

Medical Care For The Masses

After one hundred and six years the Cottage Hospital is about to say goodbye to its current building and move into the brand new building next door. The current hospital building has gone through a number of alterations and additions over the years as the town developed and more facilities were required. But the first alteration was actually the building itself.

The hospital started life in 1887 when, as a memorial to Queen Victoria's golden jubilee, the old Horse and Groom pub, on Banbury Road, was purchased and converted into a nursing home to provide the people of Bicester with the medical care that they required.

In 1904 the St. Edburg's Church parish magazine recorded that "the Nursing Home is quite one of the best institutions of Bicester, well worked and admirably managed. It has two very nice little wards with three beds, which can be had on a small weekly payment."

The nursing home was sold to the Great Western Railway Company in 1908 for £1000 to make way for the embankment and bridge of the new railway line. The money, together with £100 from the Earl of Jersey of Middleton Park, was used to build the present Cottage Hospital in King's End, on land leased from the Coker family for £1 per year. It was built by Thomas Grimsley, later of Grimsley & Sons, who was a prominent local builder and townsman.

The freehold of the land was donated to the hospital in 1918 by Major Lewis Aubrey



Coker, in honour of the men and women of Bicester who had served in the Great War. A further donation was given in 1927 when the widow of Henry Tubb funded an extension to the hospital in his honour. This provided a new ward and nurse's room.

In 1928 the hospital was registered as a nursing home and run as a cottage and community hospital for maternity use only. In 1958 an extension was built by Ron Price to accommodate additional wards. In the 1970s the purpose of the hospital was changed from maternity to general nursing and another extension was built, sponsored by the League of Friends, to provide day care facilities. In 1981 the physiotherapy room, donated by Iris Mackenzie, was added and an extension for the X-ray department was built.

In June 2012 proposals were submitted to Cherwell District Council outlining plans to demolish the current building and build a new 12-bed hospital on land behind the current site to house state-of-the-art facilities. The area of the current hospital will then be redeveloped for residential purposes.

- Matthew Hathaway



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Advert taken from the
 Bicester Directory 1953

Bygone Bicester (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser & Mid-Oxon Chronicle)

20th November 1914

Bicester Town FC journeyed to Cottisford on Saturday last, a rather uninteresting game resulting in a pointless draw. Mr. Smith was referee, and the local men represented by: L. Newby, goal; T. Ancil and Blake, backs; P. Newby, H. Sirett and J. Golder, half-backs; W. Bright, J. Right, H. Dean, C. Hughes and W. Gibbard, forwards.

6th November 1964

The annual dinner of the Bicester Bowls Club was held at the King's Arms Hotel, Bicester on Friday last week, when many visitors from surrounding clubs

were present.

After the presentation of trophies to club winners, a new trophy was presented to the club by Oxfordshire bowls champion and England international, and member of Oxford City and County Club, Mr. Algy Allen; and his sister, Mrs. E.B. Harris of Sheep Street, Bicester. The presentation was to mark their families' long sporting association with Bicester.

The new trophy, a silver rose bowl, was received on behalf of Bicester Bowls Club by the president, Mr. W.H. Dagley, and was handed over by Mrs. Harris.

Archive Update

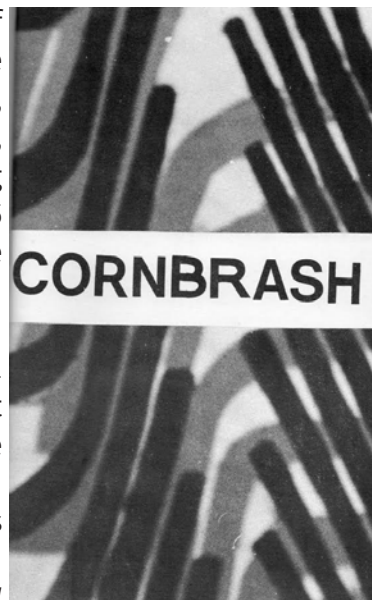


We are trying to build up a collection of local school magazines in the archive. We hold a number of issues of 'The Bicester', the magazine of Bicester Grammar School, dating from 1927 to 1962, but are missing years 1932, 1940, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1956 and 1958. If anyone can help to fill those gaps it would be much appreciated.

