



Bicestre Cottage Hospital



As most of you know, I do end up buying some oddities on the internet, especially via eBay. The following is a good example. It was described as an 18th Century engraving of the Royal Bicestre Hospital, Paris. (in later engravings it's called Bicetre, a name that still exists – in France).

Bicestre is one of the names used in the past for Bicester (UK), other examples are Bissiter & Bister but there are quite a few more. But the auction was finishing in a few minutes so I didn't have time to do any research on the item so I bid on it and won. I think the postage was more than the cost of the picture! It measures some 450mm x 300mm

(it's French!). It certainly doesn't look British and doesn't bear any resemblance to Bicester Cottage Hospital!!

The name Bicêtre comes from the fact that the original 13th Century fortress that was built on the site, was on land belonging to John of Pontoise, Bishop of Winchester, who owned it during the British occupation, during the reign of Charles VII. From Winchester comes Winchestre, Bichestre, Bicestre, and finally Bicêtre.

The building you see above was built in the 1700's and it initially hosted the dregs of society, mixing indifferently the destitute, the sick and the criminals: the insane (chained until 1793), crooks, syphilitics, murderers, vagabonds and delinquents of all kinds. In particular, poor homosexuals caught red-handed were placed there, since they had given up on burning them in public places. Prisoners were castigated to make them



The hospital now, situated in the southern part of Paris in an area called Le Kremlin-Bicêtre.

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atone for their faults.

During the French Revolution, prisoners held without trial were released. In September 1792, furious "septembriseurs" murdered nearly two hundred inmates at the place. Among the victims were many children picked up from the streets for petty theft, begging or vagrancy.

It was in Bicêtre that the upholsterer Guilleret invented the straitjacket in 1770. It was also there that the first test of the guillotine was carried out on April 17, 1792, on live sheep, then on the corpses of three vagrants!

So, nothing to do with Bicester, Oxfordshire, but it helps to fill a page!

- Bob Hessian

Bygone Bicester - June (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

8th June 1861

BICESTER CRICKET CLUB

On Thursday the first match of the season was played between the married and the single members. The day was tolerably fine, and the attendance was good for an opening day.

The singles went in first and acquitted themselves admirably. The batting of Messrs C. Painter, Smith, and R. Phillips was remarkably good, and so was the bowling of G.T. Drake and Mr Smith. They also fielded well, and in every way proved themselves masters of the field, as is shown by the score.

On the other side, Mr T. Painter and Mr Bradbury batted well; Mr W. Collins also bowled well.

At two o'clock there was an adjournment for lunch, which was provided first-rate style by Mr Haylock, of the Red Lion, in a tent erected for the purpose. It was beautifully supplied and well served.

As a whole the day's amusement was all that could be desired, and considering the want of practice, was creditable to the club. The final score was: Singles - 1st innings 162; Married - 1st innings 27, 2nd innings 46.

21st June 1918

SALE OF WORK AND ENTERTAINMENT AT ST JOHN'S

Yesterday evening a sale of work and entertainment took place at St John's in aid of a War Emergency Fund for children of soldiers and sailors who have lost their lives in the war and a fund for keeping a child at school at Penhalonga (South Africa).

A number of young candidates for the Girls' Friendly Society gave the entertainment, and there was a good attendance of people, despite the inclement weather. The sale of work took place first, and although the sum of money taken is not yet known it is assumed that it amounts to quite as much as has been realised in previous years.

A feature of the proceedings was a baby show, for which a surprisingly large number of entries were received. Prizes were awarded as follows: For children under twelve months, 1 - Pamela Hickman, 2 - Eileen Baxter and Arthur Alger, 3 - ___ Bowerman (Goddington), Special - Betty Lane. Children between one and two years, 1 - Alfred Kimberley, 2 - Marion Godfrey, 3 - Joan Cambray, Specials - ___ Woodward and John Hawes, Highly Commended - John Ballard.

Following the baby show the entertainment took place. The first item was a cantata, entitled "The Golden Apple". The performing of the little ones was decidedly good and reflected great credit on those responsible for their training. Much appreciation was shown at the next "turn" which comprised a gipsy song, entitled

"Esmeralda", and another "Topsey Turvey".

The proceedings terminated shortly after seven o'clock with the singing of the National Anthem.

15th June 1977

WHAT THE TOWN WANTS IS A MUSEUM!

Although Bicester has no museum it is surprising the amount of historical material that is around the town, as an exhibition opening at the library this weekend should prove.

It is being mounted by members of a local history course run at the Bicester Adult Education Centre through the WEA and the External Studies Department of Oxford University.

The course tutor, Mr John Steane, tells me that a number of interesting documents, photographs and articles have been loaned.

There are two large collections of photographs of old Bicester, one the work of Henry Taunt, the famous Oxford photographer who visited Bicester in 1900, the others come from photographs owned by photographer Mr Michael Morgan.

Documents include a pre-Enclosure map of Bicester, dated 1753. Minute books of the Turnpike Trustees for the Bicester-Aylesbury turnpike road will also be available for inspection. Articles will include Medieval keys and stained glass from the site of the old Priory in Bicester and Romano-British pottery collected by Mr David Watts on land between Bicester and the Roman town of Alchester, near Wendlebury.

"The exhibition illustrates the life of Bicester over the last 300 to 400 years and also depicts the historic buildings of Bicester which still remain standing," said Mr Steane.

Although unseen at the time of writing, it would seem that this collection would form an admirable basis for a Bicester museum.

The idea of a museum has been vaguely tossed around for some time and usually discarded. But with travel costs escalating, it is becoming increasingly expensive to travel to Woodstock or further afield to find out about the immediate locality.

The biggest stumbling block appears to be finance. Mr Steane estimates that it costs about £5,000 a year to run a small museum. Still, perhaps the idea is worth reviving and giving serious consideration in jubilee year.

15th June 1977

MERRY MEN OF OLD LAMB ALE

Kirtlington people showed they still know how to make merry with their riotous Lamb Ale Feast. Some of the traditions associated with the centuries old Lamb Ale have died, but villagers forgot about the weather



and the country's problems for a few hours on Monday.

The Lamb Ale is usually held on Trinity Monday, but the clash with the Bank Holiday this year meant organisers had to postpone the feast a week to ensure the presence of a fair.

More than a 100 villagers and their guests, a visiting cricket team from Merton College, Oxford, and a team of Morris dancers, packed the village hall and set the rafters quivering with their celebrations.

The fame of the Lamb Ale has even reached to America, said the chairman, Mr Creighton Ashley, the village headmaster, who received a newspaper cutting this week from the United States referring to the old Kirtlington custom.

Among those at this year's Lamb Ale was 66-year-old Mr Ernie King, who has been coming to the feasts since he was 14-years-old, together with Mr Bill Herbert, 75, and Mr Albert Collett, 73.

