needs require buildings and spaces to adapt, or even be replaced altogether.

These pictures show just a few of the more extreme examples. They show the churchyard of St Edburg's having been all but stripped of grave stones, despite the graves still being underneath, the row of houses torn

down to make way for a new Methodist Church, the George Hotel having been replaced by HSBC bank, and the widening of London Road to facilitate better traffic flow.

You do have to wonder if a Victorian person visiting today would even recognise the place.

- Matthew Hathaway



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Roll of Honour

The following are the local men who died in the Second World War, 80 years ago this month.

Flight Lieutenant Michael Patrick O'Reilly, of Bicester.

Died: 3rd September 1940

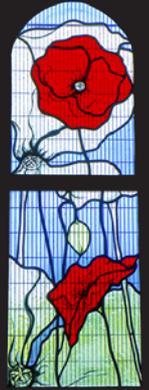
Served in: Royal Air Force

Stoker Arthur William Holton, of Kirtlington.

Died: 28th September 1940

Aged: 23

Served in: Royal Navy - HMS Nile



Bygone Bicester (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

22nd September 1860

BICESTER HARMONIC SOCIETY

The members of the above society have commenced their weekly meetings for the winter season, at the Crown Hotel, every Friday evening at 8 o'clock. The list of members is rapidly increasing, and the young men of the town will find this an excellent opportunity of spending a few hours.

The committee are desirous of purchasing a piano, and, towards defraying the expense, they intend giving a concert at the Black Boy Assembly Rooms, on Friday, October 26th.

28th September 1900

DANGEROUS PLAY

On Saturday afternoon a boy named George Bowden (son of Mr G. Bowden, New Buildings), had an unpleasant experience through meddling with gun powder.

He purchased a small quantity at a shop, under the pretext that it was for use in cleaning a flue. Then he repaired to the Banbury Road with a boy companion, whom he despatched home for a match. The sinews of war being thus prepared the match was ignited and applied to the powder, with the result that it blazed up in the boy's face, taking off his eye-brows and eye-lashes, singeing his hair, and blackening his face, which was more or less burnt.

The adventurer then returned home, and may congratulate himself that the result of playing with such a dangerous toy was not far more serious.

In the same quarter of the town another accident happened early this week, the victim being a boy named Charles Clifton, son of Mr C. Clifton, grocer. Whilst playing with other children he fell over a rope with which they were amusing themselves and broke his leg. He was subsequently taken to the Nursing Home.

6th September 1940

BICESTER HOME GUARD EXERCISE

The Bicester Home Guard had its first real exercise

on Sunday, when they "defended" the town against "invasion" by a large "enemy" force, represented by Woodstock Home Guard.

For the purpose of the exercise only certain routes were allowed by which the invaders could travel, but the defenders did not know by what means these routes would be traversed. A time limit was imposed for the completion of the exercise, and three umpires officiated, one at each of the posts in action. The defenders wore red armlets and the attacking force had white ones. Brigadier-General Courage, H.G. Commanding Officer for the County, who was accompanied by Colonel M. Lloyd Mostyn, Ploughley area Commander, watched the proceedings.

The Market Square was used as headquarters, with Mr W.H. Morgan, Bicester Section Commander, in charge; and assisting with the reinforcement parties were Mr O.H. Gilbey, Bicester Platoon Commander, and Captain Graham, Company Commander. The "A" Section of the Bicester Platoon, in the charge of F. Edwards, defended the Bucknell Road - Highfield post, reinforced by "B" Section, under W.F. Brooks; "C" Section, with H. Weatherbee in charge, manned the London Road post; and "D" Section, under Major L.A. Coker, defended Oxford Road. The Launton, Stratton Audley, Ambrosden, Arcott and Merton Home Guards took part in the exercise, and acted as reinforcements. Captain Hogarth, Captain Douglas and Dr J. Holmes officiated as umpires.

The one obstacle to the defenders was the fact that traffic on the three mentioned roads could not, of course, be interrupted, and thus it was that some of the vehicles of the attacking force got through at two of the posts, but on the London Road the attack definitely failed, the scouts getting their signals through in plenty of time for the barricade party to be ready. Altogether the exercise was highly satisfactory, and the defenders, under all the circumstances, performed a difficult task in commendable manner.

The exercise over, both the Bicester and Woodstock

Companies lined up on the Square to hear the umpires' verdicts. Colonel Mostyn congratulated the men on their excellent muster, and introduced General Courage who offered friendly criticism and advice on the exercise, and also gave certain instructions connected with Home Guard activities which are to be followed in the future.