Of the later title, 'Cornbrash' we hold 1965, 1966, 1967, 1969, 1970 and 1971 and we have a photocopy of the first issue of the Cooper School magazine 'Cooperation' from 1975.

If anyone can add any items to this collection, please do get in touch.

- Gill King



Marj's Memories The Gospel Hall Sunday School

One of my earliest memories goes back a long way to around 1938-9, sometime before I started school.

Evelyn Clifton, who lived "on the hill", took me to Sunday school, with my brother Don. My family lived at that time in Hudson Street, so the back gardens of our houses met with the houses on the hill. There were not any high walls or barriers just chain link fences so we could all call to each other at the back. Our house was opposite Blencoe's, the first council house at the bottom of the

hill in Bucknell Road. The Clifton family lived half-way up the hill. There were two daughters: Evelyn and Francis.

The Gospel Hall was a hut type building in North Street, on the right when facing north, where the alleyway leads to Crumps Butts. The Sunday school was run by Miss Richards, with the help of Mrs Massey.

Miss Richards, who lived in North Street, would arrive with a portable piano (or organ). The children sat on long forms (not chairs). The big boys, well big

to me, would slide their bottoms along the form and nearly make me fall off the end, so kind Miss Richards let me sit by her side on the piano stool.

At Christmas we all had a very expensive present, well, it was expensive at the time. My present, one year, was a sleeveless cardigan. I still have the bible she gave to me all those years ago. She wrote in it "Suffer little children to come unto me, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven", and quoted Chapter and Verse.

- Marjorie Dean MBE

Chairman's Ramblings

The Editors keep nagging me to write something for the Newsletter but as they're doing such a wonderful job why should I try and spoil it? However, I was offered almost a cart-blanche on subject matter and so temptation got the better of me – so I'll apologise now!

I've been spending a lot of my spare time recently, attempting to catalogue my local history "stuff". For "stuff" I mean the 700+ items relating to Bicester, 129 old maps of the area plus a complete set of Ordnance Survey maps for England, Scotland and Wales (War Edition – 1940s), 71 railway books for the area, 280+ different post-cards for Bicester and a similar number for the surrounding villages. Not to mention over 100 local newspapers dating back to 1873. Once the Civic Centre is built and we have our BLHS area in the new library we'll be able to display some of this material.

My intention is to use some of this material for the Newsletter and pick out the quirky, humorous, sad and odd items and share them with you. The following two stories relate to World War One, which is very topical at the moment.

The first is about the George family – who were tailors in Sheep Street. Walter George certainly had a way with words – his advertisements in the Bicester Herald/Advertiser are witness to this. "Are you in need of a new suit? Well by George you shall have one". And "Splendid holidays are being arranged by the favoured ones, and among other necessities, the most important should be a new flannel outfit made by Walter George". In July 1891 there was a tragic accident when a visiting cousin shot and killed Walter's son Aubrey with a loaded shot-gun. Aubrey was not yet 3 years old and the two had been playing together. The Inquest jury returned a verdict "in accordance with the evidence that the deceased died from a gun-shot wound" and that it was done "undesigningly and without malice"!



Into the 20th century and the Georges are still "tailoring" in Sheep Street. But war is looming and Mr George places the above advertisement in the Bicester Advertiser in February 1913. I wonder if he'd get away with that now?!

The second story relates to correspondence between the Mirrlees/Coker family from Bicester House. It was a Margaret Mirrlees who married Major Lewis Aubrey Coker and came to live in Bicester House. The house had been in the Coker family

since 1584. The Major died in 1953 and Mrs Margaret Coker died in the early 1970's. She was a great collector of ephemera (there are five volumes deposited in the Bodleian Library) and she fastidiously saved all her family related correspondence. When Bicester House was sold in the 1980s, a wooden blanket chest containing hundreds of her collected letters and other family items came up for sale in a Messengers household furniture auction. My wife bought the box thinking it would be good for storing the children's toys. She was unaware of the contents at the time. And the children never got to keep their toys in it either!!!

Mrs Coker's brother, William, served with some distinction in the 1st World War (and survived) and was writing home to his mother practically every other day. His descriptions of life on the front for an officer make interesting reading. The box also had maps showing trench positions, orders for the day and information on gun placements.

