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Bicester Historian

The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society

Bicester's Spooky Side

With Halloween and All Souls' Day happening at the moment I'm reminded of the ghost walks and talks that BLHS used to organise for a number of years that explored the darker and spookier side of Bicester's history and heritage. Looking back through the talk notes on the website it seems there are more ghostly goings-on than I realised. Apparitions of monks have been witnessed around Old Place Yard and Priory Lane, the site of the former Bicester Priory. Two sightings of ghosts are recorded by Sid Hedges in his book 'Bicester Wuz a Little Town'. The 'White Lady of Rookery Pond' is said to search for



long lost treasure that was hidden during the English Civil War when the town was attacked by the Roundheads. The 'Crockwell Cavalier' is said to manifest his presence to courting couples around the site of the old spring in Crockwell, close to the junction of St John's Street and Queen's Avenue.

A number of buildings in the town claim to house ghosts. The Old Toll House, in North Street, is said to



The Old Toll House, North Street

be haunted by an old Edwardian lady. The British Heart Foundation shop in Sheep Street also has unexplained supernatural happenings reported to have taken place. Many of the town's public houses are haunted. Back in 2011 the Copper Kitchen, in Sheep Street, then Newlands Tea Rooms, experienced visitations by former residents called Annie and Lester. The Ghostfinders Paranormal Society investigated the sightings at the shop and declared it the most haunted premises in the town.

The supernatural is not limited to the town however. Many of the surrounding villages lay claim to ghostly deeds. Weston Manor, in Weston-on-the-Green, has three ghosts including Mad Maud, a thirteenth-century nun, a dairy maid who is said to have committed suicide on the premises and a phantom coach that can be seen in the grounds. Famous highwayman, Claude Duval, is said to haunt the Holt Hotel, at Hopcrofts Holt. A disappearing car has been observed near Souldern. Many military sites in the area shelter their own ghostly secrets. Lots of local villages claim ghostly sightings and unexplained

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Dates For Your Diary

Bicester Advertiser Local History Article

4th November

November Newsletter Submission Deadline

14th November

Oxfordshire & the Spanish Civil War Talk

15th November @ 7:30pm

See page 3

events, some might have a logical explanation but there are many that cannot be readily explained. The truth might never be known!

- Matthew Hathaway



Copper Kitchen, Sheep Street

14th September 1861

DRUIDS PICNIC

A picnic in connection with, and for the benefit of, Lodge 367 of the Ancient Order of Druids in this town, was held on Thursday last, in Park Meadow, adjoining Number Hill, which was kindly granted for the occasion by Mr R. Phillips. Admission was charged at 6d. each, the funds to be appropriated to the benefit of the sick of this institution.

A few parties partook of tea on the ground, refreshments, of a superior kind, being provided by P.A. Collins, of the Rose and Crown. But the grand business of the evening did not begin till five o'clock, when the dancing commenced.

A very large party assembled, the fine weather doubtless drawing a good number. But the chief attraction, we think, was the Bicester Rifle Corps Band, who had kindly granted their services. Their performances, always good, were especially so on this occasion, and they very materially added to the enjoyment of the large company present.

Dancing was kept up with much spirit in the open air till dusk, when the services of a large booth were brought into requisition, and the amusement continued till about ten o'clock, when the company dispersed. All having evidently thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

18th September 1896

NOT AN INFERNAL MACHINE!

On Sunday night last a scare was caused in certain circles through the discovery of a suspicious-looking instrument at the front of Mr Scrivener's premises in the Market Square. The discovery was made by some timid young men who very warily conveyed their "find" to the Police Station upon a stick and by the nature of their statements somewhat alarmed the peaceful occupants of the Superintendent's residence.