The leaders of the Bicester "A", "B" and "C" Sections (Messrs. G.H. Sibling, H.L. Tyson and W.R. Nicholson) were unable to take part in Sunday's proceedings.

9th September 1976

PLANS FOR SUPERMART EXPANSION

Two major supermarket chains have announced plans for new and larger stores in Bicester town centre. The Oxford and Swindon Co-operative Society and Tesco have both applied for planning permission to move their present Sheep Street stores to larger buildings.

A Co-op spokesman said increasing business in Bicester

had decided them on the move from 25 Sheep Street to a vacant site at 37-39 Sheep Street, where they hope to build a single-storey supermarket with a flat above. The new supermarket will include a large butchery section and will replace the present building where the grocery and butchery sections are separated.

No decision has been taken on the future of the present building.

Tesco Stores Ltd. want to build their new store at 49-57 Sheep Street, to replace the existing store built on the site of the former Crown Hotel in 1964. Their new store will be almost opposite Bicester Post Office and will have a rear access to the new car park off Manorsfield Road.

Along the half-mile length of Sheep Street there are four other supermarkets - Fine Fare, Keymarket, Budgen and Woolworth. A fifth supermarket, International, was closed some time ago because of the intense competition for grocery shoppers.

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. But we do 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.

2020 AGM - 2019 Minutes

Monday 16 September 2019

Venue: The Clifton Centre, Ashdene Road, Bicester

Present: 32 members

1. Welcome/Format of Meeting

Bob Hessian opened the AGM at 19:40. He welcomed members and outlined the format of the meeting. He then requested permission from members for him to stand down as Chairman of BLHS, in order that he could conduct the remainder of the meeting. Members agreed to this request.

2. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Pat Tucker, John & Sue Leverton, Matthew Hathaway, and Pam Roberts.

3. Minutes of 2018 AGM

Bob Hessian summarised the key points from last year's AGM minutes, and asked members for approval of these minutes. The minutes were approved and would be available on the BLHS website.

4. Chairman's Report

Bob Hessian listed the talks and social events that had taken place from September 2018 until July 2019. He commented that this year's talks had provided a very good selection of topics and speakers, and thanked Sally James and John Roberts for their note-worthy efforts in booking and organising these events. Talks for the Society had been further enhanced by the purchase of new sound

equipment (a digital headset and microphone). This new equipment had proved to be a great improvement, and many members had commented that they were able to hear speakers far more clearly now.

The Aynho village walk had been well attended and enjoyable, and a further visit to the Virador waste plant was scheduled for late October/early November this year.

Matthew Hathaway had produced some amazing graphics for the WW1 Centenary event at St Edburg's Church, organized by St Edburg's Heritage Group. First, he had produced a map of Bicester showing the houses of service people who had survived WW1 and come home. Second, he had produced a large timeline for the duration of WW1, showing the battles where serving Bicester people had lost their lives. These graphics were very detailed and engaging, and had been extremely well received by the many visitors to this highly-successful event. Matthew had spent countless hours producing this material single-handedly, and a huge vote of thanks was owed to him.

To mark the 100-year WW1 centenary, BLHS had purchased a special commemorative bench for Garth Park. Further work was required to re-surface the base area where the bench is situated, and this task was now in hand. A plaque had been attached to the bench.

September 2019 marks the fifth year anniversary of the BLHS monthly newsletter, The Bicester Historian. Sincere thanks were given to its editor, Matthew

Hathaway, for never missing a deadline, and providing such an interesting and valuable newsletter for all BLHS members.

One of the saddest events of 2019 was the sudden death in April of Gill King. Gill came to Bicester from Oxford and had recently retired from her job at the Bodleian Library. Gill had served as a BLHS Committee member, and was the Society's archivist. She was heavily involved with the St Edburg's Heritage Group, as well as many other groups and societies. For several years, she had been working on a biography of John Dunkin, the Bicester-born historian. It is the Society's hope that Gill's material on Dunkin (which the Society now has possession of) will be able to be published at some future point.

The Bicester Town Trail would be available at the forthcoming St Edburg's Heritage Day/Bicester Festival on Saturday 21 September 2019. BLHS have been working on this Town Trail for several years. Cherwell District Council (CDC) had recently taken over the production, and the format has been altered to a one-page handout. BLHS are not particularly happy with the changes to the format and some design aspects, and intend to produce a full-version at a later date. The Bicester Town Trail is a free item.