He went on to become a Major in the Royal Field Artillery before the war was out, that is before he was 25 years of age! It would be wrong to suggest that such a war was fun but the letters certainly make for some amusing reading. Here's a selection from three letters sent from the front – remember William is only 23 at this time (but an officer).

October 4th 1915:

"I have planned rather a nice little dinner for tonight - mushroom soup, lobster salad, fillet of beef, potatoes and cauliflowers, mushroom omelette. Another brace of grouse arrived the other day and were excellent"

I'm assuming he didn't share that with his men?!

December 19th 1915:

It's nearly Christmas and presents have arrived - a pair of gloves! But later he's busy shelling the Germans:

"I started by shooting steadily from 9am to 11 o'clock, with several intervals while German aeroplanes hovered over the section. Just as I was coming back from the Observing Station the Bosch, in the most impudent way, started shelling the station with Black Marias - a most unheard of proceeding in these parts!"

December 26th 1915:

"We had quite an amusing Christmas on the whole but it was very difficult to do anything for the men as they were so split up, so we have now decided to give them dinner when we come out of action. However, we got them vegetables, fruit, sweets, nuts, cigarettes, beer and crackers and they made an excellent meal. There were no Christmas truces this year, in fact we spent all Christmas Eve night and Christmas night in shelling the kindly German, most annoying I called it, it rather interfered with our dinner. I got over that difficulty by giving my orders to the section from a telephone rigged up in the dining room. It was rather funny eating plum pudding with one hand as it were and shooting Germans with the other. Talk about the Americans doing big deals by a few words on the telephone I think it is better to shoot Germans by telephone at dinner"

- Bob Hessian

Save Gavray Meadows Campaign

The campaign has progressed towards its aim of protecting both Gavray Wildlife Site and the larger River Ray Conservation Target Area (CTA). Following extensive campaigning to let people know the importance of the great biodiversity and historical value of these sites, both Bicester Town and Cherwell District Councillors now support the need to preserve these areas. But sadly, the struggle isn't over yet. The next huge challenge is to demonstrate to the Planning Inspector at a public examination of Cherwell's Local Plan that all the land east of Langford Brook up to Wretchwick Way should be saved for its historical and natural value to a town that is due to double in size in the next 17 years.

An Interview with Pat Tucker

I was born at Hughenden, in the Chilterns, and went to the primary school at Great Hampden. A small school but the headteacher gave us a good grounding in the basics, with interesting visits to local places, even though the school was deep in the countryside. I later went to Wycombe High School, doing the usual mix of subjects (although not so much on the science side). My main interest was geography - being nosy about other places. However this was not a subject that I could see leading to a career, without sciences to support it; so after A levels, I joined the civil service and worked in the Court of Protection (overseeing the administration of the affairs of people who no longer had mental capacity to do so). I then worked for an insurance company in High Wycombe until I married. I then joined my husband at the Rocket Propulsion Establishment at Westcott and we came to live in Launton. I later had three children and did occasional part time work when they were growing up.

I had not been interested in History at school, but taking the children and the dog for walks in the village I gradually began to wonder what the place had been like before we came. In 1978, the then Rector, John Blythe, called a public meeting with the idea of getting a local history society started in the village - just at the time when there was a great popular movement in tracing family history as well as local history. I was hooked - and was quickly roped in to be the secretary for the group (and I am still secretary all these years later!) which started with about 20 members.

We had a lot of support from the ORCC - it was to be a few years before the local history movement had expanded so enormously in the county that the offshoot OLHA was formed. We were encouraged to get started on a project and John Steane came and suggested

a survey of the church and chapel yard monuments, which he showed us how to organise. We also transcribed the later church registers - Brigadier Goadby's group had been doing the earlier ones for the Family History Society. Very soon we started to get enquiries from all over the place from people tracing their ancestors - and this helped us because we were learning what had happened to Launton people who have left the village or who had lived elsewhere before coming here. With the census data, we were building up knowledge of who had been here before us - so we started a card index system, which now amounts to many thousands; it may seem very low-tech by modern standards, but it has the advantages that we can add notes in pencil if we are unsure about the data! One of our members had a typescript copy of the notes made by Rev. JC Blomfield for his unpublished history of Launton; these we copied. This opened up pre-Victorian Launton, although it raised many more questions. A chance meeting led us to a map of 1607, which, once again we copied. (Since then, we have no idea of what has happened to that map). A doctor in London researching his family history arrived on my doorstep with photocopies of documents he had come across in the County Record Office; these showed a landowner's property in the parish, both enclosed field and strips in the open fields. The data I recognised immediately as the same on the 1607 map - although the documents had been classed as 18th C in the Record Office. We immediately went to Oxford, with our copy of the map, and demonstrated to the archivists that the documents that our London doctor had photocopied tied up exactly with our map. In addition we discovered that in the archives was a bound volume of the open field system, each one showing the farmer's name and

