



French Red Cross Day

During the Second World War, fundraising seems to have been almost a daily occurrence. From “Spitfire Week” and “War Weapons Week”, to “Battleship Week” and the “Red Cross Penny-a-Week Scheme”, the people of Bicester seem to have thrown themselves into everything wholeheartedly. But maybe it can be slightly understood when you consider that all their good causes were high up in the public consciousness. Much the same as it was in the First World War when they had “French Red Cross Day”. A day when, back in July 1916, the people of Bicester came together to raise money to help the French Red Cross in supporting the servicemen fighting to defend their own country.

The Bicester Advertiser article on the day reports that “success is hardly a sufficient word to attend the efforts of the local committee appointed to arrange the day. Never

has an undertaking been received with more enthusiasm by all creeds and denominations thus showing the universal admiration for our gallant allies who are fighting by the side of our own heroes on the Western front of the greatest battlefield ever known.” The whole organisation of it had to be rushed, only a few days being available to prepare, but they still managed to raise over £136, or about £12,000 in today’s money.

Events kicked off the day before with a tennis tournament held in the grounds of the Bicester Tennis Club when the first prize for the ladies – a smelling salts bottle – was won by Miss N. Brown, of Somerton, and the first prize for gentlemen – a vacuum flask – was won by a man who preferred to remain anonymous.

Then, on Friday 14th July, stalls were set up all over the town displaying a large variety of donated

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- Straight Joints & Curved Braces Dateable Architecture Talk *17th May @ 7:30pm*
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- Bicester Advertiser Local History Article *20th May*



Bovs National School Stall

goods for sale, most of which were homemade or homegrown. The St Edburg's Church stall was located at the junction of St John's Street and Sheep Street. The Roman Catholic stall was at the south end of Sheep Street. The VAD Red Cross Hospital set up their stall outside the hospital in London Road (now Hometree House). The Boys' School stall was near Red House, while the Girls' School stall was in Market Square and the Infants' School stall was in Crockwell.



Infants National School Stall

Many other stalls were set up outside shops and houses all around the town.

As well as selling goods, several of the stalls also had competitions, with the Congregational Church and Infant School stalls both hosting "Guess the Name of the Doll", while

the Catholic Church stall went for a "Guess the Weight of the Cake".

To end the extremely successful day everyone headed to the grounds of The Garth, then the private home of the Keith-Falconer family, to enjoy a concert and dance on the lawn. Refreshments were laid on in a

marquee and everyone enjoyed a "most convivial evening".

Then, just a couple of weeks later, everyone came together again to raise a record-breaking £150. This time in aid of "Oxfordshire Red Cross Day", they had a fancy-dress parade, more stalls, and even more cakes!

- Matthew Hathaway

Bygone Bicester (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

6th April 1861

THE BICESTER HARMONICA SOCIETY

The annual meeting of the members of this society was held on Tuesday evening, at the Crown Hotel. An excellent supper was served by Mr King, to about thirty gentlemen, in a style that afforded unqualified satisfaction. Mr G. Armstrong occupied the chair, supported by R. Nunn, Esq. and other gentlemen.

The usual loyal toasts were heartily responded to, and were followed by "the Bicester Harmonica Society", "the Town and Trade of Bicester", which was responded to by Mr W. Hitchman &c. The Chairman proposed "Mr Drake and the Bicester Hunt" (loud cheers). If that gentleman had not been very popular they should not have witnessed the flattering demonstration that had recently taken place. After the toast had been enthusiastically received, Mr King gave "A Southerly Wind and a Cloudy Sky", with admirable effect.

The evening was spent in strict unison with the objects of the society, and in addition to some excellent singing, the Band of the Royal Rifle Corps added much to the pleasure of the company by their presence and the able performance of some popular airs.

20th April 1861

PRESENTATION TO MR JONES

On Wednesday evening, a farewell dinner was given to Mr R.A. Jones, for a number of years Master of the Bicester Station, upon his leaving the town.

