

Bicester Historian

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The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society

Ringling The Changes



Last month marked a special occasion for St Edburg's School when the school bell, used to call students to class every school day since it was hung in 1860, was taken down ready to be re-hung in the school's new building on the Kingsmere estate.

Originally the Bicester National Schools, St Edburg's current home was first opened on 1st June 1859, under the control of the schoolmaster, Mr Pendlebury, and schoolmistress, Miss Annie Underwood. Over 300 children enrolled on the first day, some from the various small church schools in the town, but a lot having had no previous education at all.

The building work took 11 months to complete from the laying of the foundation stone on Tuesday 6th July 1858. A day that was so important to the local community that the whole town closed down for the afternoon to celebrate.

Early in the morning Plant's Band paraded through the town, reminding all as they woke up that the day was a day of festivity and rejoicing. Arches of evergreens, flags, banners and flowers were quickly erected in the morning and at noon the shops were closed and the Thame Royal Brass Band arrived to enliven the proceedings.

The church bells rang out a merry peal and at one o'clock the procession began to form in the close at the back of Mr Shillingford's residence on the Causeway. By two o'clock all was ready and the procession, headed by the Thame Band, entered the town via Mr Kirby's garden (across a temporary bridge erected over the River Bure).

Arriving at the site of the new building, the band played the National Anthem whilst the children were arranged in their places. The proceedings began with a hymn, after which the Rev. T. J. Lingwood offered up a prayer asking God's blessing upon the undertaking.

Before preceding to the ceremony of laying the stone, the Rev. J. W. Watts addressed the crowd with a characteristically lengthy speech.

He began by stating that it was the

happiest day of his 15 years in the parish. He remarked that they were living in an age of general enlightenment, when education was the great question of the day and if they would wish to see a moral improvement among the dense masses of the working population, they must take in hand the rising generation, and seek to train them up in the fear of the Lord. And by the implanting of solid scripture principles, they might adorn their situation in life, however humble, by reducing Christian principle to Christian practice.

He thanked Sir Edward Page-Turner for freely granting the land for the site of the building. He also thanked the subscribers generally, and the Members of the Committee.

Rev. Watts then proceeded, assisted by Mr Munday, the builder, to lay the foundation stone. Below it they placed a glass bottle containing a prospectus of the Schools and the following document printed on parchment.

"BICESTER NATIONAL SCHOOLS - The Foundation Stone, of these Parochial Schools, erected by Voluntary Subscriptions, aided by Government, was laid on the 6th day of July 1858, to the honour and glory of God, by the Rev. John William Watts MA, Vicar of this parish, in the presence of the Rev. Thomas John Lingwood HA, Curate, the Members of the School Committee, and Parishioners at large."

The ceremony ended with the band playing "God Save the Queen" and a hearty three cheers from the crowd. The procession then re-formed and marched to Mr Woodward's field, where all the children in the town were given tea and cake.

Once tea was over everyone moved to the adjoining field where the Annual Rural Festival of the Bicester Literary Institution was taking place. Picnic parties were formed in various nooks and shady places. Then came rural games to please the children. Racing matches, bobbing for oranges, jumping in sacks and bun-eating were much in vogue, and were carried on with great vigour. Two bands were engaged to play quadrilles and country dances.

- Matthew Hathaway

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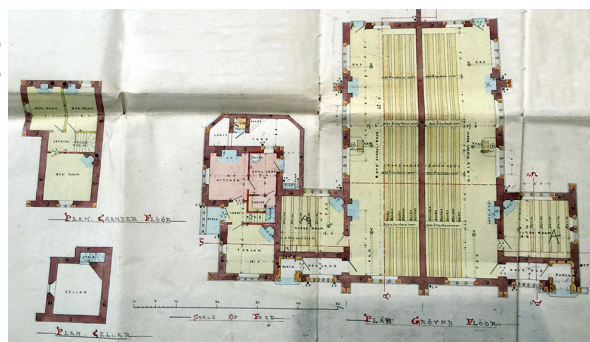
Dates For Your Diary

Tin Helmets & Gas Masks Talk
20th July - 7:30pm
see page 5

King's Sutton Countryside Walk
26th July

August Newsletter Submissions Deadline
31st July

Souldern Countryside Walk
6th September



Architects plans for the original school building - 1858

Marj's Memories When the Circus Came to Town

A circus came to Bicester, periodically. The Big Top was erected in Bell Field (now the area occupied by Bicester Community College and Brookside School). Years ago it was just a large field with a track to Highfield. Half-way along was a stile and a hedge that went across towards Bucknell Road. The path was used as a short-cut for Highfield people to get to Bicester, originally the Workhouse path.