BLHS are offering members a one-off opportunity to attend a BLHS Committee meeting, without actually having to join the Committee. This would give any interested members an opportunity to see what goes on behind the scenes of BLHS. Anybody interested should contact Bob Hessian.

Bob Hessian gave his thanks to: the Committee members for serving in 2018/2019; those members who had put out/put away chairs at the monthly talks; those members who had helped with organizing and serving refreshments; and Peter and Jean Crook for organizing the monthly raffles. Finally, thanks were given to all BLHS members for supporting the Society during 2018/2019.

5. Treasurer's Report

The BLHS Treasurer, Sally James, then gave her annual report.

A draft copy of the BLHS income and expenditure accounts for the year ending September 2019 had already been distributed to members prior to the start of the meeting.

Sally reported that in a nutshell, the Society had spent a lot of money in 2018/2019. Just over £2,000 had been spent on purchasing the WW1 Commemorative bench, and another £90 is to be paid for the accompanying plaque. The concrete base on which the bench has been placed is not satisfactory. However Bob Hessian and his son have agreed to re-surface this area themselves, paying for all labour and material costs. Sally commented that she had recently visited Garth Park and had sat on the bench and felt very proud. £500 had been spent on initial design costs for the Bicester Timeline which, when completed, will be on permanent display in the library. This is a worthwhile project, and once the final artwork is completed, will be produced by CDC. As mentioned by

the Chairman, new audio equipment had been purchased for £472.99, which had solved the problem of members not being able to hear some speakers at monthly talks.

The membership of the Society remains at 89 – the same as the last two years. Each year Sally and John Roberts encourage former members of the Society to rejoin. This year Sally and John would like to issue a plea to all current members to encourage new members to join the Society.

The Society received a special donation of £50 from a neighbour of Gill King's, in Gill's memory. The £10 'adjustment' charge showing in the accounts, covers the cancellation charge for a lost cheque sent to the landlord of the Red Cow (refreshments for Chesterton 2018 village walk).

This year, the Committee were proposing to increase annual subscriptions to £13 for Individual Membership, and £20 for Joint Membership. This proposal is subject to ratification by the members. Sally pointed out that there had been no increase in subscriptions for the past six years, and that the Society had spent over £4,000 in 2018/2019, and needed money for new projects. Sally asked the members if they were in favour of the new subscription rates. All members were in favour, and there were no objections.

Sally asked whether members had any questions concerning the accounts. Geoff Miles asked how much the WW1 seat had cost? Sally replied £2,124. Geoff asked whether it had been manufactured locally? Sally replied that a specialist company in Kilmarnock had manufactured it. There were no further questions.

6. Election of the Committee

Bob Hessian stated that in order to adhere to constitutional rules, all existing Committee members were now asked to stand down. Bob Hessian then asked members if they were in agreement for him to take on the role of Acting Chairman whilst voting for the new Committee members took place. Members agreed to this request. All Committee members who had served during 2018/2019 had agreed to carry on in 2019/2020. Members were then asked to vote on accepting the following BLHS Committee for 2019/2020 'en bloc':

Bob Hessian, Chairman
Sally James, Treasurer
Sally Dexter, Minutes Secretary
John Roberts, Membership Officer
Matthew Hathaway, Newsletter Editor
Peter Crook

All members were in favour, and there were no objections.

The AGM closed at 20:03 hrs.

A break for refreshments followed, and then Bob Hessian gave a short talk on the work and legacy materials of Gill King.

- Sally Dexter

2020 AGM - Chairman's Report

Normally, (and when I say normally, I mean like for the last 25+ years!) at this point of the AGM I would list the talks and social events that have taken place over the previous year i.e. from September 2019 to July 2020. But there has been nothing normal about the last 12 months!

The 2019 AGM proceeded as normal and was well supported. Afterwards I spoke about Gill King, who had died earlier in the year, and her archive material and interests which had been donated to the society.

In October we had one of our favourite speakers, Liz Woolley, who spoke about Oxford's Base and Brickish Skirt – the story of the development of Oxford's suburbs



in the 1850 – 1914 period. The phrase comes from a poem about Oxford by Gerard Manley Hopkins:

*“Thou hast a base and brickish skirt there, sours
That neighbour-nature thy grey beauty is grounded
Best in; graceless growth, thou hast confounded
Rural, rural keeping — folk, flocks, and flowers”*

November's meeting was a first for Matthew when he spoke to us about Bicester's Great War, and some of the local men who had lost their lives on the Western Front during the First World War. A Part 2 of the talk was scheduled for July this year, but, unfortunately, had to be cancelled, but it will be held on a later date. Well done Matthew for an excellent and well-informed talk!

