

# THE CHRONOLOGY OF BICESTER

## *Anglo-Saxon Period (410 – 1066)*

c.634 Burncester founded.

873 Battle fought with Danes near Gravehill (Gravenhill) by Ethlred and Alfred. The Danes gained the victory.

c.912 Old town of Burencester destroyed by the Danes.



## *Medieval Period (1066 – 1485)*

1066 Robert D'Oily given estate at Burcester by William the Conqueror.

1086 Domesday Book survey records 42 villeins and borders in Bicester (25 at Wretchwick, 14 at Bicester, 2 freeholders). Population estimated at 200 people.

1145 Nuns House founded (Bicester House).

1182 Gilbert Bassett founded the Monastery (Priory) of St. Edburg.

1193 Tournament on Baynard's Green, by permission of King Richard I.



1194 On Richard I's return from Crusades, Gilbert Bassett, Lord of Burcester, who had adhered to Earl John, purchased King's pardon for £8.

1212 James le Bret, Lord of Bigenhul, gave to the priory of St. Edburg, 4 acres of meadow.

1219 Isabel Gargat of Caversfield gave to the church of St. Edburg in Burcester and the canons thereof part of a croft on condition that they should receive her into the prayers of their house for ever and her name should be inscribed in the martyrology of the convent.

1239 Permission granted to William de Longspee to hold weekly market in the present Market Square .

1279 Bicester had grown into a long and irregular series of dwelling houses. The poor huts of the original settlement were at Crockwell. First trades people were butcher, baker, beer brewers, draper, tailor, mason, and carpenter. Glaziers, painters and slate layers came from Banbury, Aylesbury and Thame.

1349 Black Death. In Oxford schools were closed and 25% of population died.



1355 Edward III granted royal license to Nicholas Jordan, a hermit and warden of the Chapel of St. John Baptist of Burcester, to erect and found a new hospital in the said town for the reception and relief of poor and sick persons.

1377 Richard II granted to Sir John de Worth, Lord of the Manor of Bigenhul, the privilege of a market on Friday every week and one yearly fair to be held for three days at his said manor, a small village now called Burcester, King's End, near the house of John Coker. Much bought at fairs - salted fish, saddlery, ironmongery, cloth, silk, linen, ink, parchment, paper and drugs (Cf. St. Frideswide's fair, beginning of September, Oxford, now St. Giles').



1433 Famine and pestilence bad at Wretchwick.

1433 – 34 From St. Andrew's Day 1433 to Valentine's Day 1434 "there was an unbroken frost so that the Thamize and other grete rivers were so hard frozen that hors and carriage might pass over; and the next year after began the grete dearth of corn in this land which endured ij (two) year, so that a bushelle of whete was sold for xl (40) pence, and the poor people in dyvers parties of the North countrie eat bread maad of farm rotes".

1485 An inflammatory fever, called "The Sweating Sickness" (Sudor Anglicus) first appeared.

### ***Tudor & Stuart Period (1485 – 1714)***

1536 Dissolution of the Priory, the Prior and Monks being pensioned off.

'The sacred tapers' lights are gone,  
Grey moss has clad the altar stones  
The holy image is o'erthrown,  
The bell has ceased to toll  
The long ribb'd aisles are burst and sunk  
The holy shrines to ruin sunk  
Departed is the pious monk  
God's blessing on his soul.



1547 A population of 500-600, among whom a new class of people from Lancashire. The increase in the population led to polluted streets and water, a lot of meat-eating, intemperance and drink. Horticulture was still in its infancy and clothing was not warm enough so the most common complaint was catarrh. Also many trade-apprenticeships.

16th Century. The pillory was in use where offenders were put to open shame.



1555 On Easter Sunday a priest, sometime a monk of Bicester, named William Branch, with a wood-knife wounded another priest as he was ministering the sacrament to the people in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, for which fact the said William Branch had his right hand smitten off; and for opinions in matters of religion was burned in the Sanctuary nigh to St. Margaret's church-yard.

1557 Bicester suffered again from the 'Sweating Sickness' - between health and death there were no more than five or six hours. (42 out of 49 deaths recorded were between April and October.)

1577 The Cage and Town House erected on the Square.

1642 – 1651 Civil War. Royalist troops stationed in Bicester for a number of years with the King being in Oxford. Probably accounts for pub names with Royalist connections – Kings Arms, Kings Head, etc.