When the large trailers arrived, curious children would go during the day to see the animals being cared for. We were allowed to stroke the elephants - I remember the feel of them - like sandpaper!

At the start of the performance, clowns appeared with red noses and baggy trousers doing such tricks as filling buckets with water that we thought would tip

over us from the end of a long pole, but somehow when the bucket tipped, confetti like paper showered us - not water.

The seating was all around in stages and everyone had a good view. Well groomed horses galloped around the ring, adorned with what looked like ostrich feathers near their ears and small bells jingling. Heavily made up girls in tutus danced on the flat part of the horses' backs as they galloped and men would jump at speed, from side to side of the horses. We saw lots of acts, such as lion tamers, elephants doing tricks, trapeze artists and tight rope walkers. To us in those days, it was a thrill and we didn't think of the cruelty aspect of wild animals being caged. The keepers were kind to them.

- Marjorie Dean MBE

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

7th July 1865

TRIP TO NUNEHAM PARK - On Tuesday last, most of the members of the Bicester Church Choir, with their affianced and other lady friends, had a trip to Nuneham Park by rail and pleasure boat. The funds to defray the expenses had been kindly collected among the parishioners by the vicar of the parish. The general management of the fete was under the care of Mr Charles Franklin, who arranged matters and catered well. There was a large muster of the choir, about fifty being present at the railway station in the morning. The immense baskets of provender and the barrel of ale that formed their personal luggage, showed that they meant to enjoy themselves.

The party had a very pleasant trip to and from Nuneham. They spent the day in eating and drinking, in singing and dancing, and in various rural games. There were present Mr, Mrs, and Miss Franklin. Mr and Mrs Scrivener, Mr and Mrs Benjamin Smith, Miss Chapman, Miss Ivens, Miss Neville, Miss M.A. Grimsley, Miss E. Grimsley, Miss Ayres, Miss Parker, Mrs Graham, Mr Ayres, Mr White, Mr Phillips, Mr Sibley, Mr W. Hitchman, Mr Stock, Mr W. Plant, Mr G. Plant, Mr H. Plant, Mr Webb, Mr Prior; Masters R. Graham, John Clarke, Thomas Renn, Horace Wheeler, William Malins, John Litten, Charles Wilson, Harry Elliott, Alfred Hitchman, Robert Bathe, Alfred Smith, Alfred Wood, Walter Wood, Samuel Wood, William Mallet, Arthur Watson, Alfred Franklin, Alfred Alley, James Alley, Joab Dawson and Richard Scrivener.

The whole party appeared to have thoroughly enjoyed

themselves; they seemed remarkably happy when they all arrived, (safe and sound,) at home by the last train, and, by token of the empty barrel, for there was no other evidence, had spent a merry day.

9th July 1915

ACCIDENT — On Tuesday Miss Green, of Blackthorn, who is ticket collector at the Bicester L. & W.Ry. Station, met with a mishap whilst riding her motor-bicycle. A dog got in the way of the machine and the rider was thrown violently to the ground. Besides being considerably shaken, Miss Green sustained injuries to her arm, for which she has had to receive surgical attention.

16th July 1965

SURVEY WILL FORM BASIS OF PLAN FOR BICESTER - The County Council have arranged to carry out a comprehensive traffic survey of Bicester which will start next week. Information obtained will provide a basis for future planning and perhaps a guide to some short term improvements of dangerous bottlenecks. Physical checks will be carried out on three days, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Traffic counting machines will be in operation.

In reply to a complaint about the dangers to pedestrians in the Causeway, the County Surveyor pointed out in a letter that it would be better to hold it over until the survey was completed. It was suggested, however, that, as a short term improvement, consideration will be given to making it a one-way street.

Member News

We were sorry to hear of the recent death of one of our members, Dr. Rosemary MacLeod. She had been a member of the Society for many years and was previously a member of the Bicester Local History Circle.

The First in the World.

