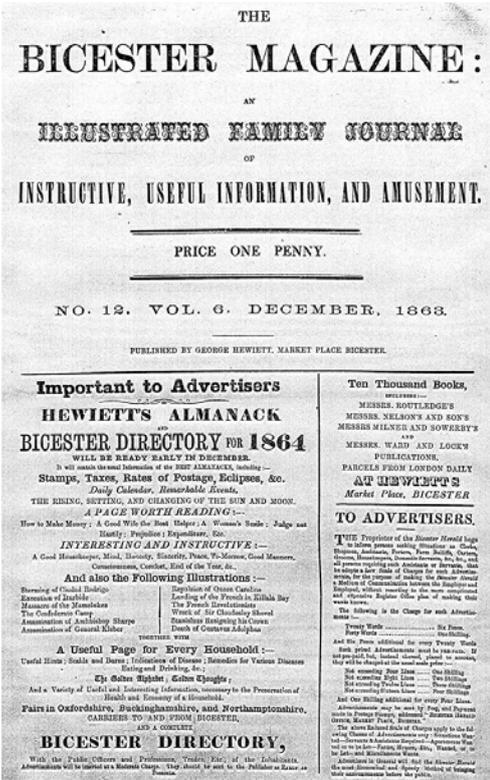




Dont forget that you can still buy copies of our 'Bygone Bicester' DVD and 'Bicester Through Time' book from Sally James. Both make great Christmas presents. See the back page for contact details.

## Archive Update



I have recently added to the Archive some photocopies of issues of the 'Bicester Magazine' for 1863 and 1864. The magazine, which was printed on very delicate paper inside a different coloured cover each month, sold for one penny. It describes itself as 'An Illustrated Family Journal of instructive, useful information, and amusement.' In the December 1863 issue, for example, its 'Household hints' gave instructions on how to boil a turkey and make oyster sauce for it. That issue also included this piece, which might give pause for thought. I wonder how different our lists would be today.

### IMPORTANT DUTIES

- Three things to love – courage, gentleness, and affection.
- Three things to admire – intellectual power, dignity, and gracefulness.
- Three things to hate – cruelty, arrogance, and ingratitude.
- Three things to delight in – beauty, frankness, and freedom.
- Three things to wish for – health, friends, and a cheerful spirit.
- Three things to pray for – faith, peace, and purity of heart.
- Three things to like – cordiality, good humour, and mirthfulness.
- Three things to avoid – idleness, loquacity, and flippant jesting.
- Three things to cultivate – good books, good friends, and good humour.
- Three things to contend for – honour, country, and friends.
- Three things to govern – temper, impulse, and the tongue.

- Gill King

## Marj's Memories A Typical 1940s Christmas

During the war and for some time after, everything was scarce but a lot of effort was made to have a good Christmas. Most families had a roast chicken dinner, some a home bred cockerel. Chicken was never eaten during the year, just at Christmas; in those days it was a luxury. Homemade wine was the main drink for adults – ours was Sloe wine, made from berries that were picked in the autumn. But my dad was proud to bring in a bottle each of RSVP sherry and RSVP port wine on Christmas Eve.

The Christmas puddings were made some weeks before and stored away to mature. Often the large bowl from a wash set was used to mix them in. The whole family had a turn in stirring "for luck". Tiny silver three penny pieces were put in. It was quite a

thrill to get one in your pudding on Christmas day. There were "meat safes" a scrubbed wood cupboard with a mesh door, which was handy to keep things cold outside in the winter.

The Christmas cake was home made and the little characters to stand on the top were affectionately saved from year to year.

Children made paper chains with strips of different coloured paper, stuck together with flour and water glue. It was important to have holly over the tops of pictures – it was considered to be lucky.

A fire was lit in the front room which was only used for special occasions. Our amusement was party games such as Charades, Postman's knock and many more.

We had, what seemed like, a lot

of presents; some from relations outside the home. A man's sock was filled with an orange (rare, but somehow acquired for us at Christmas), an apple, a pear and various nuts and sweets. We had nothing like that through the year so it was wonderful to find it all on Christmas morning at the bottom of the bed.