1666 John Coker, because of a summer of excessive drought, re-opened St. Edburg's well.

1678 'Strange and Wonderful news from Bisciter, a town in Oxfordshire; being a full and true account of a Terrible Tempest of lightning, rain, hail and thunder, which happened there the 20th day of April last past, and continued for several hours; burnt much corn, some barns and outhouses and killed many cattel; also spoyled several persons and had like to have consumed the whole Town.'

1682 The Six Bells Inn built.

1683 Earthquake felt at Bicester.

1698 The large gallery in the church built.



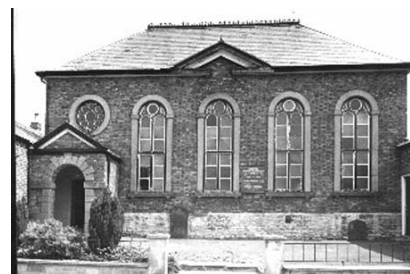
1707 Smallpox responsible for 42 deaths out of 68 recorded that year. The town and market were avoided and grass grew in untrodden streets.

### ***Georgian Period (1714 – 1837)***

1724 A sudden and terrible fire in Waterlane, which in about three hours destroyed ten dwelling-houses, besides warehouses, malshouses and stable. Losses of malt barley, beans, oats, tobacco, flax, hemp, hay, candles, household goods and wearing apparel amounting to a total loss of £2,231-5s-8d.

1729 Congregational Church built in Waterlane (later Chapel Street).

1730 A large fire in King's End which consumed many houses.



1732 Edward Hemins, at Bicester Foundry, cast "call bell" for old Town Hall. It is now at the entrance to the Garth.

c.1743 Bicester bell foundry closed down.

1745 Free schools started for boys aged 7 - 14 and they learnt spinning and got gifts of clothing including a blue coat, breeches and a cap - thus "The Blue Coat School". Master's salary was £25 - £30 a year and only 30 boys were allowed. Mr. Raymond (hemp-dresser) raised a company of volunteers to oppose the progress of the Pretender.

1749 John Hickman and Elizabeth Templer married under license for £100 at St. Edburg's Church, Bicester. They were both of Ambrosden parish (Arncot).

1752 The Pest House built to accommodate those infected with the smallpox (demolished in 1849 to make room for the London Road railway station).

1757 "Inclosure Act " passed. Sir Edward Turner is seized of the greater part of the land. (1200 acres in the parish).

1758 First Bicester postchaise was advertised.

1762 First Statute Fair (Statby) for hiring labour was held.

1763 The King of Denmark passed through Bicester. Heavy rain began on June 19th and continuing floods for fifteen weeks up till February 1764. Toll-gates or turnpikes were erected at the Priory. A horse-drawn coach paid 4½d; horse-drawn wagon 3d; horse 1½d; drove of oxen, cattle 10d per score; drove of calves, lambs etc. 5d. per score. Double tolls on Sundays.



1765 Church set on fire by lightning.

1768 In this year of excessive mortality an infectious fever was prevalent. The Vicar and his two daughters died of it and many members of families were at this time buried in the same grave.

1768 Mutton 4d - 4½d a lb. Bacon 8d. a lb. Veal 3½d. a lb. Butter 6d-7d. a lb. Beef 4d-5d a lb.

1769-1816 On Friday in Easter week, first Friday in June and Friday after Christmas Day, Statute fairs were held and often followed later by 'The Runaway Fair' for labourers who had left hirers; a third fair took place but very few attended. Such fairs had been going in Oxfordshire since 1650.

1770 Road from Bicester to Aylesbury was repaired and widened.

1774 " Nov. 21. Bowden, a shoe-maker, barbarously murdered by his journeyman, George Strap, who beat



out his brains with a hammer as he sat at work late one evening. Strap was executed at Oxford, and his body given to the surgeons." (Dunkin – local historian).

1775 Only 428 of the 750 people who had been married in the parish, could write their names.

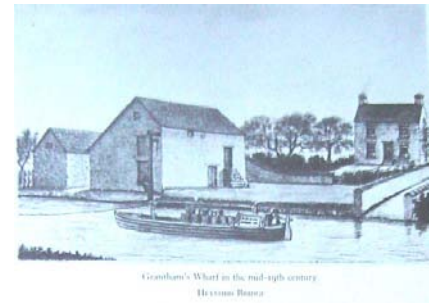
1789 There was a great public ceremony in Bicester to celebrate the King's recovery - bonfires and illuminations, roasted ox and plum pudding. Butter was 3d. a lb., a 9 lb. loaf was 6d., mutton and beef 2d. a lb., as recalled by John Pratt, a centenarian in 1862.

