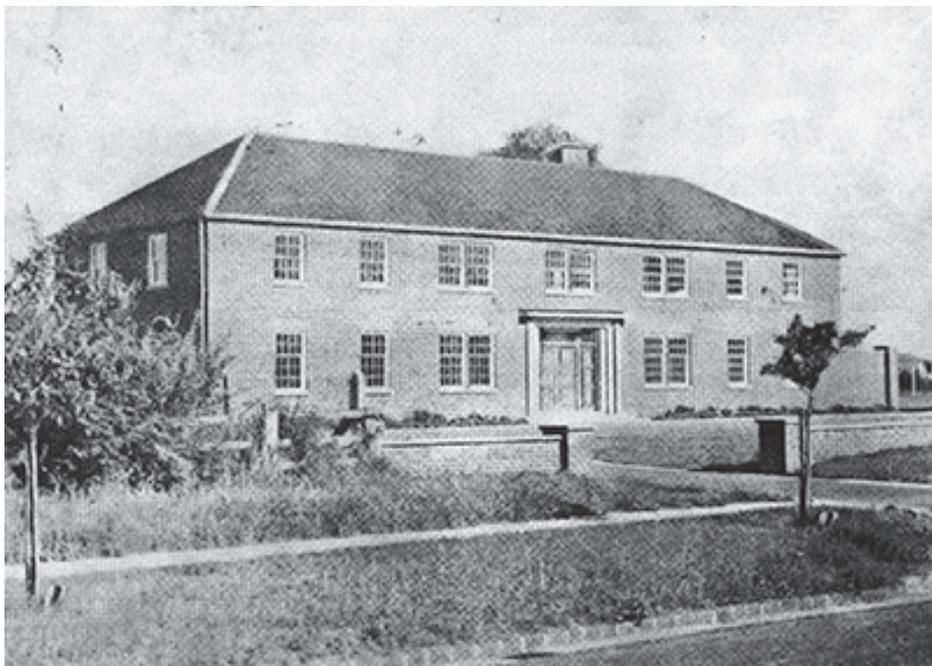




## Law and Order



Waverley House - 1957

Curiosity and concern is rising over the future of the magistrates court site on Queen's Avenue. Since its announced closure no firm plans for the site have been revealed by the Ministry of Justice and, although the town council believes that there is a long-standing covenant on the site, dating back to its original purchase in the 1950s, which says only public service buildings should go there, people still fear that it will be given over to yet more housing.

Back in the 1950s Ploughley Rural District Council tried to buy Bicester House from the Coker family to move all its offices, scattered around the town, under one roof. Talks for the purchase of the house fell through but the Council were able to purchase land on Queen's

Avenue instead. There they built Waverley House to accommodate their offices, which was opened in 1957.

The Rural District Council was amalgamated into Cherwell District Council in 1974 so the building passed into their hands, and shortly after the courthouse in Church Street was closed down and the magistrates court was moved into Waverley House as well.

It remained there until the present day. But, as more and more cases were moved out to Banbury and Oxford magistrates courts, the Bicester court had not been used for criminal cases since 2013, and the two cells were decommissioned in 2010.

Our chairman, Bob Hessian, is quoted in the Bicester Advertiser as saying: "In the 1970s it was felt necessary to have proper facilities to run a magistrates court to cope with the increasing population of Bicester. Yet in 2017, with an even bigger projected increase in the local population, it is deemed unnecessary to have such a facility - is this because Bicester residents are more law abiding than their predecessors?"

- Matthew Hathaway



The Old Courthouse in Church Street

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### Dates For Your Diary

Potted Histories at Bicester Library  
18th March

Oxfordshire Castles Talk  
20th March - 7:30pm  
see page 7

April Newsletter Submissions  
Deadline 31st March

April Talk  
24th April - 7:30pm  
see page 7

### AVAILABLE NOW!

Our new DVD, **Bicester's Buildings**, is on sale now.

See the website for more details.



And our 2017 Calendar is still available through Coles Bookstore.



