



Issue: 83 December 2021

Bicester Historian

The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society

Christmas Quiz

After successfully returning to live talks last month (see page 5 for details on that) the developing Covid situation once again forced us to resume virtual meetings for our December social event, which was held on Monday 20th December via Zoom. This included another of our quizzes that have proved so popular in past years. Hopefully everyone that took part enjoyed themselves, but, for those that couldn't join in, some of the questions are given below so you can still have a go and test your own knowledge of our town's history. The answers can be found on the back page.

- Matthew Hathaway



The Town House and Shambles were built in Market Square around 1600AD.

1. What were the main type of traders who used the Shambles?
2. What caused the building's destruction in 1826?



3. What is the building in this drawing?
4. What family lived here and later gave their name to the road opposite?



The Congregational Chapel, shown here in 1885, stands in Chapel Street and is the reason for the road's name.

5. What was the road called before it became Chapel Street?
6. After the chapel closed, what was the building used for in the 1980s and 90s?

Contents

Bygone Bicester	2
Talks Update	4
Membership Renewals	4
Roll of Honour	5
Oxfordshire and the Spanish Civil War Talk	5

Dates For Your Diary

Bicester Advertiser Local History Article

30th December

January Newsletter Submission Deadline

9th January

Diseases & Epidemics Talk

17th January @ 7:30pm

See page 4

28th December 1861

SEASONAL LECTURE

On Monday evening last, the fifth of a series of lectures was delivered in the New National Schoolroom, by the Rev W.L. Brown, of Wendlebury. The subject was "Old Christmas Day, and how the World was got ready for it."

Before commencing the lecture, the rev gentleman stated that his lecture was not, as some might suppose, a description of how our forefathers kept Christmas Day in the olden times, and what preparations were made for feasting and merrymakings. There would be nothing improper in a description of this kind; but he thought they might turn their attention to a better and higher subject - a description of the first Christmas Day, or the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and how the world was got ready to receive him.

He had nothing to say against the merrymaking and joyous customs observed at the season of the year, but he was of the opinion that these things ought to be only a part and not the whole. Christmas was instituted to be kept in a very different manner, and he thought that the time would come when the festival would be kept in the way in which God intended it should be. With these introductory remarks, the lecturer proceeded to the first part of his lecture, Old Christmas Day.

Having explained the reason of Old and New Christmas Day, and one or two other terms connected therewith, he went on to state what was the origin of the festivities connected with the day, viz., the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. The Jews had three great feasts, of which the principal was the Feast of Tabernacles. We had adopted the two, which we could easily trace back, and was it at all likely that we should pass over the third, which was that of Tabernacles, without observing it.

Christmas Day was also identical with the festivals held by the Romans to the honour of their god Saturn. It was the custom of the early Jewish Christians, when they were compelled by persecution and other causes to go into foreign lands, to observe what were the local customs, and endeavour to make their own high days and festivities range as far as possible with those of the country where they were living. The Jews who had gone to Rome, found that the Romans were accustomed to hold a festival to the honour of Saturn about the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, and in course of time they became identical one to the other.

As a further proof of Christmas being derived from the Feast of Tabernacles, we have the custom of decorating our churches with branches of trees and evergreens at Christmas time, the decorations at the

Jewish feast being exactly the same kind. The practice of card playing on Christmas Eve which, till of late years, was considered a necessary adjunct to that evening, was derived from the Romans, who were in the habit of playing a game similar to cards the evening before their Saturnalia.

Having thus traced back Christmas Day to its probable origin, the lecturer proceeded to show how the world was got ready for it. He said that it would be very improbable to suppose that God would send his son into the world without making some preparation for his arrival. There had been a vast deal of preparation going on for centuries past, and the lecturer proceeded to state what he considered those preparations were. He endeavoured to trace in what parts of the world the descendants of Noah first settled, and showed what were the parts of the world first inhabited.

Until lately, very little had been known on this subject, but the recent discoveries of Sir Henry Rawlinson, in Persia, have thrown considerable light on the history of these first nations.

The position of the Holy Land was then described, showing how well it was adapted for the purpose that God used it for, as it was the centre of the then inhabited world, out of which centre, when God had prepared them for the work, and taught them his laws, the inhabitants were sent into the surrounding countries.