The first craftsman in the world was a Tailor; for do we not read that Adam sewed fig leaves together? When speaking of Tailors the first that occurs to my mind is that highly-cultured craftsman MR. WALTER GEORGE. Did he not gain a MEDAL and DIPLOMA for EXCELLENCE as a TAILOR? Here's success to Walter!

Dark Blue for Ever.

Here is what Dark Blue thinks of MR. GEORGE, the BICESTER TAILOR:—

Leonard F. Robbins, Esq., of Oxford, in writing to MR. GEORGE, the BICESTER TAILOR, says: "I am very pleased with the whole of the Clothes which You made for me, and it will give me the greatest pleasure to recommend any good customer to you that I can."

Bravo, Oxford! MR. GEORGE finds a SATISFIED CUSTOMER, one of the best advertisements.

Adverts taken from the Bicester Advertiser - May 1915

Out & About

This year's two village walks have now taken place. Both were well attended with 21 members at the Souldern walk on the 14th June and 18 members at the King's Sutton walk on the 5th July.

The Souldern village walk (pictured) was led by Bob Hessian. It started off in the village hall, looking at a fabric representation of the village in the 1980s, and ended up at the Fox Inn for some delicious tea and sandwiches.

Also last month were the Marlborough trip, on the 24th June, which was just as successful as last year's one, and the Meadow Farm visit on the 28th June, which also drew considerable interest.

But still to come are the King's Sutton countryside walk, on Sunday 26th July and the Souldern countryside walk, which has been moved to Sunday 6th September.

- Matthew Hathaway



Roll of Honour

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

Sergeant Leslie Hamilton Paxton, of Mixbury.

Died: 12th July 1915

Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private Frederick John Wilson, of Upper Heyford.

Died: 16th July 1915

Aged: 18

Served in: Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars

Private William Arthur George Webb, of Goddington.

Died: 17th July 1915

Aged: 19

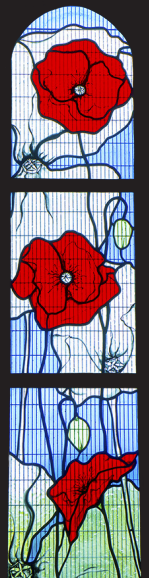
Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private Albert Edward Castle, of Launton.

Died: 30th July 1915

Aged: 27

Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry



Village History Blackthorn

The small village of Blackthorn lies just south of the A41, close to Ambrosden. The A41 lies on the old Akeman Street Roman road, which may explain the amount of Roman and Iron Age pottery that has been found in the area over the years.

In 1194 Blackthorn was recorded, with Ambrosden, as part of the honour of St. Valery (as mentioned last month about Beckley). As such, Blackthorn descended to Edmund, 2nd Earl of Cornwall, who, in 1288, gave Ambrosden (including Blackthorn) to Ashridge Priory, in Hertfordshire. The priory kept it until it was dissolved in 1539 during the Dissolution of the Monasteries, when it surrendered its lands to the Crown.

The Crown seems to have separated Blackthorn from Ambrosden and sold them off separately. Though John Denton, lord of one of the manors of Bicester, bought both of them: Ambrosden from Henry VIII's agents in 1542 and Blackthorn from Elizabeth I in 1564.

Blackthorn later passed to the

Nourse family of Woodeaton and, in 1636, Philippa Nourse and her son John conveyed Blackthorn to Edward Rudge.

Between 1706 and 1713 the manor changed hands three times and eventually it belonged to a Sebastian Smythe.

In 1752 Smythe left it to his daughter, Barbara Smythe of Cuddesdon, who, in 1787, left it to Sir John Whalley-Gardiner, 1st Baronet of Roche Court, Hampshire. Blackthorn then changed hands a number of times until, by the 1820s, Alderman Richard Cox of Oxford owned it and, in 1852, James Morrell, of the Morrells Brewery family, was lord of the manor.

Blackthorn is included in the Church of England parish of Ambrosden so doesn't have a church of its own. But in 1820 the Home Missionary Society did send a Congregationalist missionary to Blackthorn, who held services in the bakery. By 1844 the services were being held in someone's house until, in 1870, a chapel building was completed. The building was replaced by a new chapel in 1926, which was still being used for worship in 1944, but is now a



private house.

