

Marj's Memories St Edburg's Hall

The old St Edburg's Hall, at the junction of Priory Road and London Road, is still a lovely-looking building. During the war it was a hive of activity where military men and local girls went dancing and many romances bloomed in there.

My uncle, Arthur Ayris, was killed in Belgium, in 1940, fighting the rearguard action, holding back the enemy for the troops to get back to Dunkirk. The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry was placed along a canal in Comines. (There is a memorial with the details by the canal). They held back the enemy for three days and only a few survived.

His widow was in her twenties with a small baby. My mother, after some time, although heartbroken at the loss of her young brother, persuaded his widow to go to a dance in St Edburg's Hall, and that's how she met and married my new uncle. I'm sure there are other similar stories of couples who met in the hall.

When I was a teenager the hall was used as a youth club. It was very basic, floor boards and not much equipment. I think there was a billiard table and we



played table tennis. Occasionally we had a dance, but no-one in the small youth club could dance anyway and the old wind-up gramophone wasn't the kind of music they must have had in war-time. I guess they would have had a live band. If our predecessors could have seen us, how they would laugh. I'm sure they had so much more style and much better music.

- Marjorie Dean MBE

Bygone Bicester (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

10th October 1863

FIRE AT ARDLEY - On Sunday afternoon about one o'clock, a fire broke out in the farm of Mr B. Millington, of Ardley. It was discovered by the foremen, and was found to be two ricks of pease on fire, evidently the work of an incendiary.

Strenuous efforts were at once made to keep the fire from spreading. A messenger was sent to Bicester for the engines.

The flames were favourably blown by the wind away from the corn stacks in the rick yard, otherwise the fire must have spread much further as the supply of water was very scant. The engines did not arrive in time to be of service in saving any portion of the pease ricks, but were of service in getting the embers thoroughly extinguished, and so putting an end to further danger.

A tramp, who said his name was Thomson, was taken into custody, while the fire was raging, on suspicion of having caused the conflagration. He had applied at the foreman's house for alms, and relief had been given to him. Very soon after he left, the fire was discovered. He was followed and taken into custody at Middleton, and was brought before the magistrates at Bicester, where on his own confession, of having set fire to the ricks, he was committed for trial at the ensuing assizes.

The property destroyed amounts to about £300, but we are glad to hear that Mr Millington is insured.

27th October 1905

C.L.B. TEA AND ENTERTAINMENT - On Tuesday evening last, instead of the usual drill and gymnastics, the officers and lads of the Bicester company of the Church Lads Brigade were invited to a tea and entertainment in St Edburg's Hall, by the assistant chaplain, the Rev. C.J.N. Page, on the occasion of his birthday.

The room was gaily festooned with flags and bunting, while the tables, upon which goodly repast was spread, were temptingly decorated with pots of flowers and ferns. The wants of the lads were ably attended to by Mrs Hunt, Mrs Timberlake and Mrs Wesker.

After the lads had done full justice to the good things provided, the Rev. G.P. Crawford said that the occasion was a very eventful one for Mr Page, who was quickly growing an old man. It was very kind of him to invite them there that evening, and he (the vicar) was sure he was speaking for the whole company when he said that Mr Page was chiefly responsible for their success. Cheers were then given for Mr Page, the company singing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow".

Rev. Page, in replying, said he was much touched by the kind words of the Vicar, and he should always do his best for the C.L.B. He wished before December to get a half-dozen more members to form a fourth squad. Major Eldridge had told him that he was very anxious that Bicester should take part in the grand display of the drill learned in the C.L.B. to be given at the Town Hall, Oxford, on November 30th, and he hoped that they would be able to accept.

Lieut. Goble then presented Rev. Page with a hockey club, the gift of the officers and lads of the Bicester company, and said that he hoped Mr Page would enjoy many games with it.

3rd October 1947

ONE-WAY SUGGESTION AGAIN - Arising from a recent council report on traffic flow, Councillor Mrs Davies said she had always coupled the Causeway with North Street and St John Street in the need for a one-way traffic system.

Speed had always been put forward as the

predominant factor against this system in the Causeway, but that theory had been shattered by the recent fatality in North Street, the narrowness of which thoroughfare was on a parallel with the Causeway. Speed was not the contributory factor to the danger existing, but the narrowness of the streets.

The Chairman of the council said he was still convinced that speed was the danger in the Causeway, when the one-way traffic was installed there, and this was borne out by the police and others.