# Village History Lower Heyford

Lower Heyford is a village on the banks of the River Cherwell, about 6 miles west of Bicester.

The Domesday Book of 1086 records the village as *Hegford*. The toponym evolved as *Heiford* until the middle of the 13th century, *Heyford ad Pontem* after the bridge was built, *Heyford Purcell* since the middle of the 14th century, *Nether Heyford* after 1474, and sometimes *Little Heyford*. “Lower” distinguishes it from Upper Heyford which is about 1 mile upstream along the Cherwell valley. There are both a Nether Heyford and a Little Heyford in Northamptonshire, so the current “Lower Heyford” reduces confusion.

Aves Ditch, also known as Ash Bank or Wattle Bank, is a 3 mile long pre-Saxon ditch and bank structure on a northeast to southwest alignment. It is believed to have been used as both a Roman boundary dyke and an Anglo-Saxon field boundary. It now forms the boundary between the civil parishes of Lower Heyford and Middleton Stony.

Before the Norman Conquest of England the manor belonged to Edwin, the son of a Saxon thegn. William the Conqueror granted the land to the powerful Geoffrey de Montbray, bishop of Coutances. The manor then passed through various hands until 1533 when Sir Edward Baynton sold it to Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Corpus Christi College still owned the estate in the 1950s.

Wufwig, Bishop of Dorchester, consecrated a parish church at Lower Heyford in the 11th century. The current Church of England parish church of Saint Mary was first built in the 13th century, then rebuilt

in the Decorated Gothic style in the first half of the 14th century. The Perpendicular Gothic clerestory and south porch were added later. The building underwent a Victorian restoration in 1867–68.

In the reign of Edward VI the church tower had a ring of four bells. It now has a ring of six, of which the second and fourth were cast in 1766 by Matthew III Bagley of Chacombe, Northamptonshire. W&J Taylor cast the fifth bell in 1825, possibly at their foundry in Oxford. Mears and Stainbank of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry cast the tenor bell in 1867 and the treble and third bells in 1925.

The church is said to have had a 17th-century clock that was made in 1695 and removed during its Victorian restoration.

In the latter part of the 17th century Lower Heyford had a Quaker congregation. There was also a Methodist congregation by 1804, which soon had a chapel in the village and eventually became part of the United Methodist Church. A new chapel was built in 1906 and was still used for worship in 1955, but it has since become a private house.

In the Middle Ages Lower and Upper Heyford had two watermills on the River Cherwell. One of which was still in use in 1858.

There has been a bridge over the River Cherwell at Lower Heyford since at least 1255. The present bridge has nine arches and was noted by the early 16th-century antiquary John Leland. In the 1970s Jennifer Sherwood dated part of it to the 13th century, and its north side to either the 15th or 16th century. However, English Heritage dates the earliest parts of the present bridge to the 14th century, its alterations to the 17th century, and its widening to the 19th century. The bridge is a Grade II\* listed building and forms an important part of the view from the adjacent historic landscape garden of Rousham House.

In 1797 the road between Bicester and Enstone was made into a turnpike. Lower Heyford had two toll-gates: one at Heyford Bridge



St Mary's Church

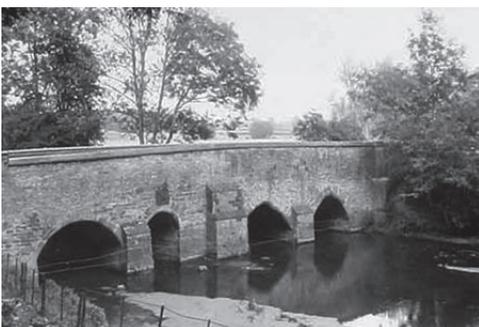
and the other at the east end of the village. The road was disturnpiked in 1876, it is now the B4030 road and Heyford Bridge continues to carry its traffic.