The conquests of Alexander the Great were another link in the chain of preparations. The Hebrew language was not well adapted to be handed down to succeeding generations; the Greek was, on several accounts. When Alexander conquered the world, he left behind him colonies of Greeks in most of the large cities. About 400 years before the birth of Christ, an authorised edition of the Old Testament was issued in the Greek language. These and various other events the lecturer considered to have been so many preparations for the reception of Jesus Christ and his gospel.

At the time of his birth, all the world was at peace, and the Romans being masters of the world, through their excellent government, there was safe and comparatively rapid means of communication from one part to another, so that all things seemed ready for the coming of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, the lecturer alluded to the second coming of Christ, and considered that it was our duty to note the various preparations which were being made for it, and which he thought could be traced in the various changes that are taking place at the present time.

A vote of thanks to the lecturer was proposed by Mr

G. Armatage, seconded by Mr Josiah Smith, and carried unanimously. Though we think most of the audience were disappointed as to the nature of the lecture, it was a very agreeable disappointment, and seldom have we listened to such an interesting and instructive lecture, and one so well adapted to the season of the year.

18th December 1896

AN UNPROFITABLE VISITOR

A somewhat infuriated cow was being driven into the market on Friday, when it ran on the footpath near the International Company's Stores, and got into such a position that it was unable to turn around without putting its head through the side plate-glass window of the Stores. The window of course was completely smashed, but the animal was uninjured. Such customers are most unwelcome and unprofitable, even at the stores!

6th December 1918

THE DANGEROUS POST OFFICE STEPS

At the recent meeting of the Bicester Urban District Council the Clerk said that, since the previous meeting, he had been paid a visit by a Surveyor from the General Post Office with reference to the Council's request that a light should be placed at the entrance to the Post Office at Bicester, owing to the dangerous position of the steps. After having inspected the steps the Surveyor said that in his opinion a light was not necessary, adding that no such precaution was taken at other places. Upon his attention being called to the way the steps projected he drew attention to other steps in the town, and intimated that if they were remedied then the Post Office might have some reason for remedying theirs. Under the circumstances he did not think he could recommend that anything should be done in the matter.

Mr Malins said the official was "talking through his hat". The post offices in most towns were thoroughly lighted.

The Chairman said the impression the surveyor made upon him was that he was an autocrat of the Department, and that he had no sympathy with the public.

Mr Malins moved that the Council write to the Postmaster-General, informing him that they were not satisfied with the interview with the surveyor, and that the only alternative they had was for Councillors to attend meetings of prospective Parliamentary candidates and ask them in the event of them being sent to Parliament if they would do all in their power to see the matter was remedied.

Mr French seconded.

Mr Layton enquired if the Council had no jurisdiction. The steps projected, and were therefore dangerous.

The Clerk replied that he did not think they had. The

County Council were responsible for the footpaths.

Mr Malins said the worst of it was there was no one in Bicester who was on the County Council who would help the town. The Oxfordshire County Council was the most backward County Council in England. They only met four times a year, and upon these occasions their business was rushed through in a ridiculously short time. There was one thing about them – they knew how to spend money.

The Surveyor said he thought if the Council could prove that the steps were a dangerous obstruction they could enforce an alteration.

The Chairman enquired if they (the Council) were not a little too previous. The Postmaster-General had not yet said definitely that nothing would be done.

A further lengthy discussion followed, in the course of which the Surveyor said he believed that when the Post Office was built the removal of the lamp to its present position was paid for. He also thought that it was agreed that the Postmaster-General should pay part of the cost of lighting.

Ultimately it was decided to defer the matter, and the Clerk was directed to ascertain if any such agreements were made.

23rd December 1938

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SPELLING COMPETITION

The spelling competition in the Christmas booklet issued by Bicester and District Chamber of Commerce created a great deal of interest, and 157 entries were received from a very wide area (including one from Bath!). Three prizes of five shillings each had been offered for the first three correct solutions opened; but three "teasers" were included in the seventeen mistakes made, and only two correct solutions had been found in the 157 entries.

These were sent by Mr G.A. Southern, 11 Priory Road, and Mr Leonard Newby, 26 King's End. The first envelope opened with sixteen correct was Mrs G. Marsh, 9 Wesley Cottages (she missed "hardwear"), and the three have each received a prize of five shillings.

Only a dozen entrants had found sixteen of the mistakes, and they had missed either "hardwear", "draft" or "grindary". The majority of the entries (including the winners) had "sox" and "scarfs" included, but as these are recognised drapers words they were not intended as mistakes. Another word, "crystallised", was included on many lists, but this is correct with either an "s" or a "z".