My grandfather lived with us and we used to sneak in and put cigarette papers, flints and lighter fuel in one of his socks on Christmas Eve to make out that Father Christmas had visited him as well.

Although we saw Father Christmas in books and on cards, we didn't see the type seen in large stores today, so to us he was real and how our imagination made him.

- Marjorie Dean MBE

# Chairman's Ramblings

Desperately trying to come up with a Christmas theme to my "ramblings", I delved into the Bob's Stuff archives – fortunately now itemised, numbered and catalogued. That doesn't mean I can find things when I need to but it helps!

Earlier this year my son (a builder) was renovating an old farmhouse the other side of Launton. Wrapped round one of the pipes in the loft (as lagging) was a copy of Bicester Advertiser for January 4th, 1963. The headline reads "BLIZZARD – 1962 slithers out – Icy Welcome to 1963". I'm sure many of you will remember it well – high winds and snow on Boxing Day and the days following brought the area and practically all of England to a standstill with 4ft - 20ft snowdrifts. The Bicester Advertiser published a plea from the National Dairy Council asking that housewives put their milk bottle out where they will not be covered by snow – "The milkmen just have not the time to search for lost bottles" !!

The snow drifts stopped fire engines from Bicester reaching a serious fire at Godington Hall Farm, (north of Stratton Audley). RAF Bicester sent out their equipment which after a struggle managed to get through some two hours after the initial alert. Needless to say the building was gutted.



The newspaper also reports on the will left by Major Moir, owner of Old Place Yard, who left over £75,000. But the front page asks a big question – "Council to buy Sixteenth Century House?" Evidently Bicester Urban Council had applied to the Ministry for the acquisition of Old Place Yard. The Editorial comment that follows says: "In an age when old buildings are being knocked down like nine-pins, Bicester Council deserve praise for their foresight in their attempts to preserve this house". I leave you to ponder on that comment! Especially when the back page of the same newspaper has a heading "Down with the Old to make way for the New – Bicester Landmark to be Demolished" – a reference to the demise of "Hedge's Block" on Market Hill!

In November 1894 the Bicester Advertiser reports the following: The LMS railway crossing – at the monthly meeting of the Bicester Local Board, the Clerk stated that he had prepared a petition to the Railway Company regarding the level crossing near the station. On the day of a recent fire at New Park Farm, Arcott, the (fire) engine had just passed over the crossing when the gates were shut in the face of the firemen who were following behind in a trap with the hose. So some 120 years

later with the new service from Oxford to Bicester and on to London, it's looking as though the same level crossing is going to cause similar problems!



I have a collection of newsletters called The Bicastrian – a weekly news-sheet for the troops and ATS stationed at Bicester Garrison (not to be confused with The Bicestrian which was the Bicester Grammar School's magazine). The Special Xmas Number 1945, apart from a delightful wintry scene on the front cover (does anybody recognise it – it does have a For Sale sign?), extols the fact that this will be the first peacetime Christmas since 1938. Food (and gifts) are still being rationed but the Editor comments that for those not going home for Christmas, the Garrison will be providing festive food which in most cases will be better than the civilians will have! (three brussel sprouts instead of two?) There is a "Fireside Quiz" for readers – one question of which was as follows: A certain Field Marshal in the British Army was, during the war (WWII), publicly deprived of his rank. His name?

But back to that 1963 Bicester Advertiser – a little gem of news, used to fill a column on Page 6 – For "wantonly throwing a missile to the danger of persons", Alan Smith was fined 10s. on Tuesday. It was stated that he was throwing snowballs and two women were forced to duck. If that happened now they'd probably send in the armed police unit!

- Bob Hessian

## Save Gavray Meadows Campaign

The Resumed Examination Hearings Programme of the Modified Cherwell Plan will take place on December 9th and continue until 23rd December. BLHS have been allowed to comment on the historical importance of the Gavray Meadows site – that will be on the 16th December and Bob Hessian will present the case for BLHS.