The "machine" was placed in the Magistrates' Chamber for safety and did not "go off", but subsequent inquiries revealed the fact that Mr Joseph Scrivener, youngest son of Mr T.A. Scrivener, had arrived from London via Oxford by the 7:39 train the same evening for the purpose of spending a fortnight's holiday. Amongst other "contraptions" he had a camera, which he placed upon the doorstep in consequence of being unable to obtain immediate access to his father's home, and which was thus credited with being an "infernal machine".

Later explanations relieved, of course, the minds of the residents at the Police Station, secured the return of the camera to its owner, and ought also to have heaped ridicule on the heads of those "very brave young men".

20th September 1918

A LONG JOURNEY

Miss Reason, of Belle Vue, Lower Heyford, posted a letter to a soldier serving in the army in Mesopotamia on the 24th July 1916. For some cause or other the letter was not delivered, and she has just received it again. The envelope is covered so thickly on both sides with postmarks that it is impossible to recognise any of them and the only wonder is that from the condition of the envelope it ever reached Heyford again after its two years of travelling on the Continent.

2nd September 1938

TELEVISION DEMONSTRATIONS IN BICESTER

There are signs that Bicester will shortly be having television within its grasp, through the enterprise of Messrs Trinder Bros., the well-known radio dealers, of Sheep Street. Private demonstrations have been carried out during the past few days by Mr E. Trinder, and our representative was present at one of these. He was agreeably surprised at all he saw.

In a room of not large dimensions a small company of people "looked-in" at their ease, and were treated to a programme, in black and white, from Radiolympia. The features of the artists, their pronunciations, and the tone, were excellent, and there was little or no outside interference. One could imagine, with no undue difficulty, that they were in a cinema, the screen - one foot square - judged by the distance one viewed it from, appearing equivalent to that of the screen in the theatre.

No large scale preparations had been necessary for the demonstrations, and the room was not specially darkened. The entire programme was seen clearly. The panting of two wrestlers, who gave an exhibition, was heard clearly, ample proof of the quality of tone.

Television has made marvellous strides, and these local demonstrations have afforded proof that programmes will soon be possible everywhere and not only, as now, chiefly confined to the recognised service area of 25 miles radius around Alexandra Palace.

Messrs Trinder Bros. hope shortly to give public television demonstrations, and the firm is to be complimented on their enterprise.

Bygone Bicester - October (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

26th October 1861

BICESTER NIGHT SCHOOL

A school for male adults and boys will be opened on Tuesday evening next, October 29th, in the Boy's New National School Room, at half-past six, and will be continued on Tuesday and Friday evenings till further notice. Payment, 2d per week; boys under twelve years of age, 1d.

30th October 1896

PLANS OF NEW BUILDINGS

At their monthly meeting last Friday Mr Brandford, the Sanitary Inspector, laid before the Rural District Council some plans of new buildings for their sanction.

The first was one from Lower Arncott which had been roughly drawn on a piece of cardboard. This was handed round for inspection, and caused much amusement. One of its principal features being the smoke, which was emanating voluminously from the chimney. The inspector said the plan was satisfactory, and asked if the Council would allow such plans to be placed before them. The chairman remarked that if an architect had drawn it they might expect a good plan, but if an amateur did it, as in this case, they could only expect amateurs' work. As it was satisfactory the plan was passed.

The second plan was from Ardley, and the Inspector laid a complaint against this as not conforming with the Council's by-laws with respect to the foul house. This adjoined the stable, when it should have been 10 feet from any building. But it was sufficiently far from the house. The council were of the opinion that so long as it was not too near the house it did not matter, and the plan was passed.

The third was the plan of some new buildings at Launton School which was considered satisfactory, except that the drainage had been left out. The Inspector was instructed to get the plan completed and bring it to the next meeting.

4th October 1918

VICTORY BELLS

The inhabitants of Bicester were enlivened on Tuesday evening last by a merry peal of bells from the tower of the Parish Church, proclaiming to them the

good news that one of our enemies in the present war had ceased, as such, to exist.