The scrutineers were Mr T. Hudson (Chairman of Bicester and District Chamber of Commerce), Mr A.J. Evans (hon. sec. and originator of the competition), and Mr F. Smith (who was responsible for the mistakes).

Below we give a complete list of the misspelled words:

Advertisement

- 1 Ashmore
- 2 Taylor, R
- 3 Hudson
- 4 Preece
- 5 Taylor, J
- 6 Payne
- 7 Paragreen
- 8 Lewis
- 9 Trinder
- 10 Morgan
- 11 Scrivener
- 12 Castell
- 13 Finch
- 14 Butler
- 15 Butler
- 16 Nash
- 17 Evans

Correct

- Aluminium
- Draught
- Cigarettes
- Appreciate
- Guaranteed
- Handkerchiefs
- Grindery
- Useful
- Television
- Photographic
- Needlework
- Personal
- Proprietary
- Hardware
- Paraffin
- Chocolates
- Tricycle

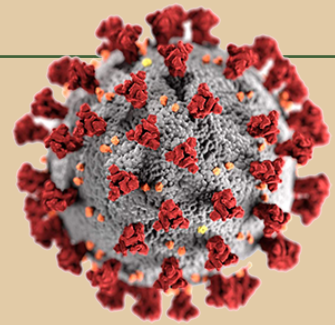
Incorrect

- Aluminum
- Draft
- Cigerettes
- Apreece
- Garanteed
- Hankerchiefs
- Grindary
- Usefull
- Television
- Photographic
- Nedlework
- Personel
- Proprietary
- Hardwear
- Parrafin
- Chocalates
- Trycicle

Talks Update

It remains to be seen whether January's talk will be held at the Clifton Centre or broadcast via Zoom. But we do know that it will be held on **Monday 17th January, at 7:30pm**. Our Chairman, Bob Hessian,

will be calling on his expertise and professional knowledge to tell us about **Diseases and Epidemics** throughout the ages.



Membership Renewals

Dear Members

We're very grateful for the support of our members during these challenging times. You will recall that in recognition of your loyalty, we've elected to reduce the cost of subscriptions for 2021/2022 by 50%. Therefore, from September 2021, subscriptions for individuals are £6 and £10 for joint members.

We continue to provide a programme of monthly talks, via Zoom and, where possible, at the Clifton Centre. We'll update you here as more talks go in the diary or you can look on the website. A recent innovation is the recording of talks for limited, members-only access on our website. The regular newsletter, the Bicester Historian, is being produced and some local walks are planned for the new year. Contacts with Oxfordshire Local History

Association and the British Association for Local History have been maintained, which include monthly news and access to online events.

The AGM is always a convenient opportunity to pay your subscription, but that was denied to us again this year, so if it was your intention to renew your membership, but the chance to do so has not presented itself, please let us know, so we can keep you on our contacts list. Otherwise, cheques (or cash through the door) can be sent to Sally James (Treasurer) at 14 George Street, Bicester, Oxon. OX26 2EG.

Thank you for your continuing interest in BLHS.

All good wishes
BLHS Committee

Roll of Honour

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

Sergeant Allan Edward Bailey, of Maidenhead, Berkshire.

Died: 6th December 1941 Aged: 19 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Bicester, buried in Caversfield)

Flying Officer Douglas Hickling Ivens, of High Bickington, Devon.

Died: 6th December 1941 Aged: 26 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Bicester, buried in Caversfield)

Flying Sergeant George Howard Schrader, of Nova Scotia, Canada.

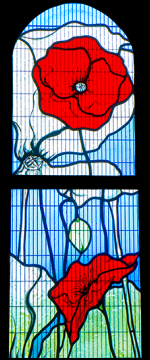
Died: 10th December 1941 Aged: 21 Served in: Royal Canadian Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Bicester, buried in Caversfield)

Sergeant Alfred William Steadman.

Died: 10th December 1941 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Bicester, buried in Caversfield)

Sergeant William Ferguson Boggs, of New York, USA.

Died: 26th December 1941 Aged: 28 Served in: Royal Canadian Air Force
(Buried in Hethe)



Oxfordshire & the Spanish Civil War Talk

In the introduction to her talk, Liz Woolley outlined how her interest in a topic with local and international aspects had developed. She went on to give a background to the Spanish Civil War.