Old maps of the area show hedgerows in the 1607s which can still be seen today. The land is old ridge and furrow and an ancient footpath runs through the site along the parish boundary between Bicester/Launton and Piddington. There are old ponds, cattle routes under the railway. We have the names of people who farmed the same small fields in the 1600s. The aim is to make it a 'living museum' of local farming knowledge and could be used as an education resource for history, as well as ecology and conservation, etc.

# Christmas in Bicester An Oral History Discussion

In December 2011 the Society held a meeting at the Pop-In Centre as part of their ongoing Oral History Project. The subject was Christmas in Bicester Past and the following is a transcript of the discussion.

## Contributors:

Margaret Barker (MB), Joyce Barlow (JB), Ron Barlow (RB), Caroline Carpenter (CC), Phyllis Casemore (PhC), Peter Chivers (PCC), Brian Clifton (BC), Jean Crook (JC), Peter Crook (PC), Phil Croxford (PCr), Marjorie Dean (MD), John Harris (JH), Meg Haynes-Latham (ML), David Hemmings (DH), Bob Hessian (BH), Mary Hodgeson (MH), Sue Hodgeson (SH), Brennan Johns (BJ), Jackie Johns (JJ), Stafford Nash (SN), Miriam Layman (ML), Esme Nicholson (EN), Marguerite Palmer (MP), Tony Neal (TN), David Pearse (DP), Pat Pearse (PP), Terri Louise Pilgrim (TP), Pam Roberts (PR), John Roberts (JR), Audrey Speller (AS), John Savins (JS), Megan Savins (MS), Robin Smith (RS), Esme Timms (ET), Fred Tracy (FT), Joan Tracy (JT), Mick Wall (MW), Wendy Wall (WW), Wendy Wright (WWr) & Jean Yeadon (JY).

(WWr) Christmas didn't start as soon. (MW) It was only a week before Christmas that things began appearing in the shops with the windows being decorated, etc. (WW) We could shop in Bicester for everything we needed because there was such a good variety of shops there. (MD) There was Alf Evans's and other big stores. (WW) Alf Evans did toys as a special Christmas line. (MD) Cherry's, the Handy Stores, was originally a toy shop and you could get all the toys there. I remember choosing what I wanted before Christmas, saying what I would like, and Father Christmas would bring it.

(DP) Just after the War, a tin of peaches was a luxury. You had a tin of peaches at Christmas. Christmas then you got all sorts of things that you didn't have for the rest of the year. It was a special time, it was a treat. You spent out at Christmas on treats for yourself.

(MD) Even if you didn't go to church there was more of a religious thing



St Edburg's Christmas Service - 1960s



about it. We sang carols. We tended to remember what Christmas was all about. (JT) The Salvation Army used to come round in the snow and play "Come and join us". They would play by the Hallelujah Tree. It was a few days before Christmas. They used to come round our area in the late 1950s. (WWr) There were carol singers too. (MD) We all used to do it with the children, as a group, but we always knew the words to the carols and this was a requirement from our audiences in the houses. They seemed to like the children coming round in those days.

(WWr) We did a mumming play one year. We went round the bigger houses like Bicester House, Oliver Gilbey's place at Slade Farm, Major Moir's in Old Place Yard. This was in the early 1950s. I was at the Grammar School then. It wasn't an organized group, my mother just decided to do it. It was mainly kids from the school I went to. After Christmas we went to do it for the Sunshine Club. My brother, who was about five at the time, played the Turkish Knight. He was very angelic looking. It caused a great deal of amusement.

(WW) In the late 1940s the grocers' shop windows were a joy to behold because they were full of goodies, things that you didn't see at other times of the year. Even before the War they would display things in the window that ordinary people wouldn't have afforded. The butchers' shops had their turkeys and chickens hung outside. It did look Christmassy.