On receipt of the news that Bulgaria had signed an armistice with Great Britain and her Allies with a view to a separate peace, the available members of the Bicester Urban District Council at once decided that the occasion should be marked in a public manner. The Vicar was approached, and his consent obtained, with the result that for the first time since the commencement of the war a real victory was heralded to the people in the old English custom of the "clanging of metal" in company with the "joy in their hearts" at so glorious a development.

28th October 1938

PARISH CHURCH SALE OF WORK

The annual sale of work in aid of the funds of St Edburg's Church was held yesterday in St Edburg's Hall, where stalls of every description had been tastefully arranged by the lady helpers, a large body of whom had worked hard on the preparation of the event. Several competitions were run in conjunction during the afternoon, and in the evening there was a non-stop whist drive.

Mrs J.C. Slessor, of Caversfield Park, who was introduced by the Vicar, Rev W. O'Reilly, declared the proceeding open, and wished the venture all success. Mrs Slessor afterwards judged the children's fancy dress parade, in company with Mrs L.A. Coker, their awards being as follows:

Prettiest - 1st Pearl Dagley (little old lady); equal 2nd Betty Barrett (bride) and Clifford Nash (Snow White). Original - 1st Roy Dagley (football results); 2nd Rosemary King and Rita Cousins (good luck and bad luck).

The stallholders and helpers were: Mrs Goble, Mrs Hudson and Miss Dealey, needlework; Mrs Williams, Mrs Mumford and Mrs Dealey, guild stall; Mrs Kinch and Mrs Bunting, provisions; Mrs Colby, games; Miss Golder and Miss O'Reilly, handkerchiefs; Mrs Harris, Miss Cox, Miss Palmer, Miss Barr, Miss Thomson, competitions etc; Mrs Coles, bran tub.

Mr J.H. Walker had charge of the door arrangements, and the Mothers' Union dispensed teas.

Talks Update

Our next talk, to be held at the Clifton Centre, will be on the **15th November, at 7:30pm**, when Liz Woolley will talk to us about

Oxfordshire & the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). She tells the story of how the people of Oxfordshire responded to what became a tragic

precursor to World War II.

This talk will also be available for members to watch on our website for a limited time after the event.

Roll of Honour

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

Pilot Officer Brian William Miller, of Auckland, New Zealand.

Died: 10th October 1941 Aged: 20 Served in: Royal New Zealand Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Cosmo Patrick Rose-Innes, of Southern Rhodesia.

Died: 10th October 1941 Aged: 21 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Cecil Broughton van Deemter, of Cape Province, South Africa.

Died: 10th October 1941 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Pilot Officer John Charles Ruck-Keene, of Bletchingdon.

Died: 21st October 1941 Aged: 27 Served in: Royal Air Force

Sergeant Reginald Hermon Brickett, of Southgate, Middlesex.

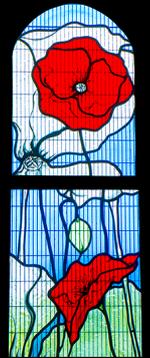
Died: 24th October 1941 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant James Cornelius Hill, of Selukwe, Southern Rhodesia.

Died: 24th October 1941 Aged: 23 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Sergeant Robert Charles Jones, of Southern Rhodesia.

Died: 24th October 1941 Aged: 20 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)



Art as Historical Evidence Talk

In the introduction to her talk, Jane Card indicated that when the study of history as an academic discipline began, written material was the basis of study. Visual evidence, which could be misinterpreted, was thought to be too complicated. However, it was established that the same questions could be asked of art as of documentation, viz;

- What was its purpose?
- Who requested it?
- What was going on at the time?
- Who was the audience?

Elaborating on her subject, Jane went on to show that whilst it was tempting to take paintings and prints as straightforward windows into the period in which they were created, in fact they are constructions using various methods to convey meanings required by the patron or to appeal to a potential purchaser. They can, however, reveal the assumptions, concerns and hopes of their time.