The stretch of the Oxford Canal between Banbury and Tackley was completed in 1787. It runs along the Cherwell valley and bounds Lower Heyford on its north and west sides. Coal mined in Leicestershire and Warwickshire was unloaded on Heyford Wharf at Lower Heyford and distributed throughout the local area. Coal was sent via the turnpike road to Bicester until 1850 when the Buckinghamshire Railway linked Bicester to Bletchley on the London and North Western Railway and coal was able to be brought in that way instead.

Construction of the Oxford and Rugby Railway between Oxford and Banbury began in 1845. By the time the line opened the Great Western Railway had taken it over. In Lower Heyford the railway runs parallel with the canal on the west side. The GWR opened Heyford railway station at Lower Heyford in 1850. The route is now the Cherwell Valley Line and Heyford station is served by First Great Western trains.

In 1808 the village had two dame schools, and by 1833 there were three more formal schools. A National School was opened in 1867. In a reorganisation of schools in 1932 the National School became a junior school and senior pupils from Lower Heyford had to go to Steeple Aston. Lower Heyford school became a Church of England controlled school in 1952. It then closed in 1974 and is now a private house.

- Matthew Hathaway



Heyford Bridge

## 7th March 1863

THE HEYFORD MURDER - Noah Austin, 26, butcher, was indicted for the wilful murder of James Allen, at Upper Heyford. Mr Davis and Mr Sawyer were for the prosecution, and Mr Hill for the defence. The prisoner on being placed at the bar, pleaded "not guilty" in a loud and firm voice.

The evidence was nearly the same as that given at the Coroner's inquest, and before the Magistrates at Bicester. After which Mr Stavely Hill addressed the Jury for the defence, in a speech of nearly two hours' duration, contending that the original story told by the prisoner was after all both consistent in itself, and more probable than the theory of the prosecution. It was, he said, more likely that the prisoner's statement, to which he all along consistently adhered, was correct, and that the bloody deed was really done by some prowling cracksmen, who suspecting that Mr Allen had some money about him, had availed themselves of the loneliness of the road at the place to murder and rob him, rather than that the prisoner himself should have committed a motiveless crime.

The learned counsel went seriatim through the leading points of the prosecution, particularly adverting to the circumstances connected with the purse, key, and pistol, and maintaining that none of those points were really inconsistent with the prisoner's innocence or with the more probable version of the transaction he had given to the police.

He remarked upon the stupidity and folly, supposing the theory for the prosecution was correct, which the prisoner displayed on some points compared with the cleverness imputed to him on others, and concluded by entreating the Jury before finding him guilty, to weigh well all the facts in his favour, and beware lest at some future day, the real culprit was brought to light, they might have given his client, unjustly condemned reason to say "I too was a murdered man."

Mr Justice Crompton, having gone through a careful analysis of the evidence heard, the jury, without hesitation, found the prisoner, Noah Austin, guilty of the murder of James Allen. The learned judge passed sentence of death, holding out no hope of mercy. The prisoner, who was totally unmoved, left the bar without remark.

## 10th March 1905

THE PROPOSED NEW RAILWAY - The clerk, at the Rural District Council meeting, produced a list of the proposed requirements of the committee appointed by the Council as to certain matters in connection with the proposed extension of the Great Western Railway, which passes through the Rural District from Souldern to Piddington.

They consisted of as follows:

Souldern: That the proposed new road gradient shall not be less than one in thirty. That the height of the proposed bridge shall be such as to leave a clear 16ft, for the reason that traffic from and to the canal leads off from main roads where bridges are to be 16ft, and that 16ft is required to take the loads of an agricultural district. The width suggested by the company is considered sufficient. That a bridge be constructed over the path

from Somerton to Souldern, or otherwise the path be conveniently diverted.

Fritwell: That a footbridge be provided for the two paths from Fritwell to Somerton. That a footbridge be provided for the path from Fritwell to Troy Farm. That on the road from Fritwell to Middleton the gradient be not less than one in thirty for the reason that one in twenty, as suggested by the Company, is unduly severe in an agricultural district.

Ardley: That the gradient on the main road from Ardley to Somerton be not less than one in thirty. The Company have made suitable provision for the district road from Ardley to Ballard's Furze. That a bridge or bridges be provided for the bridle roads from Ardley Wood to Scotland Barn. The main road appears to be satisfactorily provided for. That the Company be required to make due provision for the bridle road close to the boundary of Ardley and Bucknell.