Councillor Trinder agreed, and pointed out the difference of one of the said streets being straight to some extent, and a bend in the other. Councillor Fred Hudson considered that the very narrowness of the Causeway was its safety.

Councillors Mrs Davies, Murray and Heath voted in favour of the Causeway being included in the list of one-way thoroughfares, but the proposition was Defeated.

13th October 1989

FOUNDED 150 YEARS AGO - Children discovered how pupils in Victorian times spent a day in their classes when Launton Primary School celebrated its 150th anniversary this week.

Mothers improvised to make period costumes for the children and teachers ran classes in the manner of the times for a Victorian day on Tuesday.

Celebrations continued on Wednesday with a tea party to recreate the days when the local vicar would give pupils a tea. The Rev. Graham Foulis Brown and his wife Felicity, who live at Launton vicarage, helped at the party.

The celebrations began on Monday evening when a book on the history of the village school by Mrs Pat Tucker and Mrs Mary Brydon, was launched. The authors are members of Launton Historical Society and researched old records and newspaper files to write the story of the school from 1839-1989.

Among the guests at the launch was the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, Sir Ashley Ponsonby, Miss Daphne Bellman, head from 1966-83, the current head Mr John Hawkins, and Mrs Margaret Howatt, from New Zealand.

Mrs Howatt is granddaughter of Mr Frances Abraham Harrison, who was head teacher from 1884-1921. She came from New Zealand specially for the anniversary after writing to the school for information about her family. Mrs Tucker saw the letter at the school and through her local history interest volunteered to help Mrs Howatt's research.

Mrs Howatt's father, Frank "Berry" Harrison, emigrated to New Zealand in 1911 and called his house Launton. By coincidence his birthday was 9th October, and had he lived he would have been 99 on the day the school began its celebrations.

Mrs Howatt is staying with the Tucker family and commented: "It is absolutely fabulous to be here as my father was always talking about England. I was going to come to England for the first time next year but made an effort to come for the jubilee of the school."

Her father was born in the schoolhouse and she has been able to see in Launton parish church a roll of honour to the victims of the First World War that was written and designed by her grandfather and his daughter Alice.

Another link with the past has come through a pewter teapot Mr Harrison gave to a cleaner at the school, Alison Simons. Alison's descendants in Chesterton and Launton offered the teapot for the celebrations after reading articles about the history of the school in the Bicester Advertiser.



Pictured at Monday's celebration are, left to right, Mrs Mary Brydon, Mrs Margaret Howatt, Sir Ashley Ponsonby, Mrs Pat Tucker, Mr John Hawkins and Miss Daphne Bellman.

St Edburg's Heritage Day

Thanks to all who supported the Heritage Day at St Edburg's Church. Despite the poor weather, we had plenty of people coming in who found the displays interesting and enjoyed the re-enactments.

Special thanks to Bob Hessian for the items he loaned and to Matthew Hathaway for his excellent leaflet on those whose names appear on the WWI memorial in the porch.

The new banners, which were produced for the event, and information cards, as well as Matthew's leaflets, will be permanently available now in the church and can be seen any time it is open.

- Gill King



Two of five heraldic banners created by Rev. Cowland Cooper in the 1940s reflecting local lords of the manor. They were once hung in the church nave.

Roll of Honour

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

Private Frank Smith, of Hethe.

Died: 2nd October 1917 Aged: 28 Served in: Dorsetshire Regiment

Private Percival Crawford, of Merton.

Died: 4th October 1917 Aged: 28 Served in: Royal Dublin Fusiliers

Private Walter Johnson, of Middleton Stoney.

Died: 4th October 1917 Aged: 24 Served in: Machine Gun Corps

Gunner Thomas Austin Smith, of Launton.

Died: 4th October 1917 Aged: 28 Served in: Royal Garrison Artillery

Private Harry Binding, of Souldern.

Died: 8th October 1917 Aged: 26 Served in: Manchester Regiment

Private William Alfred Medcraft, of Islip.

Died: 13th October 1917 Aged: 20 Served in: York and Lancaster Regiment

Private William Mervyn Golder, of Stoke Lyne.

Died: 20th October 1917 Aged: 30 Served in: Royal Warwickshire Regiment

Private James Pollard, of Bicester.

Died: 24th October 1917 Aged: 20 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

2nd Lieutenant William Clarence May, of Stoke Lyne.