15th June 1977

CHURCH CELEBRATES GOLDEN JUBILEE THIS WEEKEND

Now the Queen's Silver Jubilee is over some Bicester people will be turning to a local golden jubilee. This weekend events are being held to mark the 50th anniversary of the opening of Bicester Methodist Church in Sheep Street.

The opening was not the beginning of Methodism in the town, which dates back to 1814. But the half-century of the building's existence has seen a steady progress in the life of the church, which found unexpected fame through its Red Rhythmics Harmonica Band.

Methodism began in the town after a Mrs J. Bowerman was "awakened" while listening to the preaching of the Rev. John Wesley at Brackley. When she and her husband settled in Bicester they at first attended St Edburg's parish church, but soon arranged for the Brackley minister to visit the town. A room in a farmhouse standing on the site of the former Wesley Hall was opened by Mr Bowerman for these services.

This was in 1814 and the room proved too small. So the building was adapted to become the first Wesleyan

Chapel to seat 100.

A site was bought in North Street and a chapel built in 1840. Some 40 years later a schoolroom was added. In 1892 the chapel was enlarged, re-seated and the gallery added at a cost of £438. In 1904 an organ was installed costing £270.

The growing number of Sunday School scholars led to the purchase of Wesley Hall and adjoining cottages for £1,650.

Although it was not until 1927 that the Sheep Street church was opened, much of the site was bought in 1919. The purchase did not immediately lead to building. But by the 1920's it was obvious something would have to be done. The old chapel in North Street needed extension and remodelling. It seated 300 and had limited vestry accommodation. The church members had to ask themselves if it was worth spending money on the building.

In 1925 the old chapel was sold. It was bought by the Jersey Lodge of Masons and has become the Masonic Weyland Hall. The Wesley Hall in Sheep Street – originally the Wesley Church or Chapel – was eventually sold in 1955 to Woolworths. It has subsequently become Coxeters furniture store.

The new church was to become the Grainger Hargreaves Memorial Church in memory of a former, noted minister.

The Rev Grainger Hargreaves had been a missionary in China, a minister in Australia and New Zealand and eventually chairman of Oxford Methodist District for 18 years. He had returned to Bicester in 1921 and died in 1923.

The new church cost £7,000, including the purchase of the site.

When the stone-laying ceremony was held on September 23, 1926, the first stone to be laid was in memory of the Rev Grainger Hargreaves.

On June 23, 1927, the new church was opened by Mrs J. Vanner Early, of Witney. The Bicester Advertiser of Friday, July 1, records:

"It was a memorable day in local Wesleyan history, and the Bicester adherents and a host of friends signalled the occasion by attending in great number, so much so that the ample seating capacity of the new building was strained to the uttermost to find room for the large audience. At one time it was thought necessary to hold an overflow meeting in the open air, till extra seats had been placed at the east end of the church. The occasion was favoured by brilliant sunshine..."

Builders were Messrs Cannon, Green and Co. of Aylesbury. The Cruciform shape of the building included nave, chancel, transepts, gallery, vestibule, cloakrooms and vestries.

The Advertiser recorded:

"... an organ chamber has been provided for the

installation of an organ at a later date. An electric lighting system has been fitted in anticipation of the establishment of the town supply which is promised for next December.”

But at one time it was envisaged by some that the church should be much grander and should have a tower. This idea was abandoned, partly on the grounds of cost.

The church is described as a Modern Gothic style and includes Oregon-Columbian pine boarding in the roof and pews.

In 1942 a two-manual organ by Albert Keates of Sheffield was installed as a gift from Mr George Layton, one of the Bicester church’s main benefactors. The organ was believed to come from a bombed church. Mr Layton was organist for 50 years and he had opened the first garage in London Road in Bicester in 1910, having, it was popularly thought, foreseen that narrow North Street would not be useful for cars. That street has since become one-way.

In 1956 there was a major expansion to the church when a new Sunday School was completed.

The Red Rhythmics Harmonica Band had been founded by Mr Sid G. Hedges, (S.G. as he was known) the late local author and historian, best known for his chronicle “Bicester Wuz a Little Town.” He was Sunday School superintendent for 50 years, following on from his father, Mr George Hedges. Sid founded the band in the thirties and it ran until 1948.

A long standing member was Mr Joe Leach, of Field Street, a Bicester councillor. “I should think there were 15 to 20 of us. I was the percussionist or drummer. We wore red berets, white shirts and grey flannels. Sid was the founder and conductor and sometimes he appeared before our audiences in evening suit,” he remembers.

The band played most music for their concerts at towns in the region and at major halls in London, including the Royal Albert Hall.

“We gave concerts but did not play for dances. We had soloists and one was George Rose the actor who is now on Broadway. He was a pianist and harmonica player,” said Mr Leach.

The band appeared several times on radio, usually from the BBC studios in Birmingham and also on television. Their fame led to the former Picture Post magazine featuring an article on the church Sunday School under the headline “Sunday School is Different Here.”

The band folded in the early 1950’s partly because of difficulties in obtaining new harmonicas.

Events marking the golden jubilee include a floral display from tomorrow until Saturday to be followed by a supper in the Methodist Hall in the evening.

Special services are being held on Sunday at 10.45 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. The preacher will be the Rev. Leslie Wollen, former superintendent of the Buckingham and Brackley Circuit.

Esme Timms

We’re very sorry to report the passing of long-standing BLHS member Esme Timms.

She was born in 1926 at the old Star PH in Crockwell, where her father was the landlord. When her father retired from the new Star PH at Highfield in 1947, they moved to Emlyn House in Sheep Street.

She trained as a shorthand typist and telephonist, working at the telephone exchange above the former post office in Sheep Street and at Bicester Ordnance Depot. Her talents extended to teaching tap-dancing, giving lessons on the quarry-tiled floor at the new public house and in a hut at the rear of Emlyn House.

Esme had a great love for Bicester which was evident in her many contributions to our oral history sessions. She appeared alongside her brother, Brian Clifton, in our DVD *Bygone Bicester: The Town We Remember*, painting a vivid picture of life in Bicester in days gone by.

It was always a pleasure to see her at our meetings. She was kind and thoughtful, and immensely supportive of our efforts to promote the history of the town.

Our sincere condolences go to Brian and his family.

- Sally James



Oxford Canal & Tooley's Boatyard Talk

Matthew Armitage has been the director of Tooley's Boatyard for 19 years. Prior to that, he was a field archaeologist.

Thomas Newcomen's Atmospheric Engine was a significant development during the industrial revolution. Initially developed to clear water from coal mines, it was later used to pump water into canals to maintain water levels at times of drought.

During the 1700s, canals were an important means of transporting goods, as roads were poor. A canal boat pulled by one horse could carry significantly more freight than a horse and cart.