Bucknell: That on the road from Bucknell to Middleton the gradient be not less than one in thirty, and the width of the bridge to be 20ft at least to carry road over railway. That the Company's attention be drawn to the footpath from Bucknell to Grunthill Copse with a view to its being duly provided for.

Launton: That the Company be required to make provision for the continued use of the paths from Bicester and Wretchwick to Launton.

Blackthorn: That the bridle road leading from the main road at Blackthorn Hill to Launton must be provided for. That the bridge over the district road be 20ft wide at least. That at the crossroads the Company be required to furnish more information as to how it is proposed to construct the bridge, that the Council may judge of its exact position. That a subway be provided for the path from Essex Farm to Blackthorn.

Piddington: The Committee cannot approve of the Company's proposal with regard to the road from Heath Bridge to Piddington; that the alteration would cause a very awkward corner, that the Company be required to suggest a more convenient method. That the Company be required to provide for the continued use of the footpath alongside this road.

The Clerk reported that since the Committee met he had seen the solicitor and engineer to the Company and had gone through the report with them. They had promised to meet the Council in every way possible, but they could not promise to make a gradient of one in thirty only in a small minority of cases. It might be possible to make a gradient of one in twenty-five, and if such was convenient they would do it; otherwise the gradient would have to be one in twenty, as allowed by the Railway Clauses Consolidation Act. The height of the bridges would be fifteen feet. The County Council had already decided through Lord Valentia and Mr Stallard with regard to the main roads over which the railway would be laid.

The matter was adjourned.

## 14th March 1947

THE WINTER OF 1947 - This winter will surely go down in history as one of the worst ever, and March of this year will be especially remembered for its frosts and blizzards,

and particularly its snow.

Rarely, if ever, have so many villages and isolated places been snowbound for such a length of time, and even now some districts in the neighbourhood are not completely cleared. I should imagine that the County Council employees are heartily sick of the sight of snow and ice. Mr C.H. Gander, divisional surveyor, had to mobilise all his employees and others as well in snow clearing, and they have been engaged in this task daily in various parts of the district.

On the morning of Wednesday in last week, the County Surveyor, Mr G.T. Bennett, had a message broadcast by the BBC to all chairmen of parish councils and policemen in snowbound areas to organise working parties to dig a way through the snow, the cost of such labour to be borne by the County Council. Throughout Thursday, Mr Gander was inundated with appeals for help from marooned villages, and no less than 300 volunteers, the majority being employees of local building contractors stood off from their own work, were engaged in the work of snow clearing. Employees of Messrs Aubrey Watson & Sons assisted in the task of clearing a way through to Chipping Norton, which had become completely cut off by snow drifts. The narrow thoroughfares of Bicester were cleared on Saturday.

Mr Gander tells me that through the kind efforts of Lt. Col. T.J. Powell, and with the able assistance of Capt. T.W.C. Mogeridge, No.9 R.E.M.E. Headquarters built a plough, which was attached to a Canadian ram tank. This set off Monday, with Mr J. Holding, assistant divisional surveyor, as "pathfinder", and cut a way through Launton, thence to Stratton Audley, and on to marooned Godington. Drifts of six to seven feet in depth were encountered, but in three hours the tank had cleared a way through to these villages.

A full day's work was performed on Tuesday, and the route was to Bucknell, Ardley, Somerton, Upper Heyford, Fritwell, Fewcott, Souldern, Tusmore Park, Cottisford, Mixbury, and on to the Banbury-Buckingham Road. Other lengths cleared included a portion of the Oxford-Brackley Road to Stoke Lyne, where snow was on a level with the hedge tops.

After this extraordinary run, the tank was stopped for repairs to the snow plough, which was bent by forcible

contact with solid ice of four-inch thickness on the roads. We understand that the Bicester-Thame Road, up to the county boundary line, was still blocked yesterday.

