

MODERN BICESTER



Bicester had changed little for many centuries. The **core of the town** remained King's End, Market Square, Sheep Street and Crockwell. **Gas supply** became available in the town in 1845, **piped water** from 1905 and a **public electricity** service after 1929. The town was typical of many of the small rural centres throughout the county.

The **population numbers** of the urban district were relatively static from 1831. The next century recorded figures as slightly in excess of three thousand. The **war years** saw a small but significant increase in population with the development of military bases located in the area. Larger **housing estates** developed in the 1920's



and 1940's/50's, mainly comprising

public and social housing projects. Real expansion dates from 1960's with a rapid increase of large recent estates located on the outskirts of the town. **Improved communications** and strategic growth planning have attracted an increased range of industrial units to the town.



The **First World War** saw local volunteers actively committed to duty on the Western Front. The present Home Tree House became Red Cross Hospital and refugees from Belgium were billeted in the town. The **R.A.F. began construction of Bicester Airfield** at Caversfield and Upper Heyford.



The **Second World War** saw a strengthening of military ties. **Evacuees** from London arrived at the town in the early stages of the conflict. These included a young Kenneth Williams. The population adapted to a wartime economy as the realities of the **Homefront** became apparent. **Air raids** were a real threat and shelters were built at various locations.

Large residencies were taken over to house important institutions such as the B.B.C. **Women volunteers** played an increasingly important role in maintaining services, The Land Army assisted farming expansion as home produced food supplies became vital to the war effort. Volunteers joined the Civil Defence and Police Forces.



The **Home Guard** numbered 1600 men by 1944 in detachments scattered throughout the Bicester area. A range of defences were constructed to repulse the threat of invasion. Pill boxes still remain as evidence of the emergency measures taken to ensure the defence of the region.

Local Airfields provided vital training bases for R.A.F. aircrews. A number of secret missions took place from R.A.F. Bicester. **Bicester Ordnance Depot** was established to supply war materials for the invasion of Europe. **Prisoners of War** were housed at Blackthorn. They were employed working at local farms and clay pits. A second wave of evacuees descended on the area as the **V1 Flying Bombs** caused a new threat to south east England. One landed at Brill in 1944. **War cemeteries** are to be found at Caversfield, Middleton Stoney and Upper Heyford.



The airbase at Upper Heyford was used by American forces during the **Cold War** period. An air strike on Libya flew from the base. The **Great Train Robbery** captured the public imagination as the gang hid out at Leatherslade Farm, near

Brill. The construction of the **M40** and other major route ways has transformed the local countryside.

The present plans to develop Bicester Town Centre, leisure and retail facilities, communications and additional residential estates will influence the town for many years into the future.