The Grand Cross Canal was built in 1769 and was the first phase of the Oxford Canal. It connected the River Thames to the River Mersey and the River Severn to the River Humber.

The Oxford Canal was built cheaply, so is of a narrow construction. The boats which navigate it are referred to as 'narrowboats', whereas later canals accommodated wider boats (40ft+) and are called 'barges'.

The Oxford Canal was constructed principally to bring coal from the Warwickshire coalfields and reached Banbury in 1778, when Tooley's Boatyard was built. Also known as Banbury Dockyard, over the years the site has included a dry dock, a forge and blacksmith's workshop, a carpenter's shop, a belt-driven machine shop and stables.

The machine shop dates from the 1930s and contains second-hand machinery from the 1890s.

The dry dock is the oldest continuously operated facility of its kind on the inland waterways of Great Britain. Before the 1920s, the dry dock was a brick-lined hole, which took 10 minutes to fill and an hour and a half to empty into the River Cherwell.

Banbury lock was bombed in 1940. Flooding was avoided in Grimsbury, as one lock gate held and the lock was functioning again in two days. The only casualty was the lock-keeper's cockerel, who lost his feathers. The bird was exhibited at a charge of 6d, which was donated to the Spitfire Fund.



The forge and blacksmith's workshop, which date from 1778, is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

The boatyard featured in Tom Rolt's popular 1944 book *Narrowboat*. The book highlighted the state of the canals and led to the creation of the Inland Waterways Association. It

has an account of converting the wooden narrowboat *Cressy* into a houseboat. He paid particular attention to the traditional narrowboat decorations of roses and castles.



A blue plaque at Tooley's commemorates Rolt.



Cressy in the boatyard in 1939.

The Tooley brothers were farmers from the Lower Heyford area. Emanuel Tooley owned a pair of boats and was known as 'number one' which meant that he was paid per delivery and was commonly transporting pig iron to Coventry and returning with sand.

His son, George, took over the dry dock around 1900. He had a 'change boat' which people could use if their own boat was out of commission. George had two sons, George and Herbert. Herbert spent seven years repairing his old boat Clara.

Savana was the last boat launched at Tooley's until the Dancing Duck was built there and launched in 2007. The Dancing Duck is used for Saturday boat trips and as a training boat.

These activities bring in much-needed revenue, together with 'Theatre in the Dock', which has been running for 12 years. A trust has been set up to ensure the continuation of the lease, to attract further funding and to develop a tourist attraction. Wooden boats will also be built at Tooley's and repairs will continue.

Forging Ahead by Matthew Armitage tells the story of the boatyard and further information can be found at www.tooleysboatyardtrust.org.uk & www.tooleysboatyard.co.uk

- Sally James

Bygone Bicester - July (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

13th July 1861

DR MARK AND HIS LITTLE MEN

The celebrated Dr Mark and his troupe of little men visited Bicester on Wednesday last, and gave two concerts in the Assembly Room. There was an afternoon concert which was attended by a highly respectable though not very numerous audience. At five o'clock there was a special performance for the benefit of school children, who were admitted at one penny each. The children of charity schools having a free admission.

The evening concert was most successful, the Assembly Room being completely crowded. The programme was selected with much taste and care, and consisted of selections from some of the best Operas and Quadrilles, introducing most of the favourite and National Airs. A few English Songs were also sung by some of the little men, in a very pretty manner. Corporal Bob Smith, who stood 3 feet 6 in his shoes, greatly amused the audience with his military salute, and the cool manner in which he played a capital solo "There is Nae' Luck", on the piccolo.

The performance concluded with the National Anthem, which was sung by the little men with great enthusiasm.

31st July 1896

EARL OF COTTENHAM'S NEW STABLES

The erection of the new stables, very similar in their exterior, but very much improved in their interior compared with those already existing, has been carried on at Bicester Hall during the past two or three months by Messrs T. Grimsley and Son, builders, Causeway. When completed they will form a valuable addition to the property which hitherto had boasted of excellent stabling. Upon the Earl of Cottenham taking over the mastership of the Bicester hounds he at once saw the necessity of having an extensive stud of valuable horses directly under his supervision.

The vast accommodation at Bicester Hall was, however, found insufficient and after thoroughly renovating and improving the house, his Lordship commenced to add to the stabling. We understand the work will be completed in early September. The new building is two storeys high and contains, on the ground floor, nine roomy loose boxes, cleaning room, boiling house, coach house, clothing room, sick box and blacksmith's shop. Above, which is approached by a spiral staircase, are large corn lofts, store room, breeches room, three bedrooms, mess room, scullery and larder, and laundry.

The whole of the stables are fed with hot and cold water, supplied from a tank above the laundry, while the lofts have the advantage of a hydraulic lift.

The stables now form a complete quadrangle and have a large yard with manure pit in the centre. An ornamental entrance from the Launton Road is in progress, and this will consist of Bath stone pillars, large doors and coping to match.

5th July 1918

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE DAY

Yesterday was American Independence Day, or, as it is known in England, "Liberty Day". The American soldiers now resident in the town were given a day's holiday from work, and a large American flag, the Stars and Stripes, overhung the entrance to Red House, where the men are billeted.

At Banbury, in association with the movement throughout the country to observe the day in recognition of America's alliance with us in the war, and her great achievements in the assistance of the Allies during the past few months, the Mayor purchased an American flag to be flown at the Town Hall in honour of the event, and a similar flag was flown from his private residence. An appeal was also made to the inhabitants possessing flags to display them.

22nd July 1938

BICESTER'S CARNIVAL QUEEN

When the Bicester Hospitals Week Committee decided on a Carnival Queen for August Bank Holiday, and adopted the penny per vote scheme, they had an idea it would raise a few pounds. Even in their wildest dreams they did not expect such a magnificent sum as £64 12s, the amount ultimately raised by the eleven competitors for the position. Each and every one of these ladies is to be congratulated, firstly on their willingness and public spirited action in competing, and secondly on their real hard work and untiring efforts in canvassing for votes.

For some years Bicester Market Square has not contained so many people as on Saturday evening last, when roughly 2,500 assembled there to witness the counting of votes and announcement of the winner. Music was relayed to the crowd by means of Messrs Trinder Bros' loud speakers, and announcements were made through the microphone by the Rev W.C. Franklin. Only six of the candidates were able to be present, and promptly at 8:30pm the counting began, each lady handing in her cards and money before mounting the decorated platform, where she was introduced and then acknowledged the crowd's greeting. The excitement grew as Mr F. Markham (Barclays Bank) and Mr G.A. Southern completed the counting, and following a trumpet call by Bandmaster Fairgrievs, RAF Heyford, Councillor T. Hudson read the proclamation,

announcing Miss Joan Grace as Carnival Queen. Another trumpet call, and Miss Grace spoke to the crowd thanking all who had accorded her votes and paying tribute to the spirit and hard work put in by her fellow competitors. She wished the carnival all success.