### 17th March 1989

NEW LOOK BARBER: WHERE WERE THE CONSERVATIONISTS? - Getting a trim, a short back and sides, or a more complicated grooming, will not be quite the same any more at Tony Bowne's barber's shop in Bicester Market Square.

After decades of being a comfortable, if slightly shabby, backroom to the brighter and smarter perfumery shop at the front, the salon has been transformed.

Gone are the squeaky and squashy old coach seats, the wallpaper decorated with guardsmen on horseback and the old lino flooring that admittedly had seen better days.

In place of the distinctly masculine and somewhat down-at-heel decor, there is white paint, arty light grey paint (even on the hairbrush steriliser) and the floor is an eye-piercing black and white diamond patterned lino.

The only compensations are that two of the Sweeney Todd type barber's chairs remain and Tony's daughter, Sarah, is still in charge of the hairdressing in succession to her aunt, Dot Knight, who retired not so long ago.

When we expressed dismay at the changed atmosphere of the salon, we were told that everyone has to move with the times.

It did not go unrecognised, though, that the changes were wrought while Tony's back was turned when he had a short spell in hospital.

Incidentally, we were told that those comfy coach seats were rescued years ago from an old charabanc that was being consigned to gipsies. When they were being thrown out to make way for tiny steel chairs - of the kind that look as if you will miss them as you bend to sit - they were unwanted by a coach museum at Hanborough, near Witney.

Simon Stone's view is: "Where were our conservation-minded councillors when this desecration was being wrought in the midst of Bicester's conservation area? Perhaps they were all too busy counting the trees in the gardens of Bicester House."

## Marj's Memories

### The Eisteddfod

The Bicester Methodist Sunday School classes took place every Sunday in the Wesley Hall, now the furniture store, Home Comforts; the chapel type windows can still be seen.

This anthem was often sung in Sunday School:

We all unite to hail  
Our Sunday School  
Against time it does prevail  
Our Sunday School  
Bicester's most happy throng  
Its great work will be our song  
God bless and keep it strong  
Our Sunday School

Many activities took place in the hall and many outside such as: The Red Rhythmics, a harmonica band that was, at the time, of national fame; a well-supported swimming club and more. In the forties I remember that an Eisteddfod was held. Competitions varying from singing, recitations, sewing, poetry, handwriting and more, took place.

The hall was crowded and the tables were covered with various exhibits and people came from the surrounding villages to take part.

Just inside the door, on the right was a type of kiosk and for a sum of money anyone could go and make a gramophone record. I remember a friend of mine going in and singing away - I wonder if she still has the record!

- Marjorie Dean MBE

# Roll of Honour

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

**Gunner Harry Eaves**, of The Turner's Arms, Ambrosden.

Died: 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1917      Aged: 33      Served in: Royal Field Artillery

**Private John Henry Cox**, of Stratton Audley.

Died: 4<sup>th</sup> March 1917      Aged: 24      Served in: Royal Scots

**Private Alfred William Stanton**, of Horton-cum-Studley.

Died: 13<sup>th</sup> March 1917      Aged: 24      Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

**Stoker George Moore Day**, of Souldern.

Died: 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1917      Aged: 36      Served in: Royal Navy - HMS Laforey

**Lance Corporal Sidney Arthur Hopcraft**, of Blackthorn.

Died: 29<sup>th</sup> March 1917      Aged: 23      Served in: Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars

**Private Joseph Markham**, of Blackthorn.

Died: 30<sup>th</sup> March 1917      Aged: 18      Served in: Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars



## The Heyford Murder

*For those of you interested in knowing what happened following the 1863 article in this month's 'Bygone Bicester' (see page 3), the Bicester Advertiser ran two pieces on the 21st March 1863 which conclude the story. Although there are still a few tantalising details left to the imagination.*

**AUSTIN'S CONFESSION** - On Wednesday week, Noah Austin, when in the condemned cell at Oxford Caste, made a voluntary confession in presence of the Rev. Phillip Wynter, D.D., the visiting Justice.