1790 Oxford Canal opened (Coventry to Oxford). The wharf at Lower Heyford became a great depot for coal for this district. The canal was frozen over for 10 weeks in 1795 and it was hard to get coal and price rose to 4s. - it fell to 1s. 6d. per cwt. when navigation was reopened on March 4th.

1790's Women earned 2s.- 2s. 6d. a week for spinning but many worked at bone or pillow lace manufacture.

Cowper wrote:

"Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,  
Pillow and bobbins all her little store;  
Content though mean, and cheerful, if not gay,  
Shuffling her threads about the livelong day;  
Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night  
Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light."



1790-1803 Prices of agricultural labour were rising (37%), of artisans (35%), of rent (20%) and rates (169%).



2<sup>nd</sup> half of 18<sup>th</sup> C Morality had fallen low and popular amusements were horse-racing, bull-baiting and cock-fighting. Illegitimate births were very high and literacy was low.

1793 Dunkin writes: "The French Revolutionary Government having countenanced seditious and treasonably practices among the disaffected in every part of the kingdom, a public meeting was held on January 8th, and an association entered into by the inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood, for the purposes of holding out in their own practice an example of respectful submission to the laws; endeavouring to bring to punishment all who by their writings or actions should in any manner disturb the public peace; and assisting the civil power on every occasion that should require their interference. And to show their detestation of seditious writers, the day was closed by the burning of the effigy of the celebrated Thomas Paine on the Market Hill. "

1793 The first public coach began to run between Bicester and London.

"Cheap and Easy Conveyance. Bicester, Aylesbury, Tring, Berkhamstead and Hampstead coach sets out from the King's Head Inn, Bicester every Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday mornings at seven o'clock to the Black Bull Inn, Holborn, London and returns thence every Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at the same hour. Performed by the Publick's humble servant, George Claydon. Calls at the Green Man and Still, the corner of Swallow Street, in Oxford Street."

1794 James Blackwell ran a service, Oxford to Bicester, Fare 2s. The 15 mile journey took 3 hours and carried two passengers.



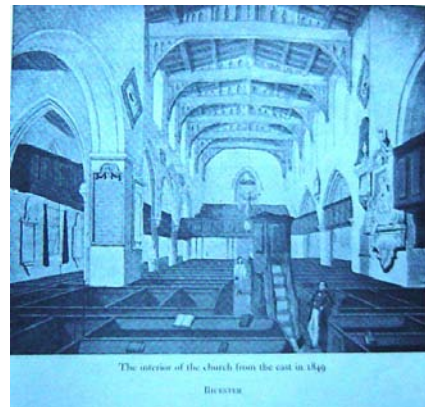
1797 Sunday School formed.

1801 First Census of Bicester taken. Population = 1,946 people (m - 940; f - 1,006) forming 449 families; 906 in trade and 923 in agriculture.

1803 Bicester Bank established, with the name "KIRBY and TUBB".

1807 Price rises since 1768:

Mutton	7d - 7½d /lb	(64%)
Beef	6½d - 7d /lb	(50%)
Veal	7½d / lb	(114%)
Bacon	10d /lb	(25%)
Butter	10d - 1s. 1½/lb	(76%)



1810 The eastern gallery in St Edburg's Church was erected.

1816 A fifth part of Bicester's inhabitants (about 450), in a condition of declared pauperism. Dunkin's History of Bicester published

1817 Dinners to poor elders of Bicester commenced.

1821 Page-Turner's scheme for farmers to employ labouring poor on piecework.

1821 George Smith printed first Bicester Directory.

1826 Town Hall and Shambles (situated in Market Square) were allowed to be demolished by rioting mob who could take away what they wanted.

1827 Appointment of Beedle - a sort of policeman. Wore a blue coat with red collar and red cuffs and carried a staff. Paid 10s. a week.

1830 A scheme of free emigration to U.S.A. On May 24th, 85 persons



(mostly paupers) were conveyed to Liverpool (some by Mr. William Reynolds with a waggon and four horses for which he was paid £34. 13s.4d. exclusive of turnpikes). Their passage money was paid and suitable clothing provided and a bounty of £5 to each married man or widower. Some of the intending emigrants lost heart at the last moment and worked their way back to Bicester in the ensuing autumn and were made to walk to Lower Heyford each day and bring back one cwt. of coal. This by law was rescinded in late 1830.

