

Bicester Local History Society

Annual General Meeting, Monday 21 September 2015, 19:30

Venue: The Clifton Centre, Ashdene Road, Bicester
Present: Forty-four members

1. Welcome/Format of Meeting

Bob Hessian opened the AGM at 19:40. He welcomed members and outlined the format of the meeting. He also brought the members' attention to the new BLHS logo.

2. Apologies

Apologies had been received from:

Robert McLoughlin
Patrick Moles
Hazel Thatcher
Jean & Peter Crook
Pat Snelson

3. Minutes of AGM held on 15 September 2014

Bob Hessian re-capped on the main points from last year's minutes. The Clifton Centre continued to work well as a venue for monthly meetings, and there were no plans to change it. 2013/14 had featured an extensive programme of village and countryside walks as well as an outing to Marlborough. BLHS's first participation in the St Edburg's Xmas Tree Festival (2013) had proved extremely successful. Cardboard baubles were assembled, each displaying old photographs of different parts of Bicester. It was agreed that the 2013 BLHS Xmas Tree would be a very difficult act to follow. The BLHS Newsletter had just been launched in September 2014, and a questionnaire had been sent to members in July to elicit feedback and suggestions/comments on the Society's activities. In addition, a plea for assistance for members to help with activities had also been made.

Bob Hessian asked the members for approval of the minutes for last year's AGM. The minutes were then approved.

4. Chairman's Report

Bob Hessian then gave his 2014/15 Chairman's Report:

2014/15 had proved another good year of interesting talks with some excellent speakers. Two speakers in particular (Pat Snelson and Tim Healey) were highlighted as outstanding. Thanks were given to John Roberts and Sally James for organising the year's programme of talks.

This year's village and countryside walks had been based around Souldern and Kings Sutton, and had been well supported. Thanks were given to John Roberts for organising these.

In addition, three outings had been offered to members. In June, the Society visited Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust reserve at Meadow Farm in Blackthorn. As well as learning about the important plant and wildlife species these meadows support, Meadow Farm also displays an

excellent example of the ridge and furrow farming system. Also in June, a return visit to Marlborough was organised. This visit included a tour of the Merchant's House, followed by a guided walk of the town. Both of these events had proved successful and enjoyable. The final outing of the year took place in July, with a trip to the Energy Recovery Facility at Ardley. This was an unusual outing for the Society, but was extremely well supported with over thirty members attending. Again, very positive feedback was received.

In April, BLHS took the restored fire engine to a Bicester Heritage Sunday Brunch outing. The fire engine was exhibited amongst equally historic vehicles. Once more, this event was deemed successful.

Following on from the success of BLHS's 2013 Xmas Tree at the St Edburg's Xmas Tree Festival, it was agreed to feature a World War One theme at the 2014 event. Facsimile 'death plaques' for each of the local service people who died in World War One were produced, and hung on branches with World War One medal ribbons. A star, made from old barbed wire was assembled on the top of the tree. Many favourable comments were received, and St Edburg's asked if the tree could be left in the Church over the Xmas period (the BLHS tree was the only tree which remained in the Church). Again, the Society is left with the challenge on how to match this success with its 2015 tree.

BLHS took part in Bicester's Big Lunch event that took place on 7 June 2015. The BLHS stand gave the Society an opportunity to try out the newly-purchased display boards, and to ask people to select their favourite photographs for inclusion in the 2016 BLHS calendar.

The two main projects BLHS have been working on in 2014/15 are the 'DVD on Bicester's Buildings' and the 'Town Trail and Map'. The 'DVD' project had a slow start, but is now moving on apace. At least 17 buildings have been identified for inclusion in the DVD and these are being visited prior to making a decision on whether to film the interior or just the exterior, or both. Pat Snelson has compiled a very comprehensive script and filming is hoped to start in early 2016. Work on this project would now need to wait until Pat Snelson had recovered from her broken arm. Work on the 'Town Trail and Map' has carried on with the financial help of Bicester Town Council, Cherwell District Council, and Bicester Village. An artist has been commissioned to draw the map, and it is hoped that the map will be available by the end of the year.

The Society is currently taking advice on how to best preserve the current Cholera Stone: whether a replica could be made; whether the stone could be moved to a more prominent position within the Churchyard; and how the story of the cholera outbreak in the town could best be re-told.

On Saturday 26 September 2015, the Society will be holding its 'Community Dig' at the Old Priory. Thanks were given to Rob Parkinson and Paul Riccoboni for facilitating this dig. Members were asked to consider attending this event.

Discussions are ongoing with Cherwell District Council regarding the future uses of the Dovecote. Similarly, discussions are ongoing regarding BLHS's presence in the new library in the new Civic Centre, due to open mid next year.

Next year sees the 50th anniversary of the Oxfordshire County Museum Service at Standlake. The Museum Service asked a number of societies to be involved in a special exhibition of artefacts held at Standlake. BLHS were offered a choice of items to select, and the item chosen was the wedding ring of Mary Dew. Mary Bryan married Robert Dew of Lower Heyford at Somerton church in 1798. They were the grandparents of George James Dew (1846-1928) Relieving Officer for the

Bletchington District of the Bicester Poor Law Union, renowned for his fascinating diaries. BLHS continues to maintain a good relationship with the Museum Service at Standlake.

The BLHS Newsletter, the Bicester Historian, was launched in September 2014, and has probably been the success story of the year. The Newsletter is published on a monthly basis, and special thanks were given to its editor, Matthew Hathaway, for his tireless efforts in producing this publication. Thanks were also given to Gill King for her help with interviewing, and also to regular contributor, Marj Dean. The Newsletter is for all members, so please feel free to contribute articles to Matthew.

