



Bicester Historian



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The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society



Wishing all our members a
Merry Christmas
and Happy New Year
from the Editor and the Committee

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A Forest of Fairy Lights

This year's Christmas Tree Festival in St Edburg's Church was another great success for the St Edburg's Foundation. This was the fourth year that the parish church has played host to the event, which continues to grow year on year.

The event saw the majority of last year's contributors, like the Library, Headmasters, U3A and Acanthus Clews Architects, return with even more impressive displays, as well as a number of first time exhibitors.

It also proved to be another success for Bicester Local History Society. Following on from our traditional Christmas tree in 2013 and last year's World War One memorial



tree, we decided to take inspiration from our surroundings and go with a church theme for this year's tree. We decorated it with photographs of all the churches within the Society's area and bells inscribed with the inscriptions of some of the bells in those churches.

The Mayor, Councillor Jim French, opened the event on Friday 11th December and, judging from the photograph above, was suitably impressed with our efforts!

It's always an interesting and fun event to be involved with. As well as promoting the use of Bicester's oldest building it also provides an opportunity for us to promote the Society. We're already thinking up ideas for next year's display!

- Matthew Hathaway



The WW1 memorial tree in 2014



The traditional tree in 2013

Dates For Your Diary

Festive Social Event
21st December - 7:30pm
see page 5

January Newsletter Submissions Deadline
1st January

Beer, Sausages & Marmalade Talk
18th January - 7:30pm
see page 5

Volunteers Evening
8th February
see page 2

Marj's Memories

Church bells were never rung during war time, so in the late forties there was a paucity of young bell ringers. At that time, a young teacher in Bicester Secondary Modern School called Miss Joanna Chase, who was a devout Christian and a bell ringer, asked if anyone was interested in learning to ring church bells. I went along with several others in the hope of becoming a "campanologist". There's a lot more to bell ringing than most people think. It is pulling ropes, and you can "go up" if you don't let go at the right time.

Bicester church, at that time, had a peal of 8 bells and the older and skilful ringers were very pleased to pass on their knowledge. Harry Hatfield was the Captain of the Bells. The other ringers included: Cyril Kinch, Bill Baggett and his son Tony, Bert Crutchfield (later of AC Electricals) Eddie Smith, Buster Clifton, and Doggie Keyes (who always rang the tenor - a very heavy bell).

A few other children joined and learnt the "handling" of the bell, but to learn "change ringing" is a long process. My friend Ann Jones joined later and it became

Bell Ringing in St Edburg's Church

our much loved hobby. The Grandsire method can be rung on 6 bells (Grandsire doubles) or 8 bells (Grandsire triples). We often rang Grandsire Doubles (6 bells) and if more ringers were available, we rang Grandsire Triples. Harry Hatfield taught me the rudiments of change ringing with cards, from 1 to 8, on his kitchen table, and he was delighted with the outcome of that. There are many other methods besides Grandsire but that was the one I learnt with an insight into Plain Bob Major.

Many ringers visited from other towers; Fred Sharp from Launton, a brilliant man in all aspects of ringing; he tuned bells and would sometimes come over to our practice night. He, amazingly, rang two bells at one time. He also had a famous band of hand-bell ringers in Launton at that time.

Bell ringing outings took place periodically in various churches in our area. There would be ringing then a church service, ringing again, and then tea in the village hall. I rang in many locations, even out as far as Great Tew. They were lovely times – and much appreciated in my memories.

- Marjorie Dean MBE



Adverts taken from the Bicester Advertiser - December 1965

Volunteers Wanted

As all of you are aware the Society desperately needs help with its projects and administration.

There is a wide variety of jobs available, from scanning archive documents to advertising the monthly talks, as well as a number of research tasks.

It doesn't even need to be something you already know how to do. We're looking into providing training or workshops, particularly for the research tasks, so you

can take the opportunity to learn a new skill, something that could also help you with your own projects.

The committee has scheduled a volunteers evening on Monday 8th February at the Littlebury Hotel for anyone who wants to come along and find out more about what we need and how you can help. Its also an opportunity for you to approach us with any projects that you'd like to undertake with the Society's backing and assistance.

Roll of Honour

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

2nd Lieutenant Reginald Strickland, of Mixbury.

Died: 25th December 1915 Aged: 23 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry



Haunted Bicester Contributed by Esme Timms

Bicester Local History Society once organised a "Ghost Walk" and, like most old English towns, Bicester has its fair share of supposedly haunted houses, and my family lived in one.

Emlyn House, in Sheep Street, where the Sue Ryder charity shop and Nash's Bakery are now, was a large private house which we moved into when my father retired. I remember we were told that the "ghost" was an elderly servant

woman wearing a long black dress and white pinafore. Mother scoffed at this and said "she sounds just the sort to help me make the beds."

Subsequently, I was married from there and my late husband, Don, made the three attic rooms into a small flat.