The dinner was provided by Mr Heritage of the Nag's Head. It was of the choicest quality, and admirably served, but no sooner had the cloth been removed, than the alarm of fire scattered the company for a considerable time.

Mr H. Hinks presided, and Mr J. Smith occupied the vice-chair. On their return, the chairman expressed his regret, in common with the company generally, at the circumstance which had caused their absence, and then, in a very appropriate and complimentary speech, presented to Mr Jones a very beautiful silver cruet stand, suitably furnished, bearing the following inscription: "This piece of plate and a purse of gold, was presented to Mr R.A. Jones, as a mark of respect, from the gentry and tradesmen of Bicester and neighbourhood, April 16, 1861." The design and execution of the stand were alike elegant, and it was accompanied by a very substantial mark of esteem, in the shape of a purse containing £41 5s.

Mr Jones thanked them for the presentation in a brief but excellent speech, and the company continued the pleasurable meeting, which was rendered more agreeable by some good singing, till a late hour.

Also 20th April 1861

ANOTHER FIRE

In addition to the morning fire at Whitelands Farm earlier reported, on Wednesday night about nine o'clock some cattle sheds in the occupation of My W. Hitchman, were observed to be on fire. They contained a quantity of pigs and poultry, and were situate adjoining the lane at the back of Sheep Street. No sooner was the alarm given than an immense number of people flocked to the spot and afforded the most energetic assistance in suppressing it. The livestock was got out without much difficulty, and a plentiful supply of water with an abundance of willing hands soon checked its progress, and ultimately subdued it.

The sheds had not been visited after dark, therefore there could be no possibility of accident about the matter. Another evidence of the felonious character of the fire was that it was entirely confined to the thatch and never penetrated to the interior. No clue has been traced to the perpetrator, and much surprise and indignation is felt on the subject, because Mr Hitchman enjoys the marked esteem of all, in consequence of his urbane and generous disposition.

A reward of £25 has been offered for the apprehension of the felon, and we sincerely hope it may result in his discovery and condign punishment. The damage was not great and was covered by insurance.

10th April 1896

LECTURE ON MANDINGO LAND

This evening, in the Corn Exchange, Prince Umbetiquesanghanghama, of Mandingo Land, West Central Africa, is announced to give a lecture graphically describing the various people of tropical Africa, and particularly the Mandingoes, their habits, customs, mode of life, trade resources, marriages, government, religion, etc, together with a vivid description of the horrors of Arab slave-raiding in tropical Africa.

The lecture is to be illustrated by native songs, etc, given by the lecturer himself and a small company of artistes.

17th April 1896

TEMPERANCE ENTERTAINMENT

Last Thursday evening, under the chairmanship of Mr George Hedges, an entertainment was given in Wesley Hall by members of the Bicester Temperance Brass Band. There was a crowded audience, the seating accommodation of the hall being put to a severe test and proving inadequate. The pieces were all well rendered and made up a capital entertainment.

The following was the programme: Opening hymn; prayer; Chairman's address; selection by the band; song, Mr T. Castle; cornet solo, Mr C. Parker; duet (euphonium and trombone), Mr J. Plant and Mr Blencowe; recitation, Mr Duffy; song, Mr J. Payne; cornet duet, two members; address, Mr Duffy; selection by the band; cornet solo, Mr H. Plant; recitation, Mr W. Burnett; instrumental trio, three members; song, Mr T. Castle; quartet (trombone, euphonium, baritone and bass) Messrs Plant, Blencowe, Castleford and Payne.

5th April 1918

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH ANNIVERSARY

The 228th anniversary in connection with the Bicester Congregational Church was observed on Good Friday. At the afternoon service the sermon was preached by the Pastor (Rev. T. Smith) to a fair congregation, the text being taken from St John xix, 18, "They crucified Him." Referring to the history of the Church, the preacher said he was the 27th pastor, and he felt very unworthy to stand in such succession.

In the evening the sacred cantata "Under the Palms" was given by the choir in their usual creditable style, all the solo parts as well as the chorus being well sustained. A special feature was the singing at various parts of a number of little children. Miss Violet Stockley ably presided at the piano, and the Rev. T. Smith acted as conductor. The congregation was a good one.