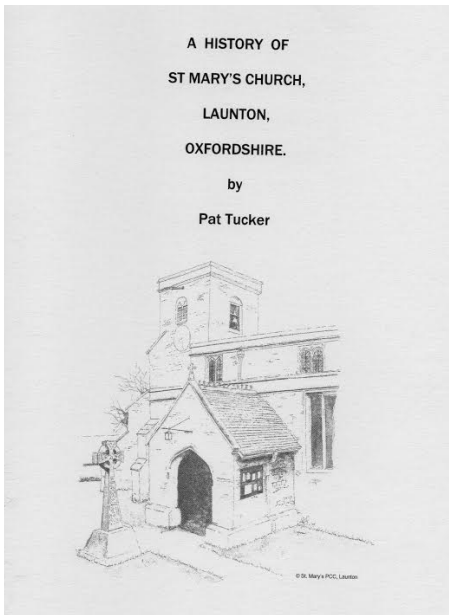
the area! About this time, Mary Brydon had widened her interest in Launton to the history of the Methodist Church - and earlier non-conformity - in Bicester. She alerted me to the reels of film of the Bicester newspapers that one could look at - and here indeed was a rich resource of local history, the celebrations, the tragedies, so much information that existed nowhere else!

We were really finding our feet now! And it was obvious from our neighbours and especially the many family historians who were contacting us that there was a need to bring together all of this information and make it generally available, so we started to think about writing a history of the village. However, we were well aware that there were many gaps in what we knew - and the idea of compiling a small book, that one could use as a guide when walking round the village, gradually arose. So we published the first version of Let's Look at Launton, quickly followed by a selection of fascinating items that we had come across in the local papers - News from Launton. The headmistress of our village school announced her retirement - "Why don't we do a book about the school to mark the occasion?", says Mary. We soon found we had taken on a very large project - and quickly realised we could not do it justice in the time. However, the 150th anniversary of its foundation would occur in the not-too-distant future (1989). The project was well under way - including transcribing the earlier school log books - when a letter arrived at the school from New Zealand from the granddaughter of a previous headmaster, asking if anyone could help her find out more about him. This letter was quickly passed over to me and within days, the writer of that letter said she would make her first trip to the UK in time to coincide with the anniversary, for which the school was planning celebrations. It was a wonderful event, with the Lord Lieutenant, Sir Ashley Ponsonby, a great supporter of the local history, launching the publication of The History of Launton School 1839-1989, and a week of celebrations for the pupils, including dressing up for a day of 'Victorian school' and appearing on the local TV news.

Soon after this Mary came across a number of letters in the Oxford Chronicle by a Rev. William Ferguson, minister of the Congregational Churches in Bicester and Launton; these letters, written in the 1840s and 50s, described the conditions that many of the poor in this part of Oxfordshire were living under, quoting, among many other things, the household budgets for a number of Launton families. Enquiries indicated that nothing was known about this man's influence in the area, so we made it an urgent project to uncover this story. Fortunately Mary and her husband were spending their summer holidays in Scotland, looking into his family tree; so



Pat with the Priory Dig group in 2012. (middle row, 2nd from the right)



they were able to widen their research to find out more about Ferguson's background. I had now passed my driving test, so I was able to spend a wonderful week tracing Ferguson in the lead-mining area in Cumbria. I was later to follow up the story in Salt Lake City, where Ferguson was buried - but we realised that the story of tracking down this man was more interesting than he was, so really not worth publishing, certainly at this stage.