We were woken up one night by a loud crash from the kitchen. After nervously deciding who should get up and investigate, I had to be brave not knowing what to encounter.

But, upon opening the kitchen door, this screeching cat shot out. It had obviously crept along the flat roof and through the open window, knocking down a saucepan!

We never did see the ghostly servant woman and I often think, when I pass Emlyn House, of all the lovely memories. I would love to visit our old attic flat and have a browse. It is said to be just a storage area now for those shops below.

- Esme Timms

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

8th December 1865

SUDDEN DEATH - We regret to have to record the death of Mr William Elliott, of Bicester, postman, who died suddenly on Sunday night last, aged fifty-seven years.

At the inquest which was held on Tuesday last, before W. Brunner, Esq., coroner, it appeared that the deceased lay down to rest on Sunday evening, in his usual health, when he shortly afterwards called out that he felt unable to lie on his left side, and, attempting to turn over to the other side, died immediately.

The jury returned a verdict to the effect that he "died suddenly and by the visitation of God".

31st December 1915

CHRISTMAS AT THE BICESTER RED CROSS HOSPITAL - Christmas Day was spent very happily amongst the inmates of the Bicester Red Cross Hospital, including both patients and nurses.

The various parts of the building were befittingly decorated, and everything made so cheerful that it was scarcely possible to realise the terrible happenings of the outside world.

After the usual preliminaries of Christmas morning the inmates and staff sat down to a sumptuous repast, everybody being on good terms with themselves and each other - "Good will towards men" being carried out to the letter. Dr Montgomery was present, and led the attack on the turkey, which was left an utter wreck. Other Christmas fare followed, including the indispensable plum pudding, and the men all feeling in fighting trim undertook their task with the greatest ease.

A truce followed, in the course of which the Commandant (Miss Hendriks) gave the toast of the Royal Family, which, needless to say, was loyally honoured. Other speeches were delivered by various patients at the hospital, Sergt. Murphy leading the way with the toast "The Allies and an early victory", which of course went down well. Next followed Sergt. Wilding, who gave "The wounded and fallen on all fronts", a toast which received every honour due to it. Sergt. Radford submitted "The Army and Navy", which met with a rousing reception.

Sergt. Wilkinson proposed a vote of thanks to the Matron, Commandant and staff in general for the way they had devoted most of their spare time in endeavouring to make Christmas appear as it should be. At the instance of Corpl. Lee three hearty cheers were given for Dr Montgomery for his kindness in visiting the

hospital during the dinner and assisting to give such an enjoyable time.

31st December 1965

ROUNDABOUT CHRISTMAS '65 - Christmas 1965 will be recorded as one of the biggest spending sprees ever, and in Bicester and district, as it was all over the country, jingle bells meant clanging tills.

On Christmas Eve when the shopping spree reached its climax, the Market Square was aglow with the coloured lights of the Rotary tree, and Father Christmas was very busy at the Round Table's annual enterprise collecting money which will be utilised on local charities throughout the year.

The Round Table's Father Christmas had already toured the villages. A total of 2,350 lucky dips were sold. After expenses, which included gifts and wrappings, a profit of about £125 is expected out of the £250 collected.

COINCIDENCE? - On Christmas Eve Bicester Police were investigating the theft of ten turkeys from Baxters (Butchers) Sheep Street, Bicester. Was it a coincidence? The week before it was reported that the same shop was entered and the intruders had overlooked the turkeys.

PARTIES - The usual Christmas parties were held and at the Bicester Garrison the 16 Bn. were hosts to a party of orphans.

Bicester Police Sub-Division children's party was held at the Bicester Police Station.

Marsh Gibbon Band played at the RAF Station, Bicester, and servicemen did a house-to-house collection. The money was contributed to Trueloves Home for Crippled Boys. Bicester RAF have "adopted" the home and as well as collection money they also take the boys on tours of RAF Stations and displays, usually ending with refreshments served by the officers and men.

IT WAS QUIET - Bicester Police report that it was a quiet Christmas and looking around it seemed the only mischevous revellers were one who broke the glass on the notice board outside the Magistrates' Court, and the one who was "escorted" from the Methodist Church to while away the wee small hours in a more suitable soundproof place.

In the local Churches Christmas Day services were well attended and despite the non-seasonal weather, here at least, the true meaning of Christmas was remembered from its humble beginnings and the sounds of Christmas carols echoed its full meaning.

Village History Chesterton

Chesterton is a village just outside Bicester. The village has sometimes been known as Great Chesterton, to distinguish it from the hamlet of Little Chesterton, which lies to the south in the same parish. The 2011 Census recorded the parish population as 850.

The village is located on the course of Akeman Street, the Roman road between Watling Street and Cirencester, about 1 mile north-west of the site of the Roman settlement at Alchester. When the M40 motorway was extended from Wheatley to Birmingham in the late 1980s, the motorway cut through Akeman Street just to the west of the village. The Roman layers of the road were exposed about 2.6 feet below the modern surface. The Romans had metalled the road with brashy subsoil quarried from roadside ditches, had subsequently patched the surface, and finally resurfaced the road over a layer of 8 inches of soil and detritus.