(BC) Lots of people belonged to Christmas Clubs, Slate Clubs. (MD) My parents belonged to the Slate Club. (MW) Most of the pubs ran a Slate Club. (DP) The Thrift Club was for Christmas and the Slate Club was for the sick. The Thrift Club you paid in whenever you wanted to save. That was taken to the bank and interest accrued on it during the year. Depending on how much you saved during the year you got a percentage of the interest to add to your money. You actually gained a little bit of money in the Thrift Club which you then spent in the pub where you had saved the money!

(WW) Most of us can remember the chimney they used to put up in Hedges's shop window at Christmas time. It had a Father Christmas that would pop up. Miss Scrivener, on the Market Square had one as well. It was like an Aladdin's cave in her shop. (MD) My brother once told me to stand and look in the window and

he was opening and shutting the door to let me see Father Christmas going up and down. Miss Scrivener was not very pleased and he had a telling off.

(SN) Christmas was hectic at the bakery. You didn't have the same competition from the supermarkets that you have today. We sold things like mince pies, chocolate logs and Christmas cakes. It helped to balance the finances for the rest of the year.

(WW) Christmas changed by the 1960s and 1970s. People were becoming more prosperous. (JT) You bought Christmas decorations instead of making them. It was good not to make paper chains. The glue tasted horrible! (BC) Goble's would sell Christmas trees.

(WWr) When I was a child Christmas trees were less common. (WW) When I was a child we had proper candles on the Christmas tree and only lit them after tea on Christmas Day and the same on Boxing Day. They would burn for a few minutes and then we would have to blow them out again. There was a fairy at the top of the tree. It was quite magical really. We had proper Christmas trees, not artificial ones like today.

(MD) If we went round carol singing most people would come out and give you some money. Sometimes the householder used to be covered with feathers where they had been plucking their chicken before Christmas. My dad used to sit there doing ours. There was no buying them ready to go in the oven in those days. The chicken was brought home with the head still attached and we had to prepare them ourselves. (BC) Alfie Bannister would go round wringing turkeys' necks for you. (WW) I can remember one year when I was a small child they were wringing necks. I was down in Wesley Lane and I saw this chicken running up the lane with its head hanging to the side. It gave me the fright of my life.

(WWr) I used to work at the post office at Christmas. We finished at lunchtime and got paid, then we went out to buy our Christmas presents on Christmas Eve. (WW) I had to work Christmas morning when I was employed in the post office on the counter. The post office opened from 9.00 am to 11.00 am. We used to take it in turns each Christmas to do this. There was only one person on the counter. The people who used to come in were the European Voluntary Workers (displaced persons) who used to come

in with their parcels. (SN) Our Christmas didn't mean as much to them as they celebrated theirs later. (MD) They were mainly Polish and Romanian.

(WWr) People used to take their turkeys to the bakery to have them cooked in the bread ovens. (MD) Capel-Smith used to do that. It was mainly chickens he used to cook in those days. He used to cook for Jack Harris the butcher. Lane's the baker did it as well. (SN) I know later in the year we used to cook the suckling pigs for the displaced persons in the bakery in Chapel Street. We didn't used to charge for it. It was the only sized ovens that you were able to cook them in.

(MD) During the War they always managed to get oranges into the shops at Christmas. We only got oranges every few months at that time. Somebody would spread the news that a shop had oranges and everyone would go and queue to get some. But they always managed to get oranges for us at Christmas so that when we opened our sock there would always be nuts and an orange in it. (WW) Going back a generation, my mum, who came from a large family always used to say that all the children had "a horange and a happle and half a dozen sweets".

(WWr) It was the first Christmas after the War. There was a German prisoner of war camp nearby and after lunch they let them out. You'd never seen anything so depressing. All these men, away from their own country, wandering around the streets on Christmas Day. Dad actually invited a couple of them in because he felt sorry for them.

(ET) The presents that we got were what our parents could afford. (SN) The best present I ever got was bicycle. (MD) Mine was a pencil case. My dad worked at Heyford both when it was English Air Force and then American USAF (United States Army and Air Force). They had a really good Christmas party each year, transport was laid on (big lorries TCVs) and we all had a good present to take home. They decorated the big dining hall with parachutes draped above our heads; the Americans were more affluent.