There were three facets to Oxfordshire's involvement in the conflict. At least thirty-one individuals with Oxfordshire connections fought in Spain, worked in front-line hospitals, acted as ambulance drivers, administrators, observers and reporters, of whom six were killed.

Many people were involved in 'Aid for Spain' fundraising in the UK and others supported Basque refugee children when they arrived here in 1937. These activities involved the city, county and university all, unusually, committed to a common cause.

Two and a half thousand people from Britain and Ireland served in the International Brigades.

There was a great diversity of backgrounds of those involved, ranging from workers at the Cowley car plant and Early's in Witney to dons and students at

the university. Personal details of members of the International Brigades were removed from Spain in 1939 and form part of the Moscow Archive.

Liz gave examples of participants, extending from Victor Claridge from South Leigh, a builders' labourer and one of fifteen children. As a young man, he had travelled to America where he joined the National Guard and the International Workers of the World. On his return to the UK, he settled in East Oxford and went to Spain in late 1936, where he saw action on several fronts, ultimately being wounded and repatriated in October 1937.

At the other end of the social spectrum was Wogan Phillips (later Lord Milford). He came from a wealthy family and had been educated at Eton and Magdalen College. Although not a member of any political party at the start of the war, he was strongly anti-fascist. He



Wogan Phillips

travelled to Spain in 1937 as part of a British/Spanish medical aid unit, taking on the dangerous role of ambulance driver. He was injured in an attack on his ambulance and returned to Britain where he joined the Communist Party and became involved in Oxford politics.

Participants' motivation was varied, being based on humanitarian reasons, political ideals or a desire to gain medical experience.

Two students from Ruskin College, sometimes known as the



Hospital at Huete in a former monastery (photo – Peter Harrison)

'working man's college', because it provided a higher education for adults with few or no formal qualifications, went to Spain. The college's radical stance meant that it provided a point of contact for both 'town' and 'gown' supporters of Spain's republican government.

Another ambulance driver was Nathan Clark of Clark's shoemakers, who had been studying maths at The Queen's College in Oxford when he decided to go to Spain in January 1937. Like his family, he was a Quaker. He became head of transport at the International Brigades' hospital at Huete, where

he met another Oxford volunteer, Peter Harrison, a former pupil of the Dragon School in North Oxford and a Trinity College student.

Alec Wainman, pictured below with Spanish children in Madrid in 1937/38, was a Quaker and volunteered his services to the Spanish Voluntary Aid Committee. He was one of six ambulance drivers in the first British Medical Aid Unit to reach Spain in August 1936. He was not a member of any political party, but was sympathetic to the communist cause. He had travelled extensively in America and Europe and spoke at least seven languages.

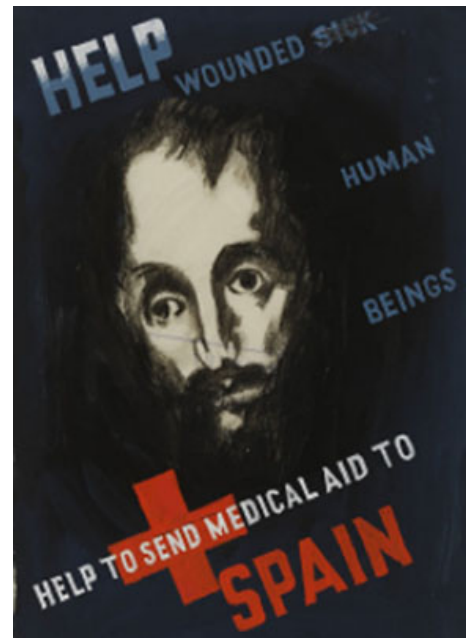


Whilst in Spain, he worked for the republican government's department of propaganda. On his return to Oxfordshire in the autumn of 1938, he continued his involvement with the war, particularly with the colony of Basque refugee children that had been set up in his home village of Shipton-under-Wychwood.

Whilst Oxfordshire people were on the front line in Spain, many local residents were showing their support for the Spanish republican government back at home. They, too, came from a wide diversity of backgrounds. Many were horrified at the prospect of the spread of fascism in Europe and others gave their support for political or humanitarian reasons. Since 1936, media coverage of the war focussed largely on the fate of the civilian population who were facing attack and starvation. So much so that, by early 1937, the National Aid Spain Campaign had been established in Britain. A wide variety of fundraising events throughout the country raised £2 million by the end of 1939.