Matthew also produced a new banner for the Society, incorporating the new BLHS logo over a montage of old photographs of Bicester. The banner was on display at the AGM, and all agreed how professional and eye-catching it looks. Again, many thanks were given to Matthew for producing this item.

2016 sees the 30th Anniversary of the formation of BLHS, and the Society wishes to commemorate this occasion. A 2016 Anniversary calendar has already been produced. It had been agreed that all BLHS members would receive a complimentary copy of this calendar (attendees at the AGM had already received their copy earlier in the evening). To mark the centenary in 2016, BLHS will be organising a history exhibition, along similar lines to previous exhibitions held in Bicester. A date for this exhibition will be announced soon.

There are also a number of other projects the Society is considering. First, a 'Street Names' book that Andy Taylor has been working on (thanks were given to Andy for his work so far). Second, logbooks from St Edburg's School have come to light with more potentially to follow when the school closes. These log books will offer a wealth of information. The Society is undecided on how to use this information. Third, the BLHS website is in need of serious updating, so this is a project which will need addressing. Fourth, BLHS needs to mark the centenary of World War One. This may involve producing a small publication or an exhibition linked to the war and the people involved. There is also every intention to organise some guided walks around Bicester focusing on the war itself and how it affected the town and its people. Finally, a project to produce a local recipe book is also being considered.

Last year, the Society put a lot of effort into trying to amend the local plan in order to protect the ancient meadows and hedgerows near Gavray Drive. Disappointingly, these efforts proved unsuccessful. Now, land associated with the deserted medieval village of Wretchwick and the farm is under threat, and Langford Village Community Association has asked BLHS for help. In addition, BLHS have been invited to comment on new dwellings and associated outbuildings at D & E Sites on Graven Hill. As a general point, it seems that BLHS are being consulted more and more on planning matters and proposed new developments. To date, any representation made has been on behalf of the Committee, not the whole Society. This raises the issue of how involved the Society should be on such matters, and whether it should be engaging with the whole membership in order to give a Society view, not just a Committee view. Further discussion on this topic is a pressing requirement.

Two 'sink holes' were alluded to: these were the houses of Gill King (BLHS archivist) and the Chairman. Effectively, without a dedicated archive storage area, all the archive material the Society has amassed over the years is being stored at these two locations. Gill has been doing a sterling job in getting the BLHS archives into good order, but she can't be expected to store all these items in her own house. So, finding a suitable permanent storage area for this material is a top priority for the Committee and the Society. Many thanks were extended to Gill for her detailed and tireless work on the archive, and the clear message was given to Gill that help is at hand soon.

A plea for assistance from members was made, in order to help the Society fulfil some or all of its hopes and aspirations. This assistance wouldn't necessarily entail being a Committee member, but could involve being part of a small working party. If any of the projects/activities mentioned so far appeal in any way to individual members, please feel free to discuss them further with Committee members. A Volunteers' Evening will be organised soon, which will give more information on the current projects on the Society's 'wish list', and give members an opportunity to see whether they could assist with specific tasks. More details on the Volunteers' Evening will follow. Regarding the Committee itself, there are vacancies for a Secretary and a Publicity Officer. Anyone who is interested can discuss what these roles entail at the Volunteers' Evening.

To close, the Chairman listed his thanks for the year. First, to all the Committee members who have helped make the Society the success it is today. Thanks were also given to all the 'behind the scenes people' who help with meetings: putting out chairs, sorting out refreshments, and clearing up afterwards. Mick and Wendy Wall were thanked for their sterling assistance with organising and running the monthly raffles. Finally, thanks were given to all BLHS members for their continued support to the Society.

5. Treasurer's Report

A draft copy of the BLHS Income & Expenditure Accounts for the year ending September 2015 had been distributed to members prior to the start of the meeting. The Treasurer, Sally James, then gave her Treasurer's Report:

The Society was in a favourable position regarding its accounts. The principal outlays of the year had been for the printing of the 30th anniversary calendars and two banners (the banners had been funded by a Bicester Town Council grant). The Society had also subsidised this year's programme of walks and outings. This is something the Society is more than happy to do, since these activities are considered a benefit to members.

Speaker costs have risen by £90 compared to last year, with the top fee for a speaker being £60. Sales of the DVD have been particularly healthy, with 80 copies being sold to Cole's Bookshop.

The Society had a total of 94 members last year, and hopes to increase this figure in the 30th anniversary year. Thanks were given to John Roberts for his work as Membership Officer.

A decision not to raise the annual subscriptions in 2015/16 had been recommended by the Committee, and this now needed to be ratified at the AGM. A vote was therefore taken to maintain the annual subscription at £12 for single membership, and £18 for joint membership. The result of the vote was: all members were in favour, and there were no objections.

The Treasurer then asked members whether they had any questions concerning the annual accounts. One member asked whether the income made from the raffle was after costs. The Treasurer replied that the income was net income, i.e. costs had already been subtracted.

6. Election of BLHS Committee

Bob Hessian reported that all Committee members had agreed to remain in position in 2015/16. Therefore, the proposal was to vote for the 2015/16 Committee 'en bloc'. This vote was then put to members: all members were in favour, and there were no objections.

One announcement was made: Saturday 10 October 2015, an Open Day will be held at Hethe Holy Trinity Church, from 1pm-4pm.

A cake was then presented to Bob Hessian to mark his 70th birthday.

The AGM closed at 20:20, and was followed by the raffle.

After refreshments, Bill King gave a talk on Archaeology in your Shed, Garage or Attic.

Note-taker: SD/2 October 2015

Circulation of AGM minutes: 2015/16 Committee members and publication on the BLHS website