In December we held our Christmas Social which was enjoyed by everybody – we were all blissfully unaware of what the New Year would bring!

In January, Dr Tim Jordan introduced us to some of the Cotswold's fine old stone barns that are a feature of the area. And in February, Mark Lawrence from the Oxfordshire History Centre, explained their photographic archive, Picture Oxon. This has now developed into a catalogue of some 400,000 images of local people, places and buildings. Picture Oxon's resources include not only photographs, but engravings, drawings and maps. We are lucky to have this resource available not just in the History Centre at Cowley, but also on-line. Mark illustrated his talk with many photographs some of which were of unusual views of Bicester.

And then along came Covid-19. The first cases of this virus appeared in humans in China in Nov/Dec 2019. The first European case occurred in France on the 24th

January, with the first confirmed case in the UK on the 31st January 2020. At the time of Mark's talk on 17th February there were 10 confirmed cases in the UK and by the time of when our March meeting was due, there had been 104 deaths from the virus in the UK. By the time when we would have been having our April meeting, over 1,000 people a day in the UK were dying of Covid-19.

When the Government introduced lockdown measures, we (BLHS) had already made the decision to cancel both our Committee and our members' meetings until further notice. I believe we received 100% support for that decision. And with the infection rate rising again, we do not see this situation changing in the near future.

The pandemic also meant that we could not organise any village walks this year. Imagine a group of 20 people keeping 2 metres apart standing in a circle with the leader of the walk in the middle. That would create a circle nearly 13 metres wide (14.2 yards in old money), with the leader in the middle having to shout as they are 7 yards away from everybody. Somewhat impracticable if you are standing in the Causeway!!!

Last year we offered members a one-off opportunity of attending a BLHS Committee meeting but without having to actually join the committee. The idea was so that people could see how we operate behind the scenes and plan for meetings, speakers, projects, etc. I can't say that I was inundated with requests, but the offer still stands!

As you know, we have cancelled any further subscriptions for the coming “year”. We've looked long and hard at how to keep the “local history” element in people's minds. We have obviously ruled out our normal format for meetings. We are looking at how other groups conduct meetings/talks using the internet and other IT methods – this is not as straightforward as some may think especially if we want to avoid excluding those who are not IT or computer proficient. Under consideration are more in-depth articles for the Newsletter, short videos on buildings of interest or of items held in the archive (my front room!).

Last year I approached the Town Council and discussed with them the possibility of having a scheme for awarding “blue plaques” which would be placed on buildings or sites where someone of note had either been born or lived. It seemed to be well-received and I suggested a scheme similar to that used in Weston-super-Mare where the townspeople were invited to suggest appropriate names and then there would be some sort of vote or referendum. The Town Council said they would set up a committee – the Blue Plaque Committee – and look at various proposals. They said that BLHS would be invited to be part of that group. And that's the last I've heard about it. The Town Council minutes seem to indicate that the group has met (but without BLHS) but I've not heard anything more on the subject.

The “Open Doors” theme for this year was “Hidden

Nature” – we were unsure how we would apply that to local history. We did think that maybe a churchyard trail could point out the different kinds of animal and plant life in churchyards, or indicating the different types of lichen, mosses and liverworts found on gravestones and stonewalls – but that was cancelled because of the pandemic.

For the Bicester Festival which would have been the



weekend just gone (18th, 19th & 20th Sept), the theme was “The Fire Within”. We thought we would dust down the old fire-engine and cool people down with a few litres of water. But again, the pandemic curtailed the event although there has been a “virtual” version of the festival with a lot of musical and art interpretations of fire. It was difficult to see how we could do something with the fire-engine. Maybe I should have offered an on-line live “Anvil Firing” event – it being my 75th birthday over the weekend!

The library has only recently been opened up to the public, but it remains to be seen as to for how long. The display cases are currently empty, but I do have material that can go on display although access for setting up in the library is limited. The Bicester History Timeline is also due to be erected on the wall of the Reference Library.