1830 Dairies were found on a large scale at Wendlebury and Bicester.

1831 Population had reached 3022.

1832 Cholera outbreak (64 died between June 7 and July 19) - a higher proportion to population than any other town in England.

1830's London coach achieved its journey both ways daily. There was also a coach to Northampton. Wagons go from Bicester to London with butter, taking ten tons per week and once a week to Birmingham. Bicester also became the centre for fox-hunting and many sportsmen came here and lived through the winter months.

1835 A school for girls was erected.

1836 Workhouse built and 79 residents initially.

### ***Victorian Period (1837 – 1901)***

1845 Gas introduced.



1846 Shillingford's brewery began making ales and mineral waters.

1850 Bletchley - Oxford railroad opened by London North Western, including a 47½ mile line from Winslow to Banbury via Verney Junction. Wages of the men were 2s. 9d. - 3s. a day. This brought about a massive social revolution.

1855 Bicester Herald founded.

1859 National Schools built.

1862 Methodist Free Church opened. Bicester Bowls Club formed.

1865 County Court House built.

1869 Infants' school opened.

1857 Police Station built (Church Street) at a cost of £825

1875 – 80 All turnpikes discontinued.



1879 Bicester Advertiser, first published by T.W. Pankhurst for E. Smith and Co.

- 1881 January 18, 19 - Great blizzard; drifts 13' deep; Piddington woman frozen to death. Population had reached 3,306.
- 1894 Bicester U.D.C. constituted.
- 1895 Continuous frost for first 3 months of the year - young man skated from Bicester to Oxford.
- 1896 Bicester Town Football Club formed.

**Modern Period (1901 to present)**

- 1901 Population had reached 3,032.
- 1905 Water piped throughout Bicester. Bicester Sheep Fair had been held in the streets of Bicester for many decades. In 1905, pens were put up in Sheep Street. In 1910, moved to a field next to Bardwell Terrace where it remained until the 1950's. Then moved to a field off the Buckingham Road and then finally to Finmere Airfield.



- 1906 Gt. Western (Bicester North) railway construction began.



- 1908 Cottage Hospital built at King's End.
- 1910 Cattle Market opened. Great Western Railway at Bicester North Station was opened.

- 1912 Entertainment given by Methodist Sunday School, (BMSS) which has continued as an unbroken event until this year (1903).

- 1913 Parish Church bells re-cast and re-hung.

- 1917 Bicester Herald ceased publication. The first RAF Bicester is opened.



- 1922 Sports ground procured.

- 1924 Bicester Grammar School opened.

- 1926 Rates fixed at 2/9d in the £. Excavation started on Roman Camp at Alchester.

- 1927 Methodist Church in Sheep Street opened. "Many motor accidents at notorious



Baynard's Green Cross-roads - roundabout needed (Advertiser):'  
Freak frost in December - skating in streets. Towards the end of the year, Bicester was almost isolated after heavy snowfall, some drifts 13' deep.

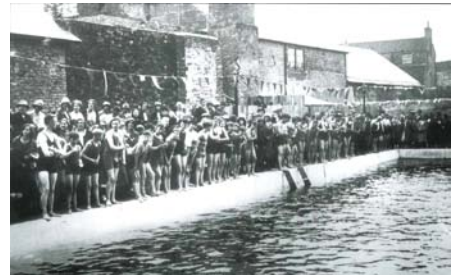
1928 Prince of Wales visited Bicester for Hunt Steeplechases. In May children of National Schools collected 2470 eggs for hospitals.



1929 102 pupils enrolled at County Grammar School. Town's public electricity lighting was officially switched on.

1930 New Street built.

1931 Highfield development started. Population reaches 3004.



1932 The Oval built.

1933 Outdoor Swimming Baths constructed. Ox-roasting on the Market Square.

1934 300 hunger marchers en route for London, housed one night in Workhouse. Regal Cinema opened.

1935 Christmas weather - rain, snow, hail, frost and thunder.

1938 New road to Oxford opened.

1939 Second World War began. Public Utilities schemes halted. Young men drafted. Prices soared. Evacuee children from London billeted in the town.

1940 Evacuees continued to come and also refugees from Belgium, to be housed by the Council.



1941 Council resisted pressure to dismiss conscientious objector employees. The Central Ordnance Depot is opened.

1942 'Bicester Home Guard urgently require stretcher bearers' (Advertiser).