Scholars know not to take an image at face value. They contain codes and conventions, and show contemporary opinions of society. Among the examples Jane cited was 'The Family of Henry VIII' 1542/5 (shown on the next page). The intention of the painting was to show Henry as a perfect renaissance prince, whereas at the time of the painting's creation he was overweight and crippled with ulcers. Jane Seymour, who is pictured, had been dead for ten years and the beautiful room in which they were all depicted never existed in Whitehall Palace.

'Over London by Rail' by Gustav Dore (shown on the last page) is found in school textbooks, being used to illustrate poverty in London in the Victorian period. However, the impression that a London street is pictured is misleading, as maps reveal that no curving street like that shown exists in London and the painting is the result of a journey right across the capital, rather than being of one location.



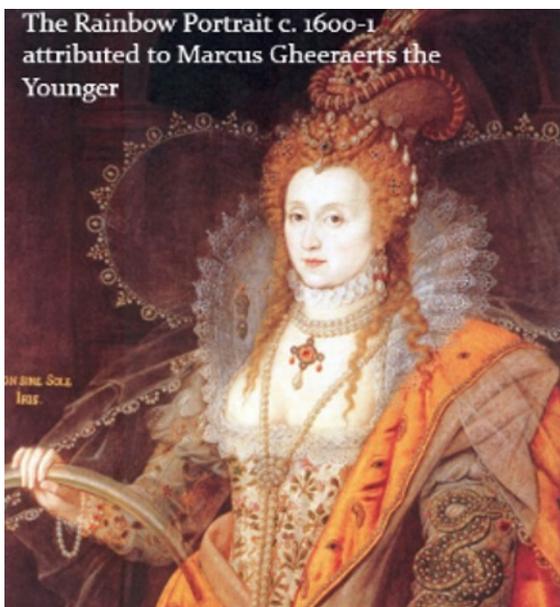
The Family of Henry VIII 1542/5

Seeing an image through the eyes of the artist or society presents considerable challenge. Contemporary texts or other images may be needed for clarification. Jane displayed the portrait of Princess Elizabeth by William Scrots, painted around 1546, when she was about 13 years old. Modern observers interpret her expression as that of an abused child. This analysis is incorrect, as other portraits from the period, such as Scrots' picture of her half-brother, Edward VI, indicate that theirs was a normal expression for portraits of the time.

Detailed analysis of the iconography, idealisation and satirisation is required to give us access to contemporary views of the past.

'The Rainbow Portrait' (seen below) portrays Queen Elizabeth I and contains many examples of iconography.

We may regard an image of a subject with their head in their hands as meaning depression or thoughtfulness, but, in the past, its meaning was that of death. Some symbols have diverse meanings because they come from a variety of sources. They may change



The Rainbow Portrait c. 1600-1 attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger

Serpent holding heart = wise
brain rules heart

Armillary sphere = constancy

Eyes and ears = watchful to
protect the people

Spring flowers = symbols of
Astraea who returns the
Golden Age AND/OR healing
flowers.

Pears and crescent moon =
virginity

Rainbow = hope/peace
Non sine sole Iris.

over time and have different nuances of meaning to different people. Images reflect changing interpretations of history, so constant re-evaluation is important. How the inclusion of a carnation in an image should be interpreted is just one example of this.

'The Sinews of Old England' by George Elgar Hicks (1857) shows a totally unrealistic portrayal of a navvie and his family. It depicts what Victorians would regard as the epitome of a working man and his working-class wife. It extolls the virtue of work, which would have

appealed to Victorians. It does not, however, give any impression of the downside of a navvie's life.

'Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward', by Luke Fildes 1874 (shown below), reveals the reality of life for many, including a navvie and his unfortunate family.

Finally, the manipulation of images was considered. This could be the repainting of a picture to enable the substitution of individuals who have fallen out of favour or to project an alternative interpretation of a scene. Photos can also be falsified for similar reasons.

- Sally James



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