Having mentioned the library, there was one event last October that was highly successful. This was the Talking Maps Roadshow organised by the Bodleian



Library to promote their Talking Maps exhibition in Oxford. They staged an exhibition of maps in the library, as did the History Centre from Cowley. We were asked to participate, and this was welcomed by the Bodleian Library and the History Centre. The bonus was that there were experts available to talk about the maps on display. The downside was that the exhibition was only open for a couple of hours on the day which meant not

many people had the opportunity of seeing the display. However, because it was so successful, I think there is a strong possibility that we (BLHS), with the help of the Bodleian and the History Centre, could stage something that lasts 2 – 3 days and which could be viewed by a larger and wider audience.

As for local enquiries – I get the feeling that many people decided that rather than watch television all day during the lockdown, they would research their family tree. We received many “my ancestors” type queries and I directed most of them to family history sites where there is a wealth of information that they can research themselves – I’m not doing it for them! But there have been several more interesting queries - the most recent coming from a guy in Suffolk who wrote: “I lived in Bicester from 1936 until 1953 when I left home for the army. But I still consider Bicester as my hometown. I would love the opportunity to pass on my memories if you are interested”. Needless to say, I replied “Yes please!”

The 2021 Calendar is currently in preparation – the theme is “Bicester From Above” and will include aerial photographs of the town.

Although mentioned in a previous Newsletter and in a recent communication from me, I wish to formally announce the death of three members and ex. members of the society that occurred in the last 12 months:

Don Robinson
Michael Wall
Megan Savins.

My thanks to the Committee members who have continued to work behind the scenes. And a special thanks to Matthew for consistently putting together, month after month, a Newsletter full of interest.

Finally, thanks to you the members of BLHS for supporting us the best you can at this time. Hopefully, we will be able to meet soon.

- Bob Hessian

Election of new Committee

Having consulted the membership and received no objections, the current committee members are therefore re-elected. They are:

- Bob Hessian, Chairman
- Sally James, Treasurer
- Sally Dexter, Minutes Secretary
- John Roberts, Membership Officer
- Matthew Hathaway, Newsletter Editor
- Peter Crook

2020 AGM - Income & Expenditure Year Ending Sept. 2020

INCOME

Subscriptions	848.00	
Admission to meetings: non-members	9.00	
Raffles	86.19	
Interest from PO Investment Account	66.08	
Book 'Bicester Through Time' – royalties	36.85	
Talk to Launton HS by Bob & Paula Hessian	25.00	
		<hr/>
		1071.12

EXPENDITURE

Subscriptions			
- Oxfordshire Local History Association	13.00		
- British Association for Local History	75.00		
		<hr/>	88.00
Meetings			
- speakers	161.20		
- hall hire	125.00		
- refreshments (incl. Xmas Social)	50.12		
		<hr/>	336.32
Administration - postage	80.76		
- stationery (incl. Xmas cards)	48.02		
- printing	255.57		
- photographic permits	14.00		
- website hosting	34.74		
		<hr/>	433.09
Plaque for WW1 Memorial Bench		<hr/>	132.00
			<hr/>
			989.41
			<hr/>
			81.71
			<hr/>
			6332.61
			<hr/>
			£6414.32

SURPLUS

Brought forward from 2018/19

TOTAL ASSETS

BALANCES

Bank	237.35
Cash	0.00
Post Office*	6176.97
TOTAL ASSETS	£6414.32

* The Post Office Investment Account contains an additional sum of £1433.13, being Museum Committee funds.

2020 AGM - Treasurer's Report

Despite our best efforts, membership is slightly down on last year. We had 76 members this year, but have very sadly lost Mick Wall, Don Robinson and Megan Savins. For the last few months, of course, a lack of events means we've been unable to interest potential new members, but John and I will continue to try to re-recruit former members and boost numbers in any way we can. Word-of-mouth seems to be key, so spread the word please!

Our biggest outlay this year has been for printing. This includes the 'then & now' photos produced for the Bicester Festival event at St Edburg's Church last September. These will be a useful resource for future displays and a valuable record of the changing town.

The plaque for the WWI memorial bench in Garth Park is now in place and we await an official opening. The cost exceeded the original estimate due to the specialist nature of its manufacture.

Given the current uncertainty, we're proposing to extend membership until September 2021 at no extra cost to members. If you have any views on this proposal, please let me know. In the absence of a response to the contrary, we will assume that members are happy with this arrangement and this will satisfy our constitution's requirement that subscriptions be ratified at the AGM.

Any questions, please get in touch.

- Sally James



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