Stone Pits Farm is named after a quarry that supplied limestone for building. In the 1740s stone from here was used to build Ambrosden House for Sir Edward Turner, 2nd Baronet. In 1819 a brick and tile works was opened in the parish. Both the quarry and the brick works were still in business at the end of the 19th century, but were disused by 1957.

In 1910 the Great Western Railway created a new route from London to Birmingham by branching from the Great Central Railway route at Ashendon and linking with the GWR line at Aynho. The line passes within a few hundred yards of Blackthorn and crosses the A41 on a bridge just north of the village. The GWR opened Blackthorn railway station on the north side of the bridge but British Railways closed the station in 1953. The railway remains open as part of the Chiltern Main Line.

- Matthew Hathaway



Site of Blackthorn station, just off the road to Marsh Gibbon.

HAIR AIDS.
There is nothing better than Eugene Actogene Treatment
for hair that is out of condition.
 Perm Waving Supplies are now strictly rationed. Book your appointment well in advance.
 In the event of Daytime Raids we have ample accommodation in our Raid Shelter for any number of customers likely to be on the premises.
A. V. BOWNE,
 Hairdresser,
 BICESTER. Phone 59.

Support the
Red Cross Penny-a-week Scheme
 and
 Help our Wounded and Prisoners of War.
 Full Particulars from
 Miss M. Bonner,
 Henley House,
 Bicester.

Adverts taken from the Bicester Advertiser - April 1941

AGM

This year's Annual General Meeting will take place on Monday 21st September, just before Bill King's talk on **Industrial Archaeology in Your Shed, Garage or Attic**. Any items for the agenda or nominations of committee members need to be submitted to the Chairman, Bob Hessian, by Monday 7th September.

The first item of business will be to approve the minutes of last year's AGM. For those of you that are interested, those minutes are available on the website:

<http://www.blhs.org.uk/index.php?page=annual-general-meeting>

- Matthew Hathaway

Talks Update

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

Monday 20th July

Martin Way explores the work of the Home Front during World War 2 in his talk **Tin Helmets & Gas Masks**. Discussing the civilians' support for the military, the mobilisation of women, rationing etc. Illustrated with an array of interesting artefacts.

Monday 21st September

Bill King's talk about **Industrial Archaeology in your Shed, Garage or Attic** shows us how artefacts reveal, over a timescale of thousands of years, the development of culture and society through the use of materials and technologies.

Monday 19th October

Stephen Barker tells us about **Oxfordshire on the Home Front 1914-18**. Explaining the impact of the First World War on the county. Focusing on many aspects, from fundraising to munitions production and the influx of Belgian refugees.

Oxford's Victorian Entertainment Talk

The population of Oxford more than doubled in the first half of the 19th century, and almost doubled again during the second half. New jobs in factories, shops and offices gave rise to new opportunities for leisure and entertainment.

Bank holidays were introduced in 1871, the weekend was defined in 1879, and early closing took effect from 1896. This extra leisure time and better transport systems meant that people had more time for entertainment. Allied to an increase in real wages, the working and middle classes had regular leisure opportunities.

All these factors led to the development of a new "Rational Recreation" philosophy – the idea that leisure time should be spent in an improving manner.

Rational Recreation manifested itself in Oxford by the building of a number of venues and the formation of organisations to provide suitable entertainment.

An early example of these was Archibald McLaren's Gymnasium, built in 1858, which specialised in physical exercise. It had a central area open to the roof with a ventilating lantern, two-storey wings, a fencing school, and a 60-foot Norwegian climbing pole.

Another example was Oxford City Football Club, founded in 1882. They were Football Association Amateur Cup winners in 1906 and two years later an Amateur International match was hosted between England and Germany, attracting a crowd of over 4,000. Three Oxford City

players were in the England team which won 9-nil.

Temperance Clubs and hotels were more concerned with the ill effects of alcohol. It was noted in 1868 that in Oxford 30% more money was spent on drink than on food.

Other attractions were Charles Peel's Big Game Museum, displaying his collection of stuffed big game hunting trophies. St. Giles' Fair highlighted Collins' Helter Skelter, and at various times featured freak shows, boxers, female wrestlers, and a trapeze act. And in 1905 Mr Taylor's 'Royal Electric Coliseum' created a stir when it brought with it a Parisian organ illuminated by 1,000 miniature coloured electric lights.

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