He said: I did not buy the pistol with the intention of shooting Mr Allen. On Wednesday, the 11th of February, Mr Allen had behaved ill to his daughter, by turning her out of doors. She sent for me on the following morning, and after telling me of her treatment said she wished some accident would happen to him. I said "I will see, but we shall be found out." She said "Oh, no, we shall not, be sure you come down in the evening and arrange it." My impression was that she wished her father to be got rid of.

I went to the mill again on Thursday evening, and saw Miss Allen. More words passed between us, but I do not remember exactly what they

were. Her father then came in tipsy, and I felt anxious to avoid a quarrel, as when he was in that state he could not say anything against me bad enough.

I felt sure that Miss Allen wished me to get rid of the father, and I left the mill with the intention of carrying out what I believed to be her wishes; but I do not think she knew that I should do so the next day, though I am sure she knew that I should do so at some time. I then determined to go to Bicester the next day with my father for the purpose.

I carried the pistol in my pocket. I could not have done it unless I had had some drink. I went to a strange place in Bicester, that I might not be known, either the King's Head or the Nag's Head, and had about two glasses of strong beer, and then returned with Mr Allen.

When sitting by his side I raised the pistol to his cheek, and fired the first shot, which caused him at once to fall on the off side of the cart. While he was falling I fired the other shot, and when he was lying on the ground I took the purse out of his pocket. There were only a few shillings in it, I knew he had the five-pound note in his pocket and the cheque, but I did

not want his money. I took the purse to make it appear that he had been robbed as well as murdered.

I tied the horse to a gate, as stated in the evidence, and on the way to the mill I placed the pistol in my father's gig, and then went to my sister's room, and put the purse in the place where it was found by the police.

I make this statement to ease the mind of my poor afflicted father, to whom I have caused so much sorrow, and believing that there was no hope of forgiveness from God, without confessing to man that I so grievously injured.

**EXECUTION OF NOAH AUSTIN** - The unhappy perpetrator of the terrible tragedy at Upper Heyford, paid the last dread penalty of the law for his crime, on Tuesday morning.

The prisoner slept from ten o'clock on Monday night until three o'clock on Tuesday morning. He slept a short time and arose at six refreshed and in good spirits. He had breakfast before the arrival of the Chaplain and Mr Rogers.

As eight o'clock approached, the looks of the crowd began to be directed towards the apparatus of doom, which with its ugly crossbeams

and treacherous platform occupied the space immediately above the great door which leads into the interior of the gaol. About a quarter to eight, the first dismal note of the prison bell proclaimed that the career of Noah Austin was fast drawing to its ignominious close, and that but a few short minutes intervened for the murderer between this life and the secrets of the life to come. The dismal sound of the death-knell hushed the crowd at once to silence, and all eyes were turned to the scaffold.

Not long were the spectators now kept waiting. The prisoner had been delivered up by the acting Governor to the proper authorities, with whom rest the execution of the sentence of the law. Prior to this he had been attended in his cell by the Rev. J. Thorpe, the Prison Chaplain, and the Rev. W.R. Rogers, one of the Wesleyan Ministers of Oxford, by the former of whom the Sacrament was administered to him.

The sacred rite over, the prisoner was conducted to what is called the press-room, where he was pinioned by the executioner, the well-known Calcraft. Up to this period Noah Austin, we are informed, maintained much the same calm, stolid, unmoved demeanour which he had displayed during his trial, and also during the preliminary proceedings before the Coroner. At the touch of the hangman, however, this calmness at once quitted the condemned. He burst into tears, and as the gloomy procession in which he formed the principal object made its appearance upon the scaffold, the apparently hardened Noah Austin seemed scarcely able to support himself, and had he not been held up during the few moments in which Calcraft adjusted the noose, and strapped his legs, would evidently have fallen prostrate upon the fatal platform.