Died: 26th October 1917 Aged: 25 Served in: Northumberland Fusiliers



Village History Piddington

Piddington is a village that lies just over 4 miles southeast of Bicester, close to the border with Buckinghamshire. Its toponym has been attributed to the Old English Pyda's tun.

Just before the Norman Conquest Hacun, a Dane, held the manor of Piddington together with the nearby manor of Merton. But the Domesday Book records that by 1086 Judith, Countess of Huntingdon, a niece of William the Conqueror, held the manor.

After the Revolt of the Earls in 1075 Judith's husband, Waltheof, Earl of Northumbria, was executed and William betrothed her to Simon I de Senlis. She refused to marry him and

fled England, so William confiscated her estates and allowed Simon to marry Judith's eldest daughter Maud. Simon received estates including Merton and Piddington as part of the honour of Huntingdon.

In 1152 Simon II de Senlis inherited Piddington and almost immediately granted it to the Priory of St Frideswide, Oxford. In 1153 Simon II died and his heir, King Malcolm IV of Scotland, confirmed the grant of Piddington to the Priory. However, Malcolm's heir-apparent, William the Lion, took Piddington back from the Priory. In about 1174 Henry II deprived William of all his titles and lands in England and granted the Earldom of Huntingdon to Simon

III de Senlis. Simon acknowledged the Priory's claim to Piddington but continued to hold the overlordship himself, even ignoring a Papal bull upholding the Priory's rights.

Joan of Piddington had held the manor of Simon II de Senlis, and in about 1183 she married Aubrey de Dammartin, son of Albéric I de Mello and Dammartin, Grand Chamberman of France. After Aubrey's death the Crown held Piddington in escheat for several years before it passed to his heir, Reynold de Dammartin. In the Anglo-French War of 1202-14 Reynold supported Philip II of France against King John, for which he was deprived all of his English estates. In 1213 Reynold's estates were

restored, but when he died in 1227 Henry III seized them again.

In 1270 Henry III granted Piddington to Alan Plukenet, in exchange for a manor in the New Forest. In 1309 his son, Alan II, granted Piddington to Hugh le Despenser, 1st Earl of Winchester, who in turn granted it to John de Hadlow, lord of nearby Boarstall.

In 1326 Despenser was executed for rebelling against Edward II. His estates were forfeited, but de Hadlow was allowed to keep Piddington until he died in 1346. But in 1331 St Frideswide's Priory began a lawsuit to recover Piddington from John de Hadlow.

In 1337 Edward III granted Piddington to Nicholas de la Beche of Aldworth and in 1340 de la Beche was licensed to grant Piddington to Sir John Sutton, lord of Dudley. In 1347 Sir John was licensed to grant Piddington to John de Peyto for life, with reversion to Sir John thereafter. Title was then disputed between the Sutton and de Peyto families, but in 1359 the Priory finally succeeded in regaining the manor. St Frideswide's Priory then retained Piddington until 1525, when Cardinal Wolsey suppressed the Priory to found his Cardinal's College. In 1530 Henry VIII deposed Wolsey and in 1532 Piddington passed to Christ Church, Oxford.

However, in 1553 Piddington was granted to Thomas Dynham, lord



Decorated Gothic sedilia in the chancel



St Nicholas' Church

of the manors of Brill and Boarstall. In 1634 Thomas's grandson John Dynham died leaving his estates to his daughters, Mary and Alice. Piddington seems to have passed to Mary, as her daughter, Margaret Lewis, was lady of the manor in 1661. Her daughter, Mary Jephson, inherited Piddington in 1672 and had married Sir John Aubrey, 2nd Baronet, by 1691. On her death in 1717 Mary's stepson Sir John Aubrey, 3rd Baronet, inherited Piddington, and it remained with the Aubrey baronets until Sir Thomas Digby Aubrey, 7th Baronet, died in 1856 and the title became extinct.

A cousin of Sir Thomas, Elizabeth Sophia Ricketts, then inherited Piddington. Her son Charles Aubrey Ricketts inherited the manor from her and took the name Charles Aubrey Aubrey. He died in 1901, leaving Piddington to Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher, 4th Baronet, who was the great grandson of Sir John Aubrey, 3rd Baronet. Sir Henry Aubrey-Fletcher, 6th Baronet, also known as the detective novelist Henry Wade, inherited the manor in 1937 and held it until his death in 1969.