(WWr) We used to go to bed on Christmas Eve just normally. Our parents used to decorate the house and put all the presents out. When we came down in the morning it was just magical. (MD) You were very lucky if you had a Christmas Tree. When I was a girl during the War, mum used to tack string into the corner of the room. She would do it while we were in bed and tied on the string would be chocolates and sugar mice. It was lovely.

(WW) My gran used to take us across to Millie Bourton's. She always had a range of things like chocolates and sugar mice. I remember lacey sweets that looked like Christmas trees. They were made of sugar and had a picture in the middle. They always got left on the tree because they were horrible to eat. They were rock hard and we always bought them at Millie's just for decoration. (MD) Millie used to have marvelous sweets. When we were parents ourselves Christmas

was different. We were able to lavish more on our own children. We made sure they had a lot more than we had had. (WW) People had got more prosperous by then, there was more money to spend.

(ET) Decorations going up in the street hasn't been going on for a long time. I think the Americans started it when they were based over here. They put decorations up outside their homes, but we didn't use to do that. The Americans lived near the Greenwood estate in the bungalows. We took up the custom from them. The Council would put up the decorations and the tree in the town. (MD) There was a tree in the Market Square in the 1960s, but maybe the lights weren't put until a lot later. It doesn't seem that long ago.

(MW) Local butchers would bid for the best animals at the Bicester Fat Stock Show. The show was about a week before Christmas and the animals that were bought were displayed in the shops. It was mainly cattle and sheep for sale. (WW) Gilbert Lane bought the beast that won the Show one year and proudly displayed it in his shop window. The Fat Stock Show took place in the Cattle Market. (MD) When we were children we would go round to the Market to see it. You would have a wander round to look at the animals. (DP) The Fat Stock market was different from the weekly market because they would judge the animals and sell the prize beast as it was Christmas. (WW) A local butcher would buy the prize beast because it gave him a lot of kudos. People would come to him for their beef. (DP) It was a bit of a show because the farmers brought the beast on for the show and it was a big thing between the farmers who won. Gilbert Lane had a notice up in his window when he bought the prize-winning animal. The show was probably an excuse to have a bit of a drink afterwards as well.

For many years there used to be a Crib outside the Catholic church. It doesn't seem to have been there recently because they had trouble with it being vandalized. (MD) There always used to be a Crib inside St Edburg's church. (BC) Many churches still have a Crib Service. (MD) In my days at school we used to have a Christmas Concert. Ours used to be round at the YMCA building where the Territorial Army had their headquarters in Chapel Street. I sang with my friend Ann Wilkins, "Silent Night, Holy Night"

dressed in our nighties! (MW) The hall at St Mary's School, where the Montgomery House surgery is now, was built in 1939. They used to hold Christmas Bazaars there with visits from Father Christmas.

(WW) Barclays Bank always provided the stirrup cup for the Hunt when it met in Market Square on Boxing Day. My eldest daughter worked at the bank and it was her job to take the stirrup cup round, although really she was terrified of horses. (ET) Whether you agreed with fox hunting or not it was quite a spectacle to see the Hunt on Boxing Day at the Market Square. (BC / WWr) Mrs Moir rode sidesaddle with the Bicester Hunt. She wore black and had a veil. She did it until she was quite elderly. They used to go round to St Edburg's House when that was built. They used to unload the hounds there so that the elderly residents could see them and then they would go down the Causeway to the Market Square. (DP) The meet was a big social event. You met people and after the meet you drifted away. We used to finish up at the Ashton Club for a few drinks.