Floral decorations were supplied and arranged by Mrs Smith and Mrs Checkly. Miss E. King, as usual, decorated the roll of honour.

26th April 1918

COMMUNAL KITCHEN FOR BICESTER

A special meeting of Bicester Urban District Council was held at the Council Chamber on the evening of Thursday, April 18th, when Mr J.T. Mountain presided. The chief business related to an Order received from the Local Government Board on the subject of the establishment of a communal kitchen in Bicester.

The Chairman read the Order, and gave as his opinion that it would be as well for the Council, without delay, to get the preliminary machinery in working order for the establishment of a kitchen, so that it might be commenced at any time.

Mr Malins pointed out that the Council already possessed admirable premises wherein the project might be carried on. He referred to the present council offices. He ultimately moved that the council establish a communal kitchen for Bicester. Mr Harris seconded.

It was resolved that a committee consisting of the whole Council be formed to carry on the work, with power to add to its number, and the clerk was directed to insert an advertisement in the Bicester Advertiser inviting any resident in Bicester to assist.

1st April 1938

HOUSING TENDERS

After being held up by the Ministry of Health's refusal some months ago to accept the tenders for the 70 houses to be built at Highfield, Bicester's slum clearance scheme can now be completed, the Ministry having agreed to the fresh tenders. These were approved by the Bicester Urban District Council at their monthly meeting on Monday.

The committee had before them a number of estimates. These were as follows: Mr B. Jackson, Bicester (part only), £5,654; Hayward and Co Ltd, Yarnton, £37,043 9s 9d; Bush Building Co Ltd, Headington, £30,105 12s 6d; W.A. Price, Bicester, £26,752; Harris Bros Ltd, Marlhay, £26,437; H. Fidler and Sons Ltd, Luton, £26,131 16s; Jennings and Prosser, Brill, £26,059; St George's Building Works Ltd, Marston, £26,050; F. Parker and Sons, Marsh Gibbon, £25,956; C. and H. Contractors Ltd, Kidlington, £25,948; The Building and Public Works Construction Co Ltd, Swindon, £23,997.

The committee had recommended that the tender of The Building and Public Works Construction Co Ltd be accepted, subject to the contractors undertaking to complete the works by December 17th 1938. The Clerk said that he had written to the company and they had replied that they could complete the houses by the time mentioned.

The type of houses to be erected as follows: four one-

bedroom bungalows; 24 two-bedrooms non-parlour type; 34 three-bedrooms ditto; seven four-bedrooms and one five-bedrooms. Suitable accommodation is rendered available for a maximum of 331 persons.

1st April 1938

NATIONAL HARMONICA BAND CONTEST

The Red Rhythmics added to their reputation last Saturday at the National Harmonica Band Contest in London. In open competition with bands from all over England they were able to secure third place - being beaten only by two men's bands from the North, each of which depended for its harmony on added instruments, piano accordions and piano. The local boys were the only ones among the prizewinners playing full part harmony on harmonicas.

In the evening came the great concert at the Westminster Central Hall, when the prizes were presented by Sir Neville Pearson. The Red Rhythmics, in addition to giving short items as one of the first three contest winners, had also been invited to give a ten-minute demonstration of part-playing for the audience of 1,500. The "stunt solos" of Les Blackman were enthusiastically encored, and he had to stand before the microphone a second time.

The band are hoping to be in equally good form for their concert in aid of the Bicester Cottage Hospital on Thursday of next week. Those intending to be present at St Edburg's Hall are advised to get their tickets early.

Roll of Honour

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

Sergeant Peter Charles Forster, of Castletown, Dorset.

Died: 17th April 1941 Aged: 23 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant William Waugh Walker.

Died: 17th April 1941 Aged: 26 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Anson R9653 was on a training flight when a wing fell off during a practice bombing manoeuvre and the aircraft crashed near Charlton on Otmoor, killing both the above mentioned as well as three others.

Sergeant Andrew Roland Rennie, of Keene, Ontario, Canada.