Piddington was originally part of the ecclesiastical parish of Ambrosden. By 1152 "Ralph the hermit" had established Holy Cross chapel on Muswell Hill, about 1 mile south of the village. Until the English Reformation, Piddington villagers used to process to the chapel on Christian feast days. The last ruins of the chapel disappeared in the early 1800s.

The chapel of Saint Nicholas in Piddington is known to have existed by 1309 and is now Piddington's parish church. Its Early English chancel was built in about 1300, but has an ornate Decorated Gothic sedilia and Easter Sepulchre carved in about 1350. There is a canonical sundial on the south wall. In the 14th century the Decorated Gothic south aisle was added, with a four-bay arcade and some new two-light windows, but also re-using two Early English lancet windows presumably from the south wall of the nave. The present belltower was built in the 16th century.

The church was repaired in 1826 and then restored in 1855. In 1898 it was restored again under the architect John Oldrid Scott, whose alterations included replacing the chancel arch. A 14th-century wall painting of Saint Christopher on the north wall of the nave was discovered in 1896 and restored in 1935.

The Congregational chapel in the village was founded in 1825 and enlarged at a later date. It was still used for worship in 1951 but has since been converted into a private house.

A Sunday school was founded in 1818. It became a day school supported by the National Society for Promoting Religious Education in 1858, and a new school building was erected in 1863. In 1925 it was reorganised as a junior and infants' school. It was still open in 1952 but has since closed.

- Matthew Hathaway

Talks Update

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

Monday 16th October

Martin Greenwood talks to us about **Evacuation to Bicester and Local Villages in 1939-45**.

Monday 20th November

Society member Pat Snelson gives us **A Window into Bicester's Architectural History**.

Monday 18th December

Martin Buckland comes to talk to us about **Canal Communities** of the past.

Bicester Brains Trust

The radio programme 'Any Questions', with a panel answering queries put to them by the audience, was launched in 1948 and is still going strong. But Bicester was holding a similar format four years earlier, with the formation of the Bicester Brains Trust. Consisting of a panel of four regular contributors plus a different guest each month, they answered questions on all subjects put to them by the people of the town. The sessions took place on the second Sunday of each month in the Wesley Hall, with Mr. S. G. Hedges acting as question master. The panel, at its launch in January 1944, was made up of The Vicar (Rev. C. P. Cowland-Cooper), the Methodist Minister (Rev. P. Brunt), Mr. F. T. Hudson (Chairman of Bicester Urban District Council), Mr. A. R. Cusden (a former foreign correspondent for London papers) and Mr. A. H. Perry. Yes, the panel was all male – but women did come on board later, including Mrs. Coker.

There was a large audience in attendance, and the first question asked was about how to improve Bicester. It seems there were some differing opinions given by the various members of the panel and particularly lively exchanges between the Vicar and Dr. House (who had later become a regular). Sadly these are not recorded in detail, although we do learn of the Vicar that cricket 'bored him to distraction', and the two 'saints' he thought fully reflected the spirit of Christ were Elizabeth Fry and Florence Nightingale.

The sessions lasted until December 1946, by which time audiences had dwindled. Perhaps the ending of the war made the difference, servicemen coming home and a more normal life resuming. Anyway, the final panel

consisted of Councillor Mrs. J. N. Davies, Rev. Cowland-Cooper, Rev. D. M. Jones and Mr. A. H. Perry.

What I find interesting is that some of the questions asked back then could still be asked today. I wonder if the answers would be similar now or completely different. They covered a huge range, from political to spiritual to amusing. Maybe we could ponder some of these ourselves. They included:

- What is the right amount of pocket money for boys and girls?
- Do you consider greyhound racing to be a sport or a menace?
- Should boys be compelled to go into coal mines?
- What is the best way to deal with fear?
- Should there be party politics in the town council?
- If you were a Good Fairy, what three gifts would you bestow on a newborn child?
- Which is the greatest asset to an individual, common sense or bright intelligence?
- Are we any nearer to the creation of a United States of Europe than twenty years ago?
- Have birds any sense of taste?
- A child is often told by a grown-up that its school days are the best time of its life. Does the Brains Trust think this true?
- Would ministers get a truer knowledge of life if they more frequently dispensed with their collars?
- Should children be taught to think and does our education system do that?

Answers welcome!

- Gill King

Committee & Contacts

Editor:

Matthew Hathaway
mathat298@gmail.com
01869 246530

Committee Members:

Bob Hessian (*Chairman*)
chairman@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