1943 Tap Dancing taught. 6d. per afternoon.

1944 One-way traffic began in St. John's Street and North Street.

1946 Public air raid shelters demolished.

1947 Severe winter. Coal much used with paraffin stoves to supplement.

1948 Conservatives challenge Labour for first time in Council elections. Bus service to Highfield began. Sunshine Club founded. Rugby Club founded.

1950 Shirt cost £1.05p. Divan £5.87½p. Whisky £1.65p. a bottle.  
Day trip to London 37½p.

1951 Ration books still around.  
Cycle speedway track opened in Launton Road.  
House property prices were of the order of £5,000 for a modern, detached house.  
Oxford Times cost 3d. Bicester Rifle Club opened.  
Population reaches 4,171.

1952 Rateable value of Bicester £19,380. Rate was 14s. (70p.) in the £.



1952 Highfield Secondary School built.

1953 Inauguration of Rotary Club.

1954 Ballroom planned for rear of Crown Hotel to replace cinema gutted by fire.

1955 Archbishop of Canterbury paid surprise visit to local Sunday School. Coach carrying Victor Sylvester and orchestra crashed in town - passengers were entertained - Mary's Cafe. P. Bourdillon of Everest expedition lectured in Bicester. Football season opened with temperature of 80°F.

1956 January: Snow, fog, ice, gales, mild spell.  
February: 20° of frost.  
March: Very dry.  
April: Fine and warm.  
May: Warnings of water shortage and sharp frost for Whitsun.  
June: Wet and chilly.  
July: Thunderstorms and serious flooding.  
August: 18 dripping days.  
September: Heavy rains and bright sunshine.  
October: Exceptionally cold.  
November: Severe wintry weather - cold spells, thick fog, heavy rain, exceptionally dry.  
December: Unwelcome variety - deep snow at Christmas (Advertiser).

Local History Circle formed.

1957 Barrage balloon at Weston on the Green comes down in flames during thunderstorm.

1958 Coach owner, A.R. Taylor, plans holiday bus service, Bicester to Paris.



1959 Many complaints about night brawls and gang fights on Market Square. Blitz against

pigeons.

- 1960 First Bicester Sea Scout Group. Glory Farm housing estate built in 1960's and much industrial expansion in Launton Road.
- 1961 Shopping Centre planned for King's End Estate. Population reaches 5513.
- 1962 Brookside School swimming pool opened. Need for a Town Hall discussed.
- 1963 Old Place Yard acquired by Council to provide old people's home, library and other amenities. New Catholic Church opened. Old Grammar School closed and moves to site adjacent to Highfield Secondary School..

1965 Queen and Prince Philip visited Bicester. Organ installed in Catholic Church. Claremont Car Park opened. Grammar School and Secondary School merge to become Bicester Comprehensive School.



1966 Modern gas plant built off the Launton Road. Cooper Secondary School built and first opera produced. New library opened by Barbara Cartland!

1968 16,000 sheep sold at the Annual Sheep Fair in 6 hours.

1969 Semi-detached bungalow available at £4,350. Rates were 2s.6d. in the £.

1971 Sports Centre opened near Highfield School. (25m. swimming pool, large activity hall and a smaller hall or squash courts.) Bicester Drama Society formed. Population reaches 12,355.



1970's Death of elm trees (Dutch elm disease).

1974 Urban District Councils like Bicester were stripped of their powers and Cherwell District Council took over.

1975 Manorsfield Road opened.

1976 Frederick Sharpe, lifelong campanologist, died; he was famous for a book on Bells and was director of Launton Handbell ringers in the 1950's.

1977 27 flats opened - Anchor Housing Association Scheme. Glory Farm Primary School built.



1979 Rateable value of nearly £2 million, nearly 100p in the £.

1980 Bicester Resources and Information Centre opened.

1981 Population reaches 20,241.

1982 September 21<sup>st</sup>. A severe whirlwind in Bicester demolished a factory building and damaged several others. Several people were injured but none seriously.

1987 Bicester (Comprehensive) School becomes Bicester Community College

1988 Crown Walk Shopping Mall is opened.

1991 The M40 motorway is opened.  
Population reaches 20,241.



1990s Southwold and Langford Village Housing Estates built.

1994 Sheep Street fully pedestrianised

1995 Bicester Village retail shopping centre is opened.



1997 Bure Park Housing Estate built.

2001 Population reaches 28,672.

2007 Bicester Avenue opened.

**And sometime in the future.....**



**SW Bicester: the approved scheme**

**Options for major development in Bicester**