Councillor H.H. Alley (Chairman of the Committee) thanked the public for their generous response to the canvas for votes, and said that the competitors deserve the highest praise for raising so much money between them. He handed to each of them an invitation from the

Committee to be their guests at all the functions being held during Hospitals Week. Miss Marjorie Taylor, as runner-up, will be Maid of Honour.

The number of votes secured by each candidate were: Miss Joan Grace, 4,022; Miss Marjorie Taylor, 2,794; Miss Dorothy Plater, 2,660; Miss Irene Powell, 2,607; Miss Maud Alley, 1,012; Miss Ethel Young, 911; Miss Ruth Wilkins, 429; Miss Islay Crawford, 367; Miss Eileen Stockley, 282; Miss Beryl Barr, 272; Miss Hilda Golder, 148.

Roll of Honour

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

Flight Lieutenant Horace John Lyon, of Bicester.

Died: 17th June 1941 Aged: 23 Served in: Royal Air Force

Flying Officer William Howard Corbett, of Northern Island.

Died: 19th June 1941 Aged: 32 Served in: Royal Air Force

(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Charles William Davis, of Newfoundland.

Died: 19th June 1941 Aged: 23 Served in: Royal Canadian Air Force

(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Joseph Jossie Goldman, of South Africa.

Died: 19th June 1941 Aged: 22 Served in: Royal Air Force

(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Patrick Lally, of Ireland.

Died: 19th June 1941 Aged: 23 Served in: Royal Air Force

(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Pilot Officer David Greville Buckley, of South Africa.

Died: 11th July 1941 Aged: 22 Served in: Royal Air Force

(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Pilot Officer Philip Llewellyn Nash, of Canada.

Died: 11th July 1941 Aged: 23 Served in: Royal Canadian Air Force

(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Frank Lees Turner, of Canada.

Died: 16th July 1941 Aged: 26 Served in: Royal Canadian Air Force

(Died on service at RAF Bicester, buried in Caversfield)

Pilot Officer Michael Wakeman Major, of Merton.

Died: 22nd July 1941 Aged: 28 Served in: Royal Air Force

(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Stoker William Charles Newman, of Islip.

Died: 12th August 1941 Aged: 32 Served in: Royal Navy - HMS Picotee

Sergeant Edward William McBarnet, of Southern Rhodesia.

Died: 18th August 1941 Aged: 26 Served in: Royal Air Force

(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Frank Williams, of Wrexham, Denbighshire.

Died: 20th August 1941 Aged: 25 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Gunner Arthur Henry Bailey, of Camberwell, London.

Died: 30th August 1941 Aged: 23 Served in: Royal Artillery
(Buried in Caversfield)

Pilot Officer Johannes Carolus Bosch, of Southern Rhodesia.

Died: 31st August 1941 Aged: 25 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Pilot Officer Castle Blunden Stapleton Fynn, of Southern Rhodesia.

Died: 1st September 1941 Aged: 26 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Donald Alexander Neal, of Canada.

Died: 13th September 1941 Aged: 22 Served in: Royal Canadian Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Bicester, buried in Caversfield)

Flight Sergeant John Mackinnon, of Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex.

Died: 18th September 1941 Aged: 25 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Bicester, buried in Caversfield)

Sergeant John Howard Ixer, of Sanderstead, Surrey.

Died: 20th September 1941 Aged: 19 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Robert Leagas, of Eastwood, Essex.

Died: 20th September 1941 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Nicholaas Petrus van der Merwe, of Southern Rhodesia.

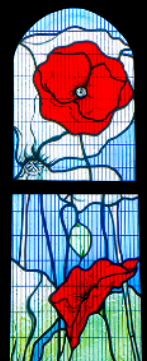
Died: 20th September 1941 Aged: 21 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Jack Amott.

Died: 29th September 1941 Aged: 19 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Jack Kenneth Howe, of Orpington, Kent.

Died: 29th September 1941 Aged: 22 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)



Careless Talk Cost Them Their Jobs

During the war, RAF Maintenance Command was responsible for receiving aircraft from factories, modifying them up to the required standard and then delivering them to the respective squadrons. In 1940, when airfields were being bombed all over the country, it was thought

that all aircraft would be dispersed as much as possible to cut down damage from air attacks. Also, as production would increase, the maintenance units would get congested with aircraft. It was decided that each maintenance unit would have satellite units, highly

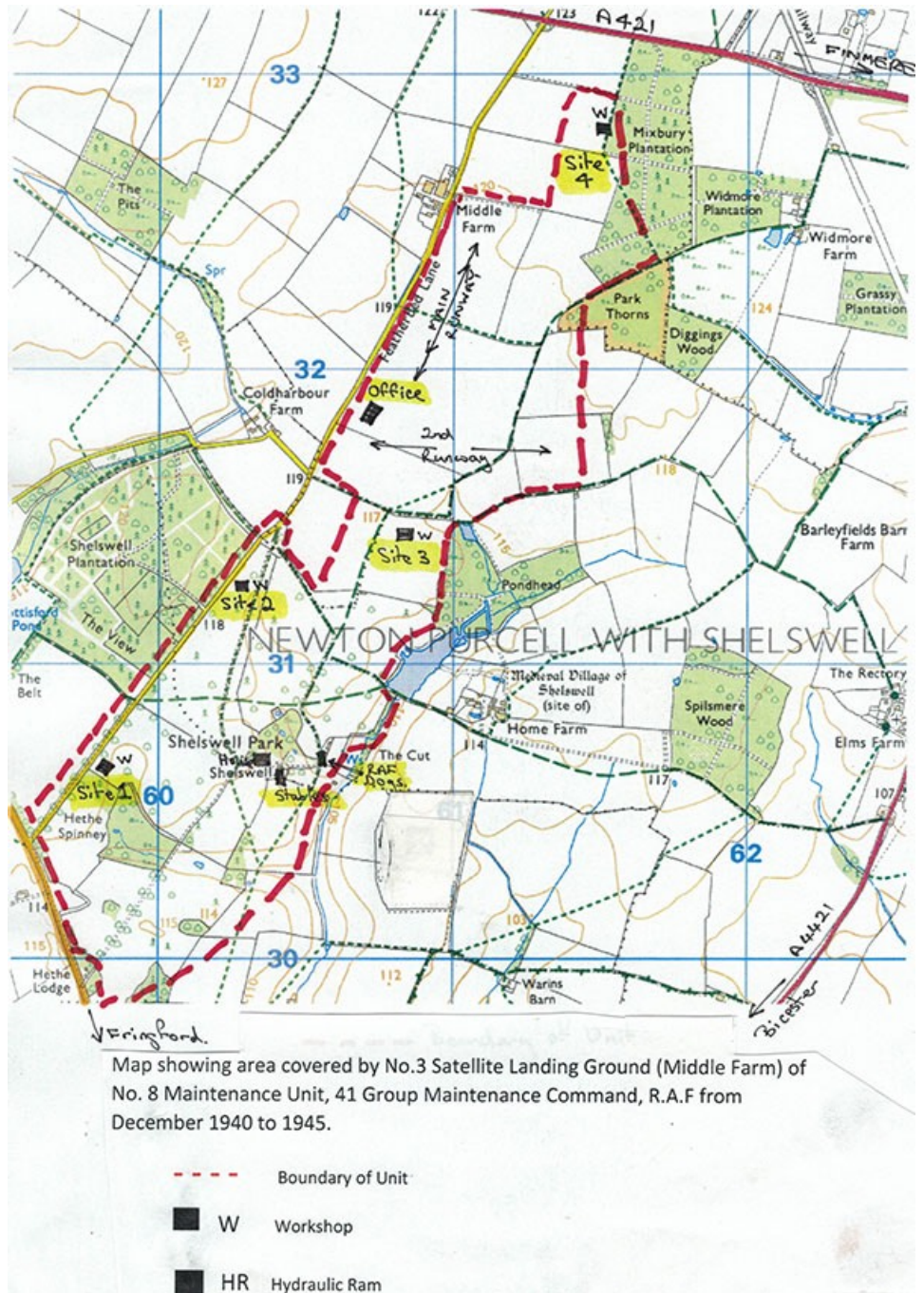
camouflaged, to store excess aircraft. Later on in the war camouflage was not so important and these satellite airfields became mini maintenance units, carrying out minor modifications themselves. Aircraft would be flown in from the parent units to the satellite landing grounds

