

Bicester Historian

Issue: 91 October - December 2022



Copyright © Bicester Local History Society 2022

All uncredited images are either public domain, held within the Society's archive, or taken by the article author.

Bicester Advertiser articles reproduced within these pages are done so with the kind permission of the editor.

All maps courtesy of openstreetmap.org © OpenStreetMap contributors

Contents

New Window	4
The Danger of Grave Hill Wood	5
New Matron of Infectious Diseases Hospital	6
Proposed Train Link to Prove a Boon	7
Bicester's Boer War (Part 6)	8
Tea in Crockwell School Room	12
Sudden Death at the Bicester Workhouse	13
Inquest on Bletchingdon Stationmaster	14
Twins Remember	17
War Commentaries in Bicester	18
Roll of Honour	19
All is Safely Gathered In	20
St Edburg's Hall - The Opening	30
Christmas at the Local Red Cross Hospital	34
If Invasion Comes!	35
Bicester Go to the Top of the Table	36



Bygone Bicester

All articles taken from the Bicester Advertiser for October

27th October 1882

New Window

During the week a new stained glass window has been put in St Edburg's Church. The window is that next to the south door and has hitherto been filled with plain glass.

The top centre piece consists of a cherub with outstretched wings in light amber, surrounded by oak foliage. The middle division represents Paul preaching at Corinth before the people, and the earnest look of the preacher is well portrayed. Underneath is the text "That they should seek God. - Acts XVII, 27."

In the left division Paul and another apostle are walking together, staff in hand, with probably, one of the cities of Asia in the background. The text underneath is "In journeyings often. - II Corinthians XVII, 26."

In the right division Paul is seen in the house of the centurion writing his epistles. The apostle has a careworn and very expressive face, while the soldier standing over him looks with a cold and hard face at his scroll. The text is "Paul the aged. - Philemon 9."

All three divisions are surmounted with a crown in pale amber, under which are passion flowers surrounded by foliage. At the bottom of the centre division are the initials S.P.

At the base of the window runs the following inscription: "In loving memory of the Rev. George Bayldon Rogerson M.A., of King's End, Bicester, formerly The Tyrwhitt Hebrew Scholar, and the 17th Wrangler of St John's College, Cambridge, and for many years second master of Bradford Grammar School, Yorkshire. Died 2nd May, 1881."

The subject which, as will be seen is entirely about St Paul, is exceedingly well portrayed and the colours are nicely blended together. White,

ruby, amber, green, and blue predominate, and the oak foliage especially is worthily represented.

The work has been carried out by Mayer and Co, 149 New Bond Street, London, the window being presented by the widow of the late Mr Rogerson.



The Danger of Grave Hill Wood

We wonder if it has occurred to the many Bicester people who are in the habit of using the vicinity of Grave Hill Wood as a pleasure resort for afternoon walks, picnicking excursions, blackberrying, rambles, etc., that they are by so doing placing themselves in danger – and not an imaginary danger by any means.

Although we are not setting up a bureau of warning against public dangers, a “tip” of this kind certainly does not appear to be out of place. As most people know, the rifle range which backs on to the hill from the London Road side is now in frequent use by the Volunteers, from practically the whole of the county, and scarcely a Thursday, Saturday, or Sunday afternoon – singularly, just the afternoons when the neighbourhood would be most patronised – passes without a squad being engaged in “pumping lead” into Grave Hill, and the feelings of a Sunday afternoon Rambler round the wood who found his or her temporary paradise suddenly converted into a miniature Vimy Ridge would probably be more multitudinously-conflicting than pleasant.

We do not wish to insinuate, of course, that stray bullets are sent roaming of their own sweet will over the landscape as a whole, and as a matter of fact very few evade the wood stock erected for their entry, but accidents will happen, and upon such occasions the vicinity is, to say the least, unhealthy, especially for those who miss the “look-outs”.

New Matron of Infectious Diseases Hospital

The Infectious Diseases Hospital Joint Committee reported to this week's Ploughley Rural District Council meeting that fifteen applications were received for the post of nurse matron at the hospital, and three applicants were selected for interview. As a result Miss Evelyn Craig, of Bradwell Isolation Hospital, Chesterton, near Stoke-on-Trent, was recommended for appointment, at a salary of £120 per annum, and to commence her duties on 1st December. It was also recommended that the payment of £8 19s 6d, in respect of travelling expenses and subsistence allowance for the three candidates interviewed, be approved and confirmed.

The report was adopted.

