

# How Bicester Has Changed

In the first of a new series, local historian Peter Chivers looks at how rapidly Bicester has grown

'Bicester Wuz A Little Town' is a popular 1968 local history by Sid Hodges. Just a generation or so on and the town's population has doubled to over 30,000 residents. With many new homes planned, Sid might find it difficult to recognise Bicester today! Where did it all start? Archaeological surveys have located the origins of Saxon Bicester next to Chapel Street and by the time of the 1086 Domesday Survey, there were 200 residents. Bicester Priory sparked a medieval



The Causeway linked Kings End with Market End and was once a major shopping area.

boom as new markets, craftsmen and traders supplied the Priory and pilgrims to the Shrine of St Edburg. And yet, it took nearly 500 years for the population to double to over 500



Housing on the Langford Village Estate illustrates a modern trend to combine a variety of housing styles and play facilities.

residents, as recorded in 1547.

If Sid could take a walk along the Causeway, through Market Place and on to Sheep Street today he would find little has changed. Most town centre buildings, where traces from the medieval period can still be found, were there long before Sid's time. Modern Bicester has grown outwards, scarcely touching the heart of "Little" Bicester.

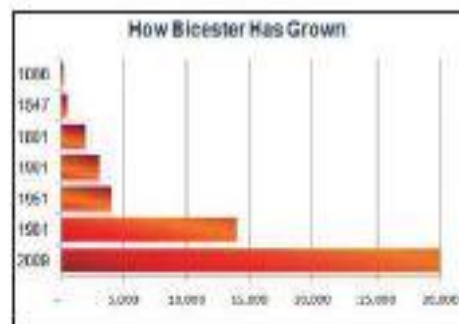
After the Domesday Book it took 500 years for Bicester to double in size: Since 1981, it has doubled again!

By the time of the 1801 census, new homes in North Street had alleviated poor social housing in Chapel Street and Crockwell and the population had jumped to 1,946.

Bicester missed the really explosive industrial growth of the 19th century, but a civic building programme included new public facilities. New housing in Victoria Road, London Road and Priory Road helped the town expand to 3,032 residents in 1901. Following World War II the new King's End estate accommodated workers at the Central Ordnance Depot at Arncott and service personnel at RAF Bicester. This time it took just 50 years for Bicester to double in size, with over 4,000 residents in 1951.

And yet the pace was only just hotting up as the 1960's brought housing estates to the north of the town. Industrial estates created employment to compliment the traditional agricultural economy and by 1981 there were over 14,000 residents. In just 30 years, the population had trebled. And, as we know, extraordinary changes did not end there.

The past twenty five years have



witnessed the greatest expansion, with new housing estates satisfying a tide of urban expansion in the south east. Plans for the town centre, for new social amenities and employment are intended to provide a vibrant and successful future and it is to be hoped changes will be sympathetic to the heritage Bicester has to offer. Whether Sid Hodges would have welcomed the rapid recent growth of Bicester is a matter for conjecture, but we can be sure recent changes would have surprised him.