and No. 3 S.L.G. (Middle Farm) was one of these. It was one of the larger satellite units and its parent unit was based at Little Rissington, near Stow on the Wold, and part of 41 Group. A similar but smaller S.L.G was based at Barton Abbey (near Hopcrofts Holt). The aircraft were mostly stored amongst and under the trees of Shelswell Park. The main runway (grass surface) ran parallel to and at the northern end of Featherbed Lane with a second runway at right angles to this.

The following information was given to me five years ago and came as the handwritten notes of D.J. Saunders who was the RAF officer in charge of the site from 1941 to 1944. He was 22 years old when he arrived at the site – “It was rather a shock to be dumped in the middle of the English countryside and be responsible for an RAF unit which was essentially a small version of a full-size RAF station with all its attendant problems”.

They stored at times over a hundred aircraft ranging from Halifax bombers to Spitfires, but primarily they kept all versions of the Wellington. On a good weather day, they would receive around eight aircraft, with a similar number going back to the parent unit. Saunders was responsible for around eighty civilian employees and twenty-five airman dog handlers who, along with their dogs, were responsible for guard duties. His office on the side of the airfield was camouflaged to look like a country bungalow!

Flight Lieutenant Saunders was billeted in Shelswell House, along with other RAF officers and one from the army. Mrs Slater Harrison was living in the house at the time. She had married her husband, Edward Slater Harrison around 1902 when she was in her 40’s and he was in his 70’s. She was related to the Cartwrights of Aynho. Edward died in 1911 but Mrs S-H continued to live in the house until her death in 1943.



The house was lit by a 100-volt electricity system from a generator with batteries. The generator was driven by a petrol engine and many times, when lights went dim, Saunders would go out into the park and obtain a can of 100 octane petrol from an aircraft to enable them to get the generator going, as Mrs S.H struggled to keep within her fuel rations. Evidently the engine would go like a bomb on this type of petrol! A hydraulic ram on the outlet of the lake used to pump water for the bath up to the house. It fascinated Saunders with its constant “thump, thump, thump” - it seemed as though one got something for nothing. (The ram

pump was invented by Montgolfier in the 18th century and using no external power source relies on a head of water to pump water uphill – use Google to understand how it works!). Saunders and the other officer (army) would have lunch and dinner with her. Sometimes they would be invited to tea (served by the butler and servants) when Mrs S.H. had her friends round – such as Lady Brooke Popham, whose husband was Air Marshall Sir Robert Brooke Popham who lived nearby at Cottisford.

As for the work carried out on the site, they were occasionally called upon to work on rather complicated modifications to aircraft. The

engineers and technicians had a favourite oak tree in the park which had a very sturdy branch which was used along with ropes and block & tackle, to haul out and replace aircraft engines. There were no aircraft hangars on the site, everything being done in the open. Engine changes were common, along with changes to the undercarriage of aircraft and wing or tailplane replacements. They got rather adept at improvisation.

One "top secret" aircraft they had for a while was the Mk VI Wellington bomber. Different to the earlier versions, this was designed to fly at 40,000 ft. The crew were contained in a pressurised cylinder to cope with the high altitude and the pilot had just his head in a small hemispherical Perspex dome on top to see where he was going! When boarding the aircraft, it was like getting into a submarine with an airtight door to close behind you.

Middle Farm (No.3 SLG) was surrounded by other airfields - mostly Operational Training Units: Bicester, Croughton, Upper Heyford, Finmere and Silverstone. Consequently, there were a large number of crashes in the area, several of which incurred fatalities. Their fire crew often attended these crashes.

Fl. Lt. Saunders mentions his contact with the local landed gentry and farmers. The airfield utilised a

large amount of land which continued to be used by local farmers.

Good public relations were needed - some trees needed cutting down and hedges/fences removed. Cattle needed to be treated with respect - a number of cows did die through drinking Glycol. The introduction of high-temperature engine cooling utilising Glycol rather than water, was a development that made it possible to reduce weight and drag by decreasing the size of the cooling radiator by as much as 75 percent. Glycol was stored in tanks situated close to where the aircraft were stored. Cows liked to rub themselves on something and the pilot heads on the tanks were particularly vulnerable. Glycol is sweet tasting and cattle were partial to drinking the fluid with often fatal consequences. In the end, each aircraft had to be fenced in.

Saunders mentions a remarkable old character named Ern Hinks. He was responsible for a team of around six men who kept the airfield tidy. He describes him as a real countryman of the old school. The farthest afield he had ever been in his sixty-five years was Bicester. He was a good poacher and would occasionally bring Saunders a rabbit.

Middle Farm (situated at the northern end of Featherbed Lane) was known throughout the 41 Group

as being prolific in mushrooms and during the Autumn all sorts of odd aircraft would drop in, just for mushrooms! Saunders mentions that he had a standing order from various senior people who would visit for eggs!