(DP) It was back to work after Boxing Day until New Year's Eve. We always used to go down to the New Year's Eve dance at the Crown Hotel. Pat used to work in the bank and it was always touch and go if we were going to get there. In those days in the bank you had to work until the books were balanced. It didn't matter what time it was that you finished. I would be hanging around outside the bank waiting for her to finish. (SN) The dance was quite formal with a band providing live music and there was proper dancing. (DP) One year we won the twist dancing competition. We couldn't do it now! One year we had to go down in Wellingtons because there was deep snow. There was always a good spread. It was a good function. (MD) The Littlebury Hotel always did a good New Year's celebration that we used to go to. They had a marvelous party and even in those days it was expensive. We had a sit-down meal and then a dance. There was a piper and the haggis was brought in. The whiskey was flowing everywhere. We used to walk home afterwards. (DP) From what I can remember the 1st January wasn't a holiday. We were all expected to go to work the next morning. (SN) You only had Christmas Day and Boxing Day off.



The Boxing Day Hunt Meet in Market Square - 1950s

# Bygone Bicester

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

## 25th December 1914

The Mary Wilson Charity, consisting of 60 sixpenny loaves to widows and widowers of the parish, was distributed on Monday, this being St. Thomas' Day. The fund is derived from a rent charge of 30s. per year on six acres of land at Caversfield, the property of Mrs. H. E. Phillips. The Rev. W. O'Reilly and the Churchwardens (Messrs. R. Watts and T. C. Finch) undertook the distribution, Mr. Bennett, Sheep Street, supplying the loaves.

## 18th December 1964

The annual appeal for toys (new or second-hand) by the Regal Cinema, Bicester, for the needy children of the district is under way. A Christmas tree has been erected in the foyer of the cinema, and everyone who can help in this very worthwhile effort is earnestly requested to do all they can to make the effort a success.

# Bicester in the Snow

As the winter weather sets in it is worth taking a look back at how winter has hit Bicester in the past.



Coal distribution to the poor in Market Square - 1912



Snow covered market day in Market Square - 1960s



Causeway and Church Street in the snow - 1908

## MAKE THIS FESTIVE FARE.

### GOOD CHEER FROM EXTRA RATIONS.

That extra half-pound of sugar and margarine before Christmas will help to make some festive fare. Icing, toffees, marzipan, fruit punch, will all give a pre-war look to your tables at Christmas parties. Here are some recipes which can all be made from wartime provisions.

#### HOUSEHOLD MILK ICING.

4 level dessertspoons sugar.  
6 level tablespoons household milk, dry.  
2-4 tablespoons water.

Colouring and flavouring if liked.

Mix the sugar and household milk together. Add the water, and beat till smooth. Add colouring and flavouring if liked. Spread on top of cake. This icing doesn't keep very well, and so should be made just before required.

#### MOCK MARZIPAN.

1 tablespoon water.  
1 oz. margarine.  
1 teaspoon ratafia or almond essence.  
2 oz. sugar.  
2 oz. soya flour.

Melt margarine in water, add essence and sugar and then soya flour. Turn on to a board and knead well.

#### MARZIPAN TOFFEEES.

Make the marzipan from the mock marzipan recipe. The toffee covering is made as follows:

$\frac{1}{2}$  oz. margarine.  
1 oz. sugar.  
3 oz. golden syrup.  
4 tablespoons water.  
2-3 drops vinegar.

Roll the marzipan into 25-35 small balls and put aside to dry and harden. Put all the toffee ingredients into a saucepan and heat gently until the sugar dissolves. Boil briskly until it reaches the "crack" stage—that is when a little of the toffee is dropped into cold water it immediately hardens and crackles.

Draw the pan off the heat and dip in the marzipan balls on the end of a cocktail stick. Place them on a greased baking tray and leave to harden. The dipping should be carried out quickly or the toffee will set in the pan.

#### SPICED FRUIT PUNCH.

1 level tablespoon marmalade.  
1 level dessertspoon syrup.  
 $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$  level teaspoon ground ginger.  
1 tablespoon water.  
2 tablespoons orange squash.  
1 tablespoon lemon squash.  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  pint freshly-made tea.

Put the marmalade, syrup, ginger and water into a pan and make hot but do not boil. Add the lemon and orange squash and the tea and serve very hot or very cold. The tea should be allowed to stand more than 3 minutes before straining and should not be too strong; otherwise a bitter flavour will result.

