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Bicester Historian

The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society

Worzel Captures Their Heads - and Hearts!

I recently came across this article in the Bicester Advertiser, published on 29th October 1980. I couldn't include it in the Bygone Bicester section as the Paragreen piece was much more interesting from a local history viewpoint. But it is such a sweet piece of popular culture that I felt I had to include it somewhere. Besides, some of the children featured, now in their 40s, might even be reading this today.

If Worzel Gumidge ever needs a friend to help him in his crazy adventures, all he has to do is call at Lower Heyford School. There

he has 28 devoted friends who are still reeling from the excitement of meeting him last week.

The children were invited by Southern Television to watch the filming of Worzel Gumidge at Lower Heyford canal and to meet the cast, which included John Pertwee (Worzel), Barbara Windsor (Saucy Nancy) and Una Stubbs (Aunt Sally).

"We were thrilled to see him," said seven-year-old Edward Cropley from the infants. "He had lots of jokes with us - he said we were the senior class and he thought I was 24. I asked him

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about his straw and felt it but it was really rubber. He used to wear real straw but it was uncomfortable.”

“I shook his twigs,” said Atlanta Kyte, five, “it felt a bit funny.”

All the children showed him pictures they had drawn of him and Tamsin Corrie, five, wrote under hers: “This is a picture of you. I love you.”

“When he saw it he said he was going to marry me,” said Tamsin. “I had to kiss him but it wasn’t very nice because he had mud and stuff on his face.”

William Mostyn celebrated his fifth birthday on the day he met Worzel, and as a treat he sat on Worzel’s knee and had his picture taken, which was then presented to him.

“He showed us the robin which lives in his coat and his hedgehog hairbrush,” said Leroy Kilby, nine. “The robin is really stuffed. He brushed my hair with the hedgehog and it prickled, and then he made me walk the plank.”

Darrell Kingham said: “Some bits had to be filmed over and over again because the jets and the trains made too much noise. We had to keep very quiet while they were filming.”

The children’s favourite bit was when Worzel’s stand-in fell in the river. All sorts of theories were put forward by the children as to why the stand-in got the wetting instead of John Pertwee. Some thought it was because his make up would run, others thought he didn’t like getting wet, and one little boy dared to suggest that Worzel couldn’t swim.

Tracy and Lorraine Hawkins, eight and nine, made special friends with Worzel.

“He let me waft the snow, which is really salt and chemicals, in the Christmas scene,” said Lorraine. “And I showed him the old chapel in the village and he said he might come and live there.”

“He gave me his telephone number and said I can be his secretary if he comes here again,” said Tracy.

The cast used the school as their dressing rooms during half term. In the infant classroom, which was Worzel’s room, he came face-to-face with himself, for the children had made a life-size model of him out of cardboard, paper and rags.

He gave all the juniors a piece of straw from his legs for



luck, and it seems to have worked for everybody.

“It was lucky for me because I fell off my pony but didn’t get hurt,” said Tracy.

“Mine brought me luck because my mum always says ‘no’ when I ask her things, but today she said ‘yes,’” said Amanda Phillips, eight. Also apparently attributable to the straw are the fact that Darrell caught a pike in the river, Leroy got 50p for helping with the washing up, and Andy Boswell’s birthday arrived quicker than he thought.

Six-year-old Russell Skraggs, whose grandmother runs the Bell Inn, observed that the film crew brought a lot of business to the village. “They drank a lot,” he said. “My granny had to get extra help to wash up all the glasses.”

Roll of Honour

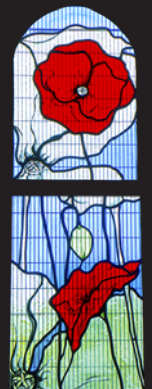
The following are the local men who died in the Second World War, 80 years ago this month.

Seaman George Harry Keen, of Hardwick.

Died: 9th October 1940 Aged: 21 Served in: Royal Navy - HMS Bacchante

Chief Steward Frank Moss, of Bicester.

Died: 24th October 1940 Aged: 60 Served in: Merchant Navy - SS Matina



Under the Floorboards Talk

St Edburg's Foundation will be holding their AGM this year on Monday 23rd November, at 7:30pm, via Zoom. This includes an interesting talk about what was discovered in St. Edburg's Church during the 2020 re-ordering works.

Anyone is welcome to attend. Simply go to join.zoom.us and enter the following credentials:

Meeting ID: 506 946 4385

Passcode: 479 515

Bygone Bicester (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

13th October 1860

ANOTHER FATAL ACCIDENT ON THE RAILWAY

On Friday afternoon, the 5th inst., William Crowdy, of Merton, was driving a cow across the line at the Langford Lane Crossing, on his way home from the fair. He was advised not to cross as a train was due, but the gate being open the cow got onto the line, and the poor man fearing that the animal should get away went in pursuit. The Worcester Express came up at the time, and the unfortunate man was struck by the buffers and carried along some distance. He was killed almost instantly.

The deceased was about 75 years of age.

12th October 1900

HARVEST THANKSGIVING AT THE WORKHOUSE

Customary with other years the usual thanksgiving service for the harvest crops was held at the Workhouse on the same day as the other places of worship connected with the Church in the town, and the little chapel on Sunday looked quite equal to the occasion.

The Master and Matron must decidedly be congratulated on the taste they displayed in adorning the building, more especially as the flowers, fruit and vegetables were all the produce of the house garden. The vegetables consisted of some fine specimens of potatoes, carrots, beet, cauliflower, onions and tomatoes, whilst grapes, apples and plums adorned the windows in abundance. The flowers included a good number of foliage and flowering pot plants, the chief of these being around and about the altar.