Fl. Lt. Saunders wrote these notes some 45 years after leaving Middle Farm S.L.G. and they include personal comments about some of the characters he remembered but I have not included them in this account. One incident does stand out however and is worthy of including here. I mentioned earlier the "top secret" aircraft - the Wellington Mk VI with its pressurised hull for the crew. Two brothers who worked for Ern Hinks were heard talking in the local pub about the aircraft and unfortunately were overheard by someone from the RAF Provost Marshal's Department. They were hauled up in Bicester County Court and the case was heard in camera as the aircraft was on the secret list. They were fined about £20 each - that's approximately £850 in today's money. The Provost Marshal was most upset as he thought they should have gone to prison. However, Saunders had to sack them, so they also lost their jobs.

- Bob Hessian (based on information written by Flight Lieutenant D.J. Saunders in 1987)

Bygone Bicester - August (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

10th August 1861

BICESTER AUGUST FAIR

This fair on Monday last was rather a large one. The supply of stock was very plentiful, and sales were generally effected at good prices. There were 3,000 sheep penned, and upwards of 400 head of cattle were driven in. There was also a great number of horses, many of them valuable animals.

Mr Paxton's ram sale proved an important feature in the fair, and attracted a large concourse of buyers and connoisseurs.

In the pleasure fair there was an unusual assemblage of attractions, so much so, that King's End, where the fair is always held, was not sufficient to contain the various shows, stalls, rifle galleries, and sixpenny-likeness booths. The overplus located themselves in Market End, and for noise, din, and demonstration, certainly out-rivalled their confreres in King's End.

The light-fingered gentry must have been pretty numerous, as several country folks were heard bewailing their emptied pockets. The police too were kept busily employed, and have filled the lock-up with

offenders, who are anxiously waiting the result of Friday's petty sessions.

28th August 1896

LECTURE IN THE CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOLROOM

On Tuesday evening last a lecture was given in the Congregational Schoolroom by the Rev S. Delahay Paine, of Florida, USA, on the "Slave War in America". There was a good attendance.

The lecturer, who had fought in several battles and is an eloquent speaker, gave most thrilling incidents from his experience of the civil war, which naturally proved very interesting to his listeners. The proceeds were devoted to the Chapel Restoration Fund, to which an addition of £1 12s 6d was made. Mr F. Smith (Sunnyside) ably performed the duties of chairman.

2nd August 1918

COTTAGE PROPERTY SALE

On Friday evening last Mr Abbotts, of the firm of Miller and Abbotts, auctioneers, Banbury, submitted to public auction, on instructions from Mr James Smith, of Bicester, a number of freehold and long leasehold dwelling houses and cottages situate in the town. There was a fair attendance, and Mr Abbotts, in opening the proceedings, announced that he had conducted twenty-three sales of property that week, all of which had changed hands, and he hoped that this sale would prove no exception to that success.

Lot one comprised two cottages, Nos 2 and 4, St John's Street, occupied by Messrs A. Richardson and J. Castle, and producing £18 4s per annum. These were secured by Mr Walter George for £165.

Lot two was withdrawn, as also was lot four.

A dwelling house in St John's Street, occupied by Mr John Grimsley, and producing an annual rental of £8 13s 4d, found a purchaser in Mr James Cripps, Field Street, for £117 10s.

The last lot consisted of five brick built and slated cottages, Nos 1 to 5, Victoria Row, occupied by Messrs G. Cartwright, G. Pitts, H. Westbury, Jonas Hudson and J. Taylor, and producing £37 9s 8d per annum. These were purchased for £355 by Mr T.C. Finch.

The solicitors for the vendor were Messrs Whitehorns, Banbury. As will be seen in our advertising columns, Lots two and four are now offered for sale by private treaty.

19th August 1938

EXCURSION

About 50 from Bicester patronised the excursion to Margate on Sunday, arranged by the local branch of the British Legion. In addition, the train picked up passengers at Blackthorn, Brill and Ludgershall, etc.

The excursionists spent about twelve hours at the seaside resort, the Bicester contingent arriving home about 3:30am on Monday.

Wychwood Forest & Cornbury Park Talk

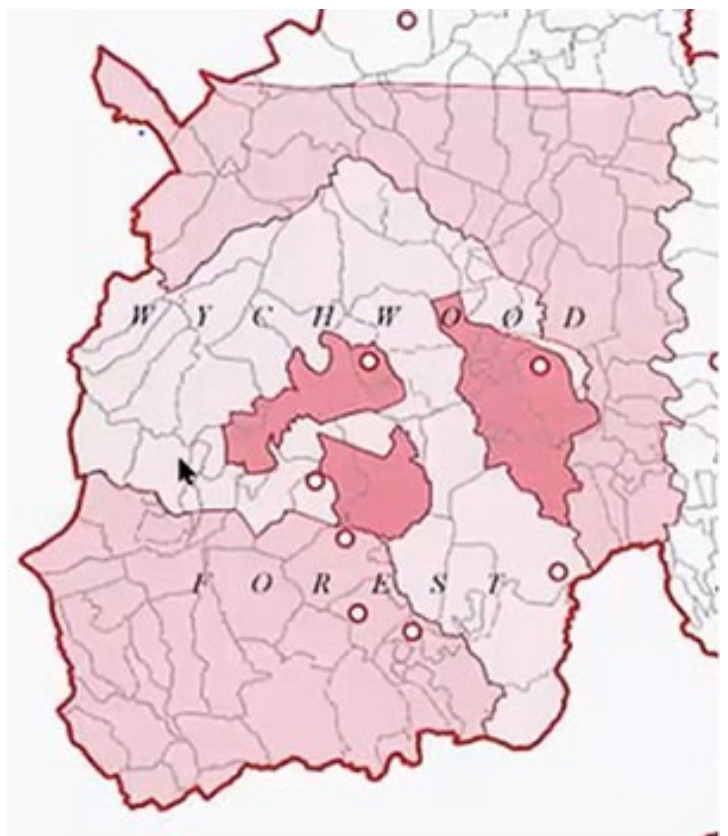
Introduction

Wychwood Forest is a relatively small area of woodland adjoining Cornbury Park, close to Charlbury. Up until the 1850s, it was substantially larger, being an area of woodland, coppice and wood-pasture stretching from Cornbury Park almost as far as Burford. Even in its reduced state, it is the largest area of broadleaf woodland surviving in the county.

A forest is defined as an area subject to forest law. This law came into being shortly after the Norman conquest, initially to protect the Crown's hunting grounds.