More Christmas recipes are available in "Festive Fare," a Ministry of Food pamphlet which can be obtained at all Food Advice Centres.

Bicester Advertiser - December 1944

## Christmas Quiz

The answer to last month's "Where Are We?" was, of course, the Cottage Hospital in King's End. This month, in a festive change, we have abandoned the location photos in favour of a Christmas quiz. We'll let you know the answers in next month's edition.

- Q1.** Which nation gives us the Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square each year?
- Q2.** What year were the first Christmas cards sent in the UK?
- Q3.** How many presents are given in total in 'The 12 Days of Christmas'?
- Q4.** Which year was the coldest Christmas on record in the UK?
- Q5.** Which monarch broadcast the first Christmas Message?
- Q6.** Which year did parliament ban Christmas?
- Q7.** Which country did the Christmas tree tradition come from?
- Q8.** What colour are Mistletoe berries?
- Q9.** Which year did the Post Office stop delivering on Christmas Day?
- Q10.** Which country did Hong Kong surrender to on Christmas Day 1941?
- Q11.** Which carol was sung by the German soldiers in the trenches in 1914, which began the Christmas Day truce?
- Q12.** Who were popularly called robins because of their red uniforms?
- Q13.** What did Tom Smith, a London confectioner, invent in 1847?
- Q14.** Which monarch was crowned on Christmas Day in Westminster Abbey?
- Q15.** What did Santa Claus win in 1964?

## Roll of Honour

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

**Private Arthur Parker**, of Souldern.  
Died: 24<sup>th</sup> December 1914 Aged: 48  
Served in: Hampshire Regiment

**Private Lewis Rhymes**, of Bicester.  
Died: 25<sup>th</sup> December 1914 Aged: 28  
Served in: Gloucestershire Regiment

**Private George Meads**, of Hethe.  
Died: 27<sup>th</sup> December 1914 Aged: 28  
Served in: Canadian Field Ambulance

**Private Henry Stevens**, of Islip.  
Died: 1914 Aged: 19  
*The people of Islip believe this man died some time in 1914, but no matching record can be found.*



## Talks Update

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

### 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.

### Monday 16th February

This time Pat Snelson takes us through **Bricks & Building Materials in Bicester's Buildings**. Tracing the vernacular architecture of Bicester through its limestone buildings, glorious early Georgian brick and 'show-off' stucco facades.

## Princess Mary's Christmas Box

In November 1914, an advertisement was placed in the national press asking for donations to a 'Sailors & Soldiers Christmas Fund' which had been created by Princess Mary, the seventeen year old daughter of King George V. The purpose was to provide everyone wearing the King's uniform and serving overseas on Christmas Day 1914 with a 'gift from the nation'.

The response was truly overwhelming and it was decided to spend the money on an embossed brass box, based on a design by Messrs Adshead and Ramsey. The contents varied considerably; officers and men on active service received a box containing a pipe, lighter, 1oz of tobacco and twenty cigarettes. Non-smokers and boys received a bullet pencil and a packet of sweets instead. Indian troops often got sweets and spices, and nurses were treated to chocolate. Many of these items were

despatched separately from the tins themselves as they were only large enough to hold the standard issue of tobacco and cigarettes.

All boxes contained a Christmas card and a picture of the Princess. Those which were not distributed until after Christmas were sent with a 'victorious new year' card instead.

The wounded, nurses, and the widows or parents of those killed were also entitled to the gift. Prisoners of war at the time had theirs reserved until they were repatriated.

Great efforts were made to distribute the gifts in time for Christmas and huge demands were made on the already stretched postal service. More than 355,000 were successfully delivered

by the deadline. As time went on a shortage of brass meant that many did not receive their gift until as late as the summer of 1916. Then in January 1919 it was reported that 'considerable' numbers had still not been distributed.

When the fund finally closed in 1920, almost £200,000 had been donated for the provision of more than two and a half million boxes with contents.

- Matthew Hathaway



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