Plans to erect a memorial to the Launton soldiers who died in the two world wars were underway. "Why don't we do something too?", asks Mary; "A book about the fallen?" Initially I was not interested, but she soon won me over, particularly when an ex-army man in our group and a colleague volunteered to visit the Western Front and track down all the memorials on which the names of Launton men are carved. By bringing together the information in the school logs books and local newspapers, together with census and church records, also much help from local families related to the fallen, we were able to publish *The Launton Lads who Went to War*, including the background story of how it had taken so very long to get the war memorial erected.

As the year 2000 approached we came up with the idea of producing a map of the parish of Launton to celebrate the change from 1999 to 2000, and a group was formed from the Historical Society and the village Environmental Group (now transmuted into the Friends of Island Pond Wood, which was planted to celebrate the same historical event). This very small committee was augmented by a couple of young brothers - one had the technical skills to do the design work on his computer, the other to devise the artwork.

At the same time, I was asked to do a short history of how we came to acquire the Island Pond Wood for the use of the village. This meant searching back into events in the recent history of Launton, when the community had resisted various attempts in the 1970s and '80s to build about 140 properties on this land.

This was a very different project for me - local events that I had been part of, rather than something which had happened way back in the past. We decided that we needed to update Let's look at Launton; there had been a revolution in printing, and with a home computer (and lots of help from my son who is used to dealing with text and photos etc) we were able to publish a much more attractive and informative edition in 2003.

I was next invited by the Rev. Margaret Mullins to write a history of our village church. A guide book to the building had been written by the late Frederick Sharpe in 1951 (to coincide with the Festival of Britain celebrations); it only contained a few pages, although a good number of photographs. Making good use of much material I had unearthed in the local papers, also a large box of items in storage boxes in the Rectory, I was able to complete this in 2003. One of the fascinating 'treasures' I came across in the archives at St Luke's was a detailed list of building materials and the costs for the alterations to the 17c rectory and it's 1830s extension. The next project I was invited to undertake was to mark the 21st anniversary in 2007 of the Village Players, a group that has been putting on a pantomime each winter, and more recently has expanded to include a summer show of songs etc on a theme, and a play in the Autumn, usually a comedy. (I did take a part in the second pantomime, but have since then confined myself with doing the refreshments and helping with the front-of-house duties - no lines to learn, no need to rehearse!). This was again a fascinating subject, greatly helped by coming across many reports in the local papers of concerts put on by the schoolchildren, the congregations of church and chapel, and also a very active group in the village in the 1950s and '60s; in addition there were references to morris dancing and a village band. Together with the activities of the Players over the two previous decades, this formed the story of *Entertaining Launton*. Then I was asked to expand and update the small book I had done when the Island Pond Wood was planted. In 2009, a number of people in Launton formed a local management group -The Friends of Island Pond Wood (and, yes, I am involved with that too!).

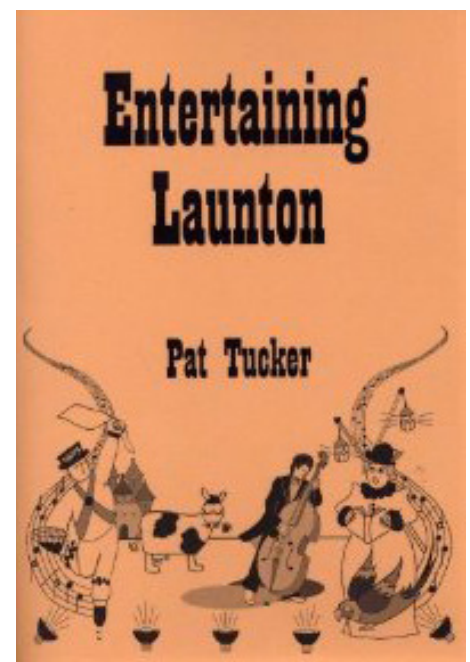
So what now? With the coming of the centenary of the outbreak of World War One, I have been busy for some time putting together a new version of *The Launton Lads Who Went to War*, and this time including all the combatants from the village named on the Roll of Honour in the church - after all, no one knew who was going to survive, and even among those who did, how many of them were to die prematurely, while others lived into their 80s?

Over the years I have been keeping a beady eye out for any items that relates to the history of the village or anybody who might have lived here. I have had three topics about which I would like to work on - maybe even do more books.