The thanksgiving service was conducted at 3:45 by the Vicar, who gave a suitable address, and the harvest hymns were most heartily taken up, Mrs Hunt accompanying upon the harmonium.

4th October 1940

DISASTROUS FIRE AT BICESTER

A fire, which in a short space of time caused considerable damage, broke out in Weyland Hall, North Street, Bicester, on Friday, shortly before 1pm, and about two hours later the upper floor (which included the temple of the Jersey Lodge of Freemasons) was completely gutted. The Hallsville School from West Ham was occupying the building, and it was after the children and teaching staff had left for lunch that the fire was discovered. Mr T. Hearn, employed by Mr H.G. Philpot, was repairing the glass windows outside when he noticed

the flames inside, and he raised the alarm.

The fire had established a firm hold before the Fire Brigade and members of the AFS could get to grips with it, and had reached so great a proportion that it was feared the houses on either side of the hall would soon be involved. The home of Mr and Mrs Walter Smith, which immediately adjoins the Weyland Hall, was quickly emptied of its furniture by many willing hands and removed to a place of safety. A store belonging to Mr G. Cannon, baker, adjoining the rear of the hall, was also threatened, but fortunately the contemplated removal of some 10 tons of flour did not need to be put into effect. Once the firemen secured sufficient pressure from the water main they gradually improved the situation, and it was surprising that, considering the hold the fire had gained, they localised it and finally got it under control in so short a time.

The Jersey Lodge suffered a grievous loss, for although the premises, furniture, regalia, etc, were insured, we understand that there were many things which it will be impossible to replace. Notable amongst these were the regalia and jewels of the late Captain Mark U. Weyland, after whom the hall was named, to perpetuate his long association with the Jersey Lodge, and who was until his death, Provincial Grand Master of Oxfordshire. This regalia and the jewels were of great sentimental, as well as intrinsic, value. Everything on the upper floor was destroyed, and all that remained later was blackened walls, a gaping roof and charred furniture. The Jersey Lodge had intended to open its winter sessions yesterday but the meeting was cancelled and all future gatherings postponed for the time being.

The Hallsville School, fortunately, suffered only slight loss, most of the property being removed to safety, but it is a great pity the school should be so disturbed after having established itself satisfactorily at Weyland Hall. However, much to the disgust of the children, the school was accommodated in St Edburg's Hall the same afternoon, and is continuing there for the time being.

Actually the damage to the downstairs floor was caused solely by water and the scullery adjoining was practically untouched. The fire started on the landing, but its cause is so far unknown. Apparently the Fire Brigade was not called until the flames were forcing through the large windows at the front, and the call received gave no indication that the outbreak was a serious one, with the result that only a trailer pump, with a quantity of hose

attached, was dispatched to the scene. Little pressure could be obtained from the water main at the outset, but once this was improved and more firemen arrived, the fire was soon under control.

The Weyland Hall, built in 1846, was the former Wesleyan Chapel, and on the completion of the new Methodist Church in Sheep Street, in 1926, the building was purchased by the Jersey Lodge of Freemasons, who spent hundreds of pounds in adapting it to the needs of freemasonry. The ground floor was often hired for whist drives and dances, and other social activities.

The fire was the most serious which has occurred in the town since the early part of the last war, when the premises of Messrs. Druce & Co, drapers, of Sheep Street, were gutted and much stock lost.

15th October 1980

FAMILY TRADING ENDS WITH BETTY'S CLOSURE

An era of family trading in Bicester comes to a close at the weekend when Betty's shop shuts in the Causeway on Saturday. The business has been in the Paragreen and Proctor families for 82 years, though there will still be a link there.

The story began when Mrs Betty Proctor's grandmother, Mrs May Paragreen, opened two general stores side-by-side in the Causeway. As the picture of what has become Betty's shop shows, she sold a wide range of goods from lace to women's and children's clothes to toys and ironmongery. The shops were called a 6 1/2 bazaar.

Her son Charles – Betty's father - took over the shop next door and to the left of the one illustrated and ran it as a cobblers. He had been apprenticed in the boot and shoe trade in Oxford. Charlie, as he was better known, ran his shop until his death three years ago. Charlie's shop has since been sold off and is now a lawnmower and garden implements shop owned by Mr Barry Burns and his wife.

It was 41 years ago in December that Mrs Proctor came onto the shopkeeping scene. Her grandmother fractured her hip and became bedridden for 19 years and the family turned to the young Betty, who at 14 had just left St Edburg's church school.

"I was just told the job for me was here. But my mother,



Mrs Daisy Paragreen, did help me." said Mrs Proctor.

At one time the Paragreen and Proctor families had three neighbouring shops in the Causeway, for Betty's husband Fred opened a greengrocers shop next door to her shop (to the right of the shop in the picture) 22 years ago. Fred established his shop in the former Carlton House prep school that had been taken over by Miss Irene Johnson. The premises became vacant when Miss Johnson moved her school to their present home, Oxford House in King's End.

Earlier this year Fred gave up the shop and it is now leased to the Church of England Children's Society as a charity shop. But Fred retains his yard and buildings at the back to continue his business as he runs greengrocery stalls at Bicester, Buckingham and Berkhamstead markets.

Betty's shop is up for sale and she and her husband and family will live in Buckingham Road, Bicester.

"I am giving up because after 40 years I have had enough. I shall still be busy as a housewife and our youngest son is still at school. And I shall also continue to do the bookkeeping for my husband." said Mrs Proctor.

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