In Oxford, the 1930s had been a period of rising political awareness across the town and university. This was partly due to changing demographics. Migrant workers at Cowley car plant and Pressed Steel established trades unionism and left-wing politics in the city for the first time. The socio-economic background of the typical university student was also slowly changing. Additionally, the city had become home to a large number of academic refugees, who had escaped persecution in Germany, and who were influential in shaping Oxford's academics' and students' perception of fascism.

Fundraising efforts in Oxford included a relief fund set up by the mayor; distribution of Spanish relief food stamps by the Oxford branch of the Communist Party; the selling of milk tokens by the Co-Operative Society; house-to-house collections by the British Youth Peace Assembly for funds to buy milk for Spanish babies and a shop in George Street raising money through sales and acting as a collection point for used clothes to be shipped to Spain.



Arthur Excel, pictured below, from Osberton Radiator Company (part of Morris Motors) organised his colleagues into a group making splints for Spain with the help of the university's engineering department and the Wingfield Orthopaedic Hospital.

Student magazines at the time carried details of the huge variety of fundraising activities taking place and of meetings and lectures arranged to discuss the current situation.





In July 1938 a small delegation of Oxford students visited Madrid and Barcelona, looking in particular at the plight of Spanish students. The highly diverse political affiliations of the student group illustrate well the level of support for the Spanish republican government in Oxford.

Dennis Healey, a prominent member of the Aid for Spain Campaign and undergraduate at Balliol College, staged a fundraising exhibition of sixty-eight of Picasso's original sketches for his painting Guernica at Oriel College in the winter of 1938.

In addition to the fundraising efforts of students, Oxford academics also showed their support, in particular the left-wing master of Balliol College, A D

Lindsay. Academics were active at the packing stations set up to organise donations of tinned food and clothing. Fundraising and awareness meetings were attended by townspeople, students and academics.

Aid for Spain was not confined to the city. For example, in Witney, Patrick Early was chairman of the local Spanish aid committee and at Boars Hill knitting classes were set up and an appeal for clothing went out.

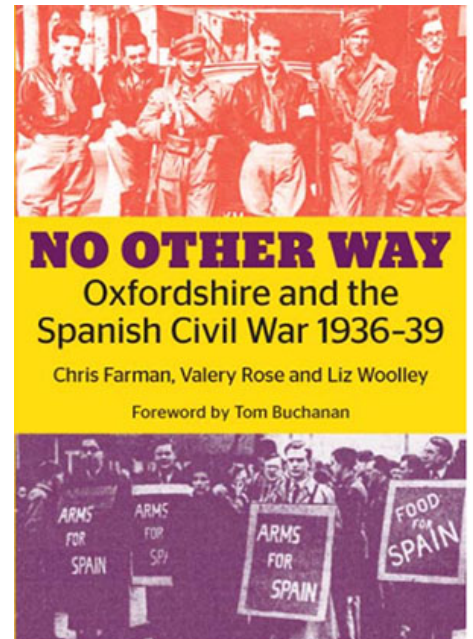
Following the attack on Guernica in April 1937, four thousand Basque children accompanied by teachers, helpers and priests were brought to the UK to live in, so called, colonies. Oxfordshire had four colonies, located in Thame, Shipton-under-

Wychwood, Aston near Witney and Buscot Park. The children's presence in the county was regularly reported in the local press which stimulated local efforts at fundraising for their upkeep. Some of the older children were adopted by local families or sponsored by the university.

People across the county continued to support the republican cause throughout the Civil War and in February 1939 twenty-two members of the British battalion of the International Brigades and two nurses who had served in Spain, were welcomed to Oxford as they toured the country to further raise awareness of the ongoing struggle.

Franco's forces were victorious in April 1939.

- Sally James



Committee & Contacts

Editor:

Matthew Hathaway
editor@blhs.org.uk

Website:

www.blhs.org.uk

Committee Members:

Bob Hessian (*Chairman*)
chairman@blhs.org.uk
01869 350662

Sally James (*Treasurer*)
01869 243804

Sally Dexter (*Minutes Secretary*)

John Roberts (*Membership Officer*)

Matthew Hathaway

Peter Crook

Mark Lewandowski

Meetings Address:

The Clifton Centre
Ashdene Road
Bicester
OX26 2BH

Postal Address:

BLHS c/o Sally James
14 George Street
Bicester
OX26 2EG