In no particular order, firstly, the history of the village pubs (including those no longer open); secondly, the stories of the two railway lines that cross the parish (and another that was proposed in the period of railway mania); and thirdly, the village policemen. And I am very certain that there are plenty more interesting topics about the history of Launton that one might follow up! One only needs to be nosy, like me, and wonder about the people who lived here in the past - What sounds did they hear? What smells? How did they deal with illness? Did they go to Bicester often - or ever go to Oxford? How did they cope with bad weather?... The questions are endless!

Launton Historical Society has continued with its monthly meetings, attracting about 20 or so members, from the village and surrounding area. I joined the historical committee that was formed as part of the ORCC, and continued as that committee grew into OLHA. Over all the years that the half-yearly meetings have been held, I have missed very few indeed. These often prompt new thoughts on following a particular topic and have taught me a great deal about where to find information etc. The meetings have been held in some fascinating corners of the county and often involve visits to buildings not open to the public. In addition it is always interesting to hear from other members their experiences in researching their own community, which might have a very different history to that of Launton.

I am glad that I came to live in Launton and at the right time, just as the local history movement took off. The advantage of living in a small(ish) village where there was no great event or family to dominate the local story has meant that I have had a free hand to follow any line of research, although I have been prompted by Mary and others to undertake certain projects! I may have been reluctant at first, but was soon caught up in the search to follow the story - as I said, I am eternally curious!



Christmas Tree Festival

St Edburg's Foundation introduced the Christmas Tree Festival in 2012, and it was an immediate success. The Christmas trees, which filled St Edburg's Church, were available for sponsorship by individuals and organisations, who could decorate them to highlight their particular causes and activities. The result was a glorious display of colour, lights and imaginative creativity. With so many beautiful trees to enjoy, refreshments on hand and a variety of live music to listen to, it was an enjoyable experience for all who attended.

Last year the BLHS Committee decided the Society should take part and our tree, decorated with old photographs of Bicester, was much admired by those who visited. Over 1,000 people came over the three days so it was a valuable opportunity for us to raise our profile within the local community.



So we will be taking part again this year, when the Festival will run from December 12th to 14th, and we invite suggestions from our members for a 'local history' theme we can use. Do you have any ideas, maybe from your own childhood, or some aspect of an old-fashioned Bicester Christmas? Please contact any members of the Committee if you can help. Thank you!

- Gill King



Where Are We?

Congratulations to everyone who identified the Dovecote in Old Place Yard as last month's location. Can you identify this month's location from the following details? As before, it's within the BLHS area and is mentioned in one of this month's articles. We'll let you know the answer in next month's edition.



Members Questionnaire

THE DORSET DAIRY,
(Proprietor W. E. Dagley) Est. 1898,

19, MARKET SQUARE,
BICESTER.

Duchess of Devonshire
Dairy Butter, Preserved Cream
and New Laid Eggs.

A Large and Varied Stock of Good
Class Chocolates and Sweets at

E. SHERWOOD'S

Confectioner and Tobacconist,

46, MARKET SQUARE,
BICESTER.

Fancy Boxes of Chocolates in a
Great Variety. ALL PRICES.

J. W. GRIMES,

Clothier, Tailor and Outfitter,
London House, Bicester.

The Noted House for everything
in Boys' School Clothing. Large
Stock always to select from.
Best value in the Trade given.

Adverts taken from the
Bicestrian 1927

Back in August the committee sent out a questionnaire to all members to try to ascertain whether everyone was happy with what the society was doing and that everyone was getting what they wanted from their membership. It also gave us the opportunity to find out a little bit about our members and their interests.

We had a good response, 47% of the membership returned their completed questionnaires, and the majority of the feedback was positive.

It told us that the majority of our members are interested in a wide spectrum of history and not just specific areas. And that 18% also enjoy the social aspect of being a member.

We learnt that 97% of those who responded read the quarterly newsletter and that 66% wanted more content. Hopefully they're happy with this new version and maybe more than 18% now pass it on to other people who might be interested.

John Roberts and Sally James were particularly happy to see the

overwhelmingly positive reaction to their choice of speakers this year. Though there were a few interesting comments and suggestions that we will be tactfully passing on to the speakers concerned.

There were a number of members who put their names forward to get involved with various activities. We are very grateful to, and encouraged by, those who did and will be contacting them shortly.