The prisoner was attired in

the same grey clothes he wore at the inquest and at the trial. The executioner was not long over his work. Quickly did he pull over the murderer's face the hideous white cap, and fit the deadly knot under the ear, and then hurriedly shaking the hand of the trembling wretch, vanished to draw the bolt of the deadly drop, and after two or three convulsive struggles, Noah Austin hung a lifeless corpse, his hand still grasping in the rigidity of death a red handkerchief, which was in it the time of ascending the scaffold.

The body after hanging the usual time, an object of horrible fascination to the beholders, was cut down and interred within the precincts of the gaol, in conformity with the terms of the sentence. The crowd, which up to the last moment continued to fill the prison yard, and obstruct the outside thoroughfare of the street, then rapidly dispersed.

## Esme Nicholson (1929 - 2017)

We are sorry to report that one of our longest serving members, Esme Nicholson, died at the end of January. A memorial service was held in St. Peter's Church, Bucknell, in February – the church was packed.

Esme studied history at university and later qualified as a teacher. Between 1955 and 1962 she taught at the Annie Walsh Memorial School in Freetown, Sierra Leone. She became a patron of the school and kept in touch with staff and pupils long after she left. So much so that it was rather moving to have a group of ladies from the school singing the school song during the service.

She married Michael Nicholson from Manor Farm, Bucknell, in 1985. She had been a close friend of Marian, Michael's first wife, and was readily accepted by the rest of Michael's family. Esme was very active in village, church and community projects – working for the local Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Christian Aid Charity. Michael died in 2009 and Esme went to live at Saxon Court, Bicester.

Esme was very quick to point out any "irregularities" in how we ran the Society AGM, but she also had a sharp sense of humour. She



joked with a friend a few weeks before she died saying that her late husband would be in a quandary soon because he would have both his wives up there with him and would have to walk around with one on each arm!

And a final quote from Esme – "I'm not afraid of dying, but I am afraid of being dead."

Dear Esme – R.I.P.

- Bob Hessian

## Talks Update

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

### Monday 20th March

Trevor Rowley talks to us about  
**Oxfordshire Castles.**

### Monday 24th April

This talk is still to be announced.

### Monday 15th May

Liz Woolley returns once again to explain to us about **Local History and How to do it.**

## Library Events

### New Library Display

The Society has always had a good rapport with the County Museum Service, whether it's through participation in the 'Oxfordshire in 50 Objects' exhibition last year (celebrating 50 years of the Service), or providing volunteers to help at the Resource Centre at Standlake, to name just two instances. The Museum Store at Standlake holds a wealth of material related to Bicester and Oxfordshire but they don't have the facilities of letting the public see the items.

We were approached by the Centre a few weeks ago and asked if we could display some of the Bicester

items in our display cabinets in the library (pictured below). These went on display on the 18th March and will be there for at least a month. There is a broad selection of items from the stone age to the 20th century.

The Museum Service held a special family event on the day, encouraging families and children to learn more about local history. We were involved with this event too, giving talks (pictured above) about the artefacts on display. It also gave us an opportunity to use our two new banners, one of which is about the society itself



and the other features a timeline of key events in Bicester's history.

### The Watlington Hoard

This hoard, a collection of silver ingots, coins and jewellery, was found by a metal detectorist in a field near Watlington in 2015. It dates back to the time of Alfred the Great.

It has recently been on display at the County Museum, Woodstock, but will be coming to Bicester library for one day only in May. There will also be a lecture on the hoard by a member of the Ashmolean Museum. More on this next month.

- Bob Hessian



## Committee & Contacts

### Editor:

Matthew Hathaway  
[mathat298@gmail.com](mailto:mathat298@gmail.com)  
01869 246530

### Committee Members:

Bob Hessian (*Chairman*)  
[info@blhs.org.uk](mailto:info@blhs.org.uk)  
01869 350662  
Sally James (*Treasurer*)  
01869 243804  
Sally Dexter (*Minutes Secretary*)  
John Roberts (*Membership Officer*)  
Peter Crook  
Matthew Hathaway

### Meetings Address:

The Clifton Centre  
Ashdene Road  
Bicester  
OX26 2BH

### Postal Address:

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

### Website:

[www.blhs.org.uk](http://www.blhs.org.uk)