Died: 27th April 1941 Aged: 26 Served in: Royal Canadian Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Bicester, buried in Caversfield)



Talks Update

Our next talk, presented via Zoom, will be on the **17th May, at 7:30pm**, when Heather Horner will present her talk on **Straight Joints & Curved Braces**. An introduction to observing dateable features in old buildings. The link for the talk will be emailed out to members nearer the time.

Salt in Pre-Historic Britain Talk

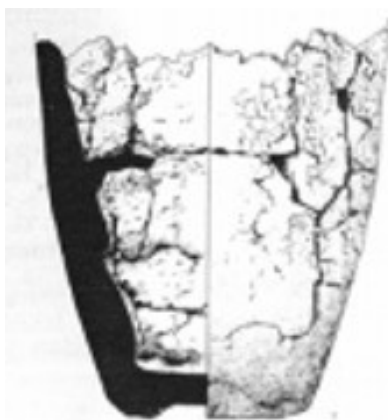
The Production, Distribution and Use of Salt in Pre-Historic Britain by Dr Janice Kinory.

Today, salt is an industrial product, but prior to the 19th century it was rare and valuable. No salt was produced in the immediate area and none exists in the archaeological record, as moisture in the air has destroyed it. Therefore, the existence of a salt-related pottery called briquetage is used to track salt's production and distribution, together with a small number of pre-historic salt production sites.

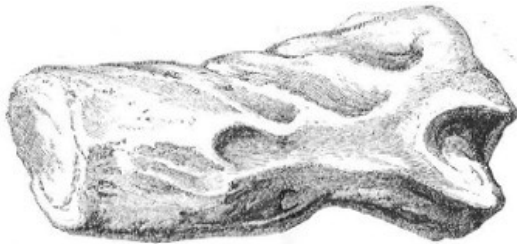
Briquetage at British sites dates from the Middle Bronze Age to the early Roman

period (c.1400 BC to the second century AD). The majority of finds, however, date to the British Iron Age (c.800 BC to AD 43).

Probably the earliest method of salt production was solar evaporation of seawater. However, given the British climate, this could be better achieved by heating the brine, evidenced by brine heating pans found in Lincolnshire.



Inland salt production was based around sites such as that at Droitwich, and in Cheshire. Here the brine would have



been heated in tall briquetage vessels set over hearths, rather than in pans. Although crude-looking, the container was highly adapted for heating and drying.

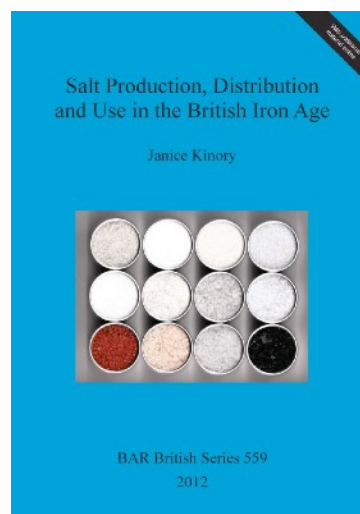
Briquetage find patterns indicate the distribution of salt, although not all regions used briquetage for transportation. Saltways for land transport and rivers were utilised. The expanding road network during the Roman period aided distribution.

Salt was considered to be an essential commodity in pre-history and continues to have numerous uses. Curing of meat; the initial treatment of hides; cheese-making and the pickling of vegetables and nuts are all important activities which require a supply of salt.

Salt production sites, whether it be coastal salt pans or inland salt springs, were involved in ancient rituals with religious beliefs and superstitions being associated with salt.

Salt was used as a payment for dowries and this is still practised in some cultures. About 10% of a Roman soldier's pay was made in salt.

In the 1990s, Janice identified a briquetage find on a



Romano-British site in Steeple Aston, which is an unusual find so far from Droitwich.

Janice's book *Salt Production, Distribution and Use in the British Iron Age* was published in 2012.

(ISBN: 978-1407309729) She will visit a meeting later in the year to show artefacts associated with her talk.

- Sally James

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