Mr Bayley, who is a member of the Committee, said that the district had lost one of the best friends to children in Mrs B. Fox. He understood that during her 30 years as matron at the hospital 740 cases had passed through her hands, and of this number only 10 had proved fatal, the patients concerned being in serious condition on admittance, and passing away shortly after arrival at the hospital. Mrs Fox had been a true mother to the little ones taken from their homes, and the council had lost a valuable servant.

The new matron was a unanimous choice, and there was no doubt that she had a difficult task before her to maintain the standard set by the retiring matron. Mr Bayley added that he hoped there would be a generous recognition of Mrs Fox's services in the subscription list now being circulated.

The chairman said that both the Ploughley and Urban Councils realised they had lost a good servant, who had been no trouble whatever to them.

Proposed Train Link to Prove a Boon

The introduction of new train services between Milton Keynes, Bicester and Oxford would prove an enormous asset to the area, a rail users group claims in a new report. Called "Perspective for a New Vision to Link Major Towns", the report is about to be published by the Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee (OBRAC), which is campaigning for passenger services between Milton Keynes and Oxford/Aylesbury on tracks that still exist for freight.

The publication of the report comes in the week of a major investigation by Milton Keynes Borough Council into the possible reopening of the line. International consulting engineers and economists, Kennedy Henderson Ltd have already started work on the study, which is expected to take three months.

If the project gets off the ground it is hoped there might be funding from European Community grants and even private enterprise.

OBRAC says the introduction of the services would cut journey times by avoiding the need to enter and cross London. It is also claimed that new services would provide connections to other services to increase travel opportunities. New services would help reduce traffic and improving rural transport.

The Oxford – Bletchley line (31 miles) closed at the end of 1967 before the development of Milton Keynes and the population growth of the area, including Bedford, Winslow, Bicester and Oxford. The line was part of the Oxford Cambridge route, of which the Bedford – Bletchley line is still open, Bletchley – Bicester is freight only, while Bicester – Oxford is open for passengers again.

Mr Chris Wright, secretary of OBRAC, said: "The growing economic power of Milton Keynes as a regional centre may well be crucial in bringing back the trains. Any indications suggest a two hourly service with class 158 Sprinters which would later provide an hourly service. The new link would save many people from the chore of going to London merely for interchanges."

Milton Keynes Borough Council came up with a figure of £2,375,000 for infrastructure costs, with a further £2.25 million for new rolling stock after three to four years the annual deficit figure was estimated at £50,000.

But the report says these costs, compared to road building, are good value for money and it stresses that the councils estimated revenue figures were pessimistic and infrastructure costs could be reduced.

Bicester's Boer War (Part 6)

Continuing the reminiscences of Lewis Turney

By Mark Lewandowski

Back home there was perhaps a sense of 'mission accomplished' in the local newspapers. The Bicester Herald of 12th October 1900 reported that: "Twelve months have passed since Ultimatum Day, when Mr Kruger's message to Britain actually began the terrible war in South Africa, which has cost so many precious lives. The war is over now, as far as the main issues go, and Kruger and Steyn are both so placed as to be able to work evil no more; but there is a good deal of "clearing up" needed to be done yet. The bulk of the troops will be withdrawn, but many soldiers will be kept in Africa until the new police system has been placed by General Baden-Powell on a firm footing. After that there seems nothing in the way of the tremendous development of the whole South African region, under British guarantee, and no doubt those of us who live a few years longer will witness wondrous changes."

Sadly, the Herald's assertion that "the war is over now" may have been premature. Their issue of the 19th reports of "Fresh Fighting" with "Severe British Losses"; whereas that of the 26th mentions "Continued Hostilities" and reports on the guerrilla tactics now employed by the Boer forces.

However, despite these setbacks (warfare is not an exact science) some soldiers were coming home as the Herald of the 26th reported.

"London is this week end according a fitting and enthusiastic welcome to the citizen soldiery home from the war; and later similar expressions of appreciation, differing only in degree, will be witnessed elsewhere up and down the country.

The volunteers who have behaved so bravely and efficiently at the front have won well the admiration of those whose battles they have fought and deserve all the honour that can be given them."

But it cautioned its readers that there was "big work still remaining to be done out in South Africa" by General Baden-Powell's military police, musing that "it will take months and years to get the Boers, some of them, into a condition to be trusted" but that "it will not do to risk spoiling the achievements of the military that have cost so much in blood and in treasure."

The Bicester Advertiser was equally cautious in its editorial of that same last Friday of October 1900.