Physical Development

The changing extent of the forest is shown on this map. Around 1219, following pressure from powerful barons to free their land from the restrictions of forest law, the forest was reduced to the pale pink area shown. Further reductions took place in 1298/1300, which resulted in the three dark pink blocks shown. The most southerly block is the private woodland, north of Witney, owned by the Bishop of Winchester. To the east is the royal estate of Woodstock Park (now



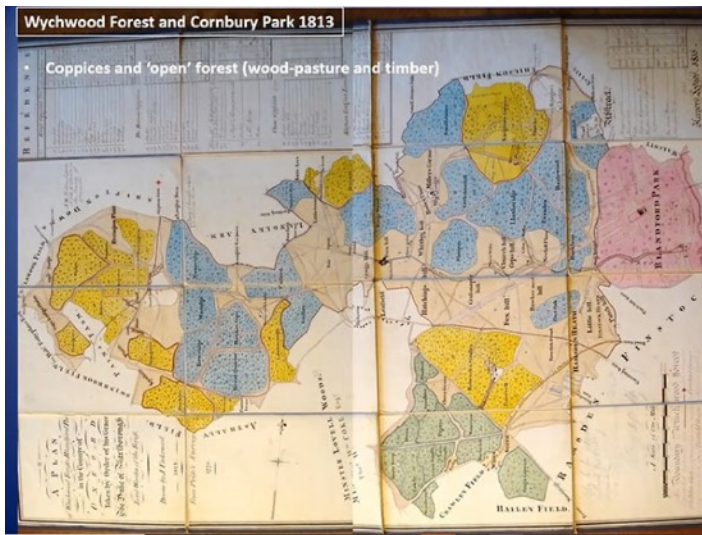
Blenheim Park) and to the west is the core of the forest, being Crown property up to the 1850s clearances and beyond. This last area is the focus of Simon's talk.

This area would have been an open landscape in the Iron Age and Roman periods, with forest regeneration in the early- to mid-Anglo Saxon era.

Meaning

The name of Wychwood was first recorded in c.840-2 as 'the place which the country dwellers call Huiccewudu' = wood of the Huicce (a dominant tribal group based in east Gloucestershire).

Use and Exploitation by the Crown



Since it was Crown property, the forest is well-mapped, particularly from the 18th century and this colour-coded map from 1813, held in the Bodleian Library, shows us how the forest worked. The pink area named Blandford Park is Cornbury Park. The green/yellow areas were counted as part of the forest, but had, in fact, been granted away by the Crown by the 13th century. The Crown retained limited rights, such as livestock grazing, and these areas were known as forest purlieus. When a stone wall was built around the forest in the 1630s, it encompassed these privately-owned areas. The blue areas are fenced coppice-wood and the remainder (brown) is open stands of trees for timber and areas for grazing.

There was a large number of trackways and roads going through the forest, either making internal links or as part of longer routes.

A number of hermitages and chapels existed within the forest in the mediaeval period. Also, forest lodges which were associated with the administration of the forest by the Crown. There were four or five in existence at any one time by the 16th century. Several survived as farmhouses for the new farms created after the clearances of the 1850s.

Large numbers of deer were kept in the forest from the 13th century, although there is no clear evidence of royal hunting until the end of the mediaeval period

when King Henry VII developed a hunting lodge and deer park at Great Langley on the edge of the forest.

The forest was managed for timber and coppice-wood, but was never exploited to its full economic potential, particularly in the later Middle Ages. A survey in 1617 noted that many coppices had not been properly fenced and, consequently, there was much damage to the trees by grazing animals with loss of income as a result. Although improvements were made, another period of neglect was highlighted in a Parliamentary Report of 1792.

Cornbury Park



King Henry I's presence at Cornbury Park in c.1100 is evidenced by the large number of charters issued from there at that time, when mixing business and hunting was commonplace. Nothing is known of the building at that date.

Cornbury Park was an integral part of the forest from the beginning, but it was imparked in 1244, separated from the rest of the forest with a park pale, ditch and hedge, and walled by the 1330s. It was managed by Crown agents for deer and timber and coppice-wood, and had a horse stud, fishponds and a cornmill. It became privately owned in the 1660s.

Importance to Surrounding Villages

By the 17th/18th centuries there were sixteen surrounding settlements, all of which had woods or heaths in the forest purlieu and, as a result, had grazing rights in the forest. However, grazing was not well-regulated. The implications of this, in addition to tree damage, were overgrazing and mounting livestock disease.

Whilst local villagers had traditional customary rights to gather deadwood and snapwood, complaints persisted from the 13th century to the 19th century of abuse of rights to firewood and wood for fencing, wattling and repairs. Poaching was a long-standing problem.

The forest was seen by locals as a 'commoner environment' and this manifest itself in activities such as traditional hunts like those at Burford and Witney, and the Wychwood Forest Fair (1796). Morris dancing was also popular.

Legitimate woodland employment included charcoal burning and pottery making.

Disafforestation & Enclosure

Attempts to improve the administration of the woodland met with limited success. Changes in agrarian priorities, that is, a switch to intensive arable farming, meant that ancient forests were seen as a waste of resources. Prejudice against forest communities, who were perceived to be perpetrators of innumerable crimes within the forest, was building in the 1850s. Under an Act of Parliament, the forest was enclosed and cleared between 1856 & 1858.

The situation after the forest clearance is pictured around Leafield and includes, to the north, the vast rectilinear fields created for the new farms.

Whilst the clearance

meant the loss of commons and woodland employment, more regular work was available on the new farms. However, the clearance remained a contentious issue. The residual of the forest remained in Crown ownership and was, subsequently, transferred to the owners of Cornbury Park who manage it commercially, resulting in limited access.

- Sally James



Talks Update

Our next talk, presented via Zoom, will be on the **18th October, at 7:30pm**, when Jane Card will talk to us about **Art as Historical**

Evidence. Jane uses examples from the Early Modern period and the nineteenth century to illustrate a little of what we can learn from

visual evidence - and what we cannot!. As before, the link for the talk will be emailed out to members nearer the time.

2021 AGM - Chairman's Report

It's pointless trying to type a load of waffle describing what we haven't done this year so I'll keep this short!

As you're aware, we're not able to have a proper A.G.M. this year. Sally has kindly done the honours of sending you the important bits.

We made a decision this time last year that all talks would be suspended until January 2021 at the earliest and as you know we have continued with that "suspension". In a separate email I have asked for your views as to how we could conduct meetings from October 2021 onwards.

We trialled a ZOOM meeting in March 2021, when I presented a talk

on Dovecotes - mostly British ones but some French ones as well. This was well received and seemed to be accepted as a way forward. So we organised the following talks, all via ZOOM:

April 2021 - The Production, Distribution & Use of Salt in Prehistoric Britain - Janice Kinory

May 2021 - Straight joints & Curved Braces - Heather Horner

June 2021 - The History of Tooley's Boatyard, Banbury - Matthew Armitage

July 2021 - Wychwood Forest & Cornbury Park from the Middle Ages - Simon Townley

Average attendance was twenty-five - I'd like to think we can get more people to participate in Zoom meetings - hence my separate message to members sent a few days ago. We have attempted to keep members interests stimulated by sending out the BALH newsletter, the OLHA bulletin, the St Edburg's Heritage Group talks and of course our own Newsletter, the "Bicester Historian".

There are some outstanding issues that we are having to deal with: our suggestion that Bicester needs to have some "Blue Plaques" to commemorate local people/personalities seems to have drawn a

zero response from Bicester Town Council even though they said they would form a sub-committee to investigate the scheme. Hopefully we will have a formal opening of the memorial bench in Garth Park preferably before the 110th anniversary of the start of WW1! We were asked to participate with one of the Kingsmere developers who wanted a "Timeline" incorporated into a footpath in their part of the site. It has been built but has yet to be formally opened but should be soon.



The Timeline for Bicester Library has yet to be erected onto the library wall.

We do get consulted on planning applications that affect buildings in the Conservation Area and generally all Listed Buildings – not just those in Bicester. These can be very time consuming.

One of our former members, Esme Timms, died last month. Ill health stopped her from belonging to the Society over the past few years but I will remember her for her loyal support especially when we first started off as a society. Sally has written separately about Esme, but I've included this photograph of Esme's grandmother, Mary Ann Lang (nee Butler) holding baby Esme outside the old Star Pub at the corner of St John's street.

The BLHS Committee consisting of Sally James, John Roberts, Matthew Hathaway, Sally Dexter, Peter Crook and myself have not been able to meet in person during the past year. We did have an informal Committee Meeting via Zoom a couple of months ago. I suspect that in the short term we will continue having these meetings in this format. My thanks to them for their continued support especially to Sally, and special thanks to Matthew, who is recovering from a serious illness that sent him into intensive care back in June but is making a slow recovery thank goodness and we wish him well. Both Sally and I now know how much work is involved in putting together the Newsletter! I'm pleased to say that all the Committee have agreed to be re-elected for another year - thank you!

Finally, a list of some of the queries received via our website in the last twelve months, just so you can see the wide variety of subjects that need some sort of response –

- Fewcott Manor – use during and after WW2 by RAF & USAF?
- Information request on the Red Rhythmics (Harmonica Band) by a former member
- Yew Tree Farm, Launton – Boer War link with farm owner
- Request for information on "concrete" works near Bicester, and where could they find

information on the records of all parishes in Ploughley? I sent them two pages on the Kirtlington and Shipton on Cherwell Cement works. I have to assume they were satisfied with that as I never heard from them again!!!

- Information request on the King's Meadow homes built for USAF personnel.
- Information request from Venice, Italy, about the POW camps at Arccott and Ambrosden for Italian prisoners - visit to site planned!
- Request for a copy of Jill Wishart's book on Merton (Jill was a founder member of BLHS) – the book was published in the 1980s.
- Request for family history information on the Ashmores.
- Request for more information on Oxford House Primary School.
- Query regarding the use of Bucknell Manor in WW2.
- Family history information on the Brockless family.
- Request for information on the Coach House in Web Court, the Causeway.
- Big query regarding the pet cemetery in Garth Park. As it was April 1st, I initially replied that it was where all the past mayors of Bicester were buried. Also wanted to know what the "sculpture" on a plinth that includes a fork and saddle was all about and also the stone item that looks like a church font. I've suggested to BTC that



they erect some notices explaining what these “important historical artefacts” are all about. That might have fallen on deaf ears!!!

- Information on the ownership of farms in the Wendlebury area.
- Asked what was the name of Station Road in Blackthorn before the railway came in 1910.
- A request for a photo of the Disc Discounts shop in Sheep St.
- Research about a family member of the enquirer who was killed in an air-raid attack on Bicester Airfield in 1941 and buried in Caversfield churchyard.
- And finally:

Message: “Hello! My name is James Ward. My Grandfather was Charles Rawlings and my grandmother was Rose Rawlings. I was moved to the US in 1977 with my mother and siblings. My step-father was a bad man but my siblings and I have survived. My mother lives in Texas and my siblings are spread out through Texas. I live in North Dakota. All of the male siblings myself included served in the US military. I was in the USA and during college I was

activated from the US Army reserves and served during Desert Shield/Storm. I began an almost 16 year service with no stripes and was medically discharged as a captain. I developed asthma and multiple system disorders and was no longer world wide qualified. Sorry about the ranting I would like to know what information and images you have? “

My reply: “Your email doesn’t make it clear as to what you’re looking for. Your email has come to Bicester Local History Society, UK. We’ll help if we can!!!”

His reply: “I am looking for any photos from 24 King’s End or any that involve Charles and Rose Rawlings, who used to own a shop at that address. I am sorry about the previous email. I have been relegated to using only one leg for a while”.

That made me smile! I sent him a copy of the relevant pages in the Changing Faces of Bicester books – including this picture of Charles and Rose working behind the counter of their shop in King’s End.

That’s it folks – hope we can all meet up safely soon!

- Bob Hessian - Chairman



2021 AGM - Treasurer’s Report

The account summary is included on the following page and has a rather different look to previous accounts. This is because, during this last year, when our activities have been restricted and there was considerable uncertainty over the timescale for the resumption of our normal range of events, we offered membership to our existing members without charge. To partly balance this, the absence of face-to-face meetings has cancelled some of our usual running costs.

The cost of speakers is for those who contributed to our programme of talks via Zoom.

We have maintained our membership of Oxfordshire Local History Association and the British Association for Local History, as both groups have expanded their online presence during the pandemic, providing access to local history news and events for members.

The accounts indicate that, despite the restrictions placed on us by the government and our desire to

ensure the safety of our members, it has still cost £561.94 to run for the year. With this in mind, and with the future still unclear, we’re proposing a subscription of £10 for joint membership and £6 for individuals. This represents half of the subscription paid in 2019/20 and is a proposal we’re pleased to make to acknowledge our members loyalty and support in these difficult times. Thank you to those members who have already renewed their membership. 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.

If you have any questions, please get in touch.

- Sally James - Treasurer

2021 AGM - Accounts

INCOME

Subscriptions		0.00	
Admission to meetings: non-members		9.00	
Raffles		0.00	
Interest from PO Investment Account		55.03	
Book 'Bicester Through Time' – royalties		37.57	
			101.60

EXPENDITURE

Subscriptions			
- Oxfordshire Local History Association	13.00		
- British Association for Local History	75.00		
		88.00	
Meetings - speakers	190.00		
- hall hire	0.00		
- refreshments (incl. Xmas Social)	0.00		
		190.00	
Administration - postage	129.15		
- stationery (incl. Xmas cards)	42.91		
- printing	19.88		
- photographic permits	0.00		
- website hosting	49.72		
		241.66	
Zoom Account 8.3.21-7.3.22		143.88	
			663.54
			561.94
Brought forward from 2019/20			6389.32
TOTAL ASSETS			£ 5827.38

BALANCES

Bank	43.95
Cash	1.43
Post Office*	5782.00
TOTAL ASSETS	£ 5827.38

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

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