Chesterton had a watermill since before the Norman Conquest, and by the time of the Hundred Rolls in 1279 a second had been built. Presumably the mills were on Gagle Brook. One mill survived until early in the 19th century, and for a time had been converted into a hemp



Chesterton Lodge, now Bruern Abbey Preparatory School

mill. Chesterton's vicar of that time complained that despite the Duke of Marlborough having spent much money trying to improve the mill it was not working well. The vicar may have been correct, for in 1822 it was closed down.

Just before the Norman conquest the manor of Chesterton was held by Wigod, a Saxon Thegn who was a kinsman of King Edward the Confessor. The Domesday Book records that by 1086 it was held by Miles Crispin, the son-in-law of Robert D'Oyly. Crispin had connections with Wallingford Castle, and Chesterton remained part of the feudal Honour of Wallingford until the 13th century. In 1272 it was sold to Edmund, 2nd Earl of Cornwall who founded Ashridge Priory in Hertfordshire in 1283 and granted the manor of Chesterton to the priory in 1285. Ashridge Priory was suppressed in the Dissolution of the Monasteries and in 1540 Sir Thomas Pope bought the manor of Chesterton from the Crown.

There was a mansion at the south-east end of the village by the early part of the 18th century. It was improved in the middle of the 18th century, and its

grounds were extended for George Clarke, Sheriff of Oxfordshire, by diverting part of Akeman Street. By 1823 it was the principal house in Chesterton and Clarke's son lived there for many years. But by 1887 the house was unoccupied and in 1889 it was replaced by a new Italianate house (pictured) built for Henry Tubb, a banker in Bicester. By 1939 the Royal Exchange Assurance Corporation owned the house, but by 1955 it had passed to Audley House mixed preparatory school and it is now home to Bruern Abbey Preparatory School.

The oldest part of the parish church of Saint Mary is a 12th-century arcade of three arches between the nave and the north aisle. The arcade is in the Transitional style between Norman and Early English Gothic. The church was rebuilt in the 13th century and reconsecrated in 1238. The chancel arch and arcade of the south aisle date from this period. The Decorated Gothic bell tower was added in the early 14th century. In 1852 the chancel's east window was replaced with a four-light Decorated Gothic one, and in 1854 the chancel arch was restored. In 1866 the architect F.C. Penrose restored much of the building, including the windows in the south aisle and some of those in the north aisle. He also added a turret staircase to the tower.



The tower and west end of the parish church of St Mary

- Matthew Hathaway

Talks Update

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

Monday 21st December

We round off 2015 with a **festive social event.**

Monday 18th January

Liz Woolley tells us about **Beer, Sausages & Marmalade.** Explaining how Oxford became well-known for its 'Celebrated Oxford Sausages' and for Frank Cooper's 'Oxford Marmalade'. Examining the link between food production, tourism and politics.

Monday 15th February

Alan Simpson gives us advice about **Exploring your Roots.** An introduction to the techniques used to research your ancestry. It will provide something of interest both to beginners and to those who have already done some research into their family history.

Putting Bicester on the Map Talk

For our November talk John Leighfield successfully managed to enthuse us all with the history of maps, and to engage us completely by showing how Bicester was depicted on maps over the centuries.

We were introduced to an array of notable map-makers. The first was Gough, who in c. 1360 produced a manuscript map of the British Isles (now in the Bodleian Library). This map is remarkably accurate as far as its depiction of England, and with its roads, pathways, and towns could still be used to navigate today.

However, it was the 16th Century which marked a map-making revolution. This was fuelled by three key factors. First, the arrival of printing presses. Second, the fear of military threats (much of the south coast had been mapped under orders of Henry VIII in fear of the Armada). Third, the advancement of 'surveying'. With the dissolution of the monasteries, Henry VIII was keen for his lands to be surveyed. This led to a number of people becoming skilled at surveying and map-making. Most notable of all was Christopher Saxton, who is recognized today as the

founder of map-making in Britain.

Saxton was a Yorkshireman, born in about 1542. His patron was Thomas Seckford, Master of the Court of Appeals and Surveyor of the Court of Wards and Liveries. It was Seckford's money, together with the authority of Queen Elizabeth I, that led in 1579 to the publication of one of the first regional atlases of any country in the world.

From the early 1570s Saxton travelled around England and Wales, surveying and drawing all the counties. To produce his maps, Saxton used a compass and other equipment, including a wheel measure, chains (each chain measured 22 yards), and surveying instruments. Interestingly, roads weren't included on the maps since they weren't deemed important enough, however rivers did feature.

John's talk was given in support of Helen & Douglas House Hospice, and excellent detailed (localized) hand-outs were supplied to the audience.

- Sally Dexter

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