The membership's main criticisms revolved around the time wasted at the monthly meetings. In response to this the committee has decided to implement a few changes. The number of raffle prizes is to be reduced, though the total value of the prizes will remain the same. The speaker will be asked to repeat any questions asked before answering, so that everyone can then hear. And we now aim to start promptly at 7:30pm so would ask everyone to make sure they arrive in plenty of time and are seated ready to begin.

- Matthew Hathaway

Roll of Honour

These are the local men who died in the Great War, 100 years ago this month.

Private Basil Thomas Martin, native of Bicester.

Died: 1st November 1914 Aged: 19 Served in: Yorkshire Regiment

Private Joseph Coles Morris, of The Green, Bletchingdon.

Died: 4th November 1914 Aged: 22 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private Maurice Edward Hirons, of Bicester.

Died: 7th November 1914 Aged: 21 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Second Lieutenant Jesse Jones, of Horton-cum-Studley.

Died: 11th November 1914 Aged: 31 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Captain The Honorable Arthur Annesley, of Bletchingdon Park.

Died: 16th November 1914 Aged: 34 Served in: Royal Hussars

Captain Cholmeley Symes-Thompson, of Finmere.

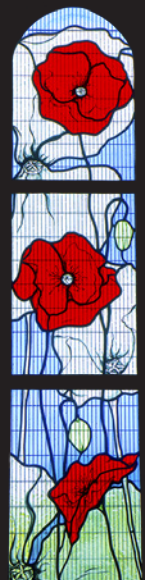
Died: 17th November 1914 Aged: 33 Served in: Grenadier Guards

Private Henry Giles Grace, of Bicester.

Died: 19th November 1914 Aged: 23 Served in: Coldstream Guards

1st Class Boy Henry Willie Collett, of Corner House, Bletchingdon.

Died: 26th November 1914 Aged: 18 Served in: Royal Navy - HMS Bulwark



Talks Update

Over the next few months we have a varied itinerary of talks that we hope will prove very interesting.

Monday 17th November

This time Martin Way takes us through **Barrels, Barley & Beer**. A potted look at the “mystery of brewing”, with reference to local breweries. Covering the brewing of beer, from the hops to the cooper’s craft, and the unique tools of the trade.

Monday 15th December

To round off the year Bob Hessian tells us about the **History of Bicester Pubs and their Names**. The Bowling Green, The Poleaxe and The Windmill - just some of the 40 plus pubs that Bicester has had over the years.

Monday 19th January

In the new year Tim Healey talks to us about **Apples! The Myth & Magic of England’s Favourite Fruit**. We explore the stories and lore of the apple, from ancient mysteries of the Sacred Fruit to the rites of Wassailing and Apple-bobbing.

Lost Railways of Oxfordshire Talk

October’s talk, Lost Railways of Oxfordshire, was given by Muriel Pilkington. We had a good attendance of 50 members and 6 guests.

Muriel began by talking about transportation before the railways. Before the 1830s goods were mainly taken by horse drawn carts or barges and the fastest form of passenger transport was the stagecoach, with a maximum speed of about 15mph. The first successful commercial steam railway came about in 1825 and cut travelling times dramatically.

The Great Western Railway’s broad gauge line from Paddington to Oxford opened in 1844. Then the Buckinghamshire Railway Company’s standard gauge line from Oxford to Bletchley (via

Bicester) opened in 1851 and connected at Bletchley with the London & North Western Railway’s main line from London to Birmingham.

Various branch lines, such as Yarnton to Witney, Kidlington to Woodstock and Chipping Norton to Kingham, opened up to link

the villages and towns of the county to the main lines. A lot of these operated until the 1950s, by which time buses had taken over the bulk of the passenger traffic, and stations started to close. But many of those that survived the competition later closed following the Beeching Report of 1963.

- Matthew Hathaway



Committee & Contacts

Editor:

Matthew Hathaway
mathat298@gmail.com
01869 246530

Assistant Editor:

Gill King

Website:

www.blhs.org.uk

Committee Members:

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

Sally James (*Treasurer*)
01869 243804

Sally Dexter (*Minutes Secretary*)

Peter Crook

Matthew Hathaway

Gill King (*Archivist*)

John Roberts (*Membership Officer*)

Meetings Address:

The Clifton Centre
Ashdene Road
Bicester
OX26 2BH

Postal Address:

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