"Peace is not yet declared; and the remnant of the Boers in the field still succeed in lengthening the British casualty lists in South Africa, there is prospect, indeed, that the police work entrusted to Baden-Powell will be no picnic. The man responsible for the continued resistance, which is nothing short of criminal, is Steyn, who will not fail to impress upon the burghers still in the mood to be deluded that the fugitive Kruger is preparing the way to the restoration of independence to the two extinct Republics."

Marthinus Theunis Steyn (2nd October 1857 – 28th November 1916) was the leader of the Orange Free State and its Afrikaner nationalist president before and during the South African War and a contemporary of Paul Kruger (10th October 1825 – 14th July 1904), President of the Transvaal, the other Boer republic.

Back in South Africa, Lewis Turney was also on the move, but alas for him, not homeward. The diary entries after 10th October 1900 detail a series of marches at one stage standing ready to receive a Boer night that did not materialise, on the way.

On the evening of Saturday, 13th October Lewis Turney appears to have been involved in some action at Vlakkfontein on the outskirts of Johannesburg. On the following day he records being in action supporting a 5-inch howitzer battery, a Royal Field Artillery battery and cavalry. He records that "... but as soon as we started the final advance the Boers fell back." That night they were forced to bivouac without blankets or coats. On Sunday, 14th October at 6.00 a.m. his unit marched off and joined the remainder of the brigade who were about three miles to the rear with the baggage, reuniting Lewis with his coat and blankets. The Journal now reflects what appears to have been a quieter spell for Lewis Turney with a repetitious cycle of fatigues, etc. Among the scant highlights that he mentions are the arrival of new tents on the evening of the 17th of October, receiving a shirt and two pairs of socks on the 21st and a pair of canvas shoes and a new serge jacket on the 23rd, all this whilst keeping an eye on what the Boers were up to. The routine was broken in the early hours of the 30th, when, at 4.00 a.m. his unit had to stand to arms in their tents as an attack on the camp was expected. Thankfully this did not happen, and the only casualty was an undisturbed night's sleep. Sadly, the following night was little better, but for different reasons, a "very rough night with wind and rain ... rained torrents all day ... came in at 6.15 p.m. soaked to the skin". The issue of rum that he records receiving on getting in out of the rain was undoubtedly doubly welcome.

Lewis Turney had not been forgotten by his work colleagues, as the Herald of 9th November reported; "The Bicester post-office staff have sent some tobacco and two pipes to Sergt. L. Turney, rural postman to Hethe, who is serving with his regiment at Heidelberg, South Africa. In a letter signed by everyone of the staff, the hope was expressed that he might enjoy the tobacco at Christmas. In his last letter Sergt. Turney stated that he was "all right."



Top: Marthinus Theunis Steyn

Bottom: Paul Kruger

Elsewhere in the same issue of the Herald, in a report on the observance of Guy Fawkes' Day, which was much reduced because of the wet weather, although it reported that; "Much jubilation was manifested over the burning of effigies of Kruger."

Digressing slightly from the subject under discussion, the Herald then makes mention of an odd local 'custom' that had somehow arisen and is thankfully now no longer part of the annual cycle of commemorations; "The dangerous practice of kicking fiery balls about the streets increased, and notwithstanding the augmentation of the police (several constables being drafted into the town from the neighbouring villages), the youths of the town succeeded in having plenty of "football."

On that same Friday, the Bicester Advertiser carried a table; "From a monthly return issued by the War Office it appears that the following statement represents the casualties in the South African Field Force reported up to the end of October."

	Officers	Men	Total
Killed in Action	302	2,902	3,204
Died of Wounds	89	893	982
Wounded	1,031	12,653	13,684
Missing / Prisoner	7	822	829
Died in Captivity	3	90	93
Died of Disease	155	6,115	6,270
Accidental Death	4	145	149
	1,591	23,620	25,211

The report goes on to say that 1,422 officers and 44,044 men had been sent home as invalids, of which 208 had died, 1,030 had been discharged as unfit, and 948 were currently in hospital.

On the following Friday, 16th November, the Herald carried a lengthy item with the news that every family had been longing to hear – that the soldiers were coming home; the first being Corporal Sydney King of Waterloo Farm, Bicester, and W. H. Hinton of Claydon. The item continues; "Bicester was well represented in the Imperial

Yeomanry, and we understand that Lieutenant C. Jagger, of the Bucks Contingent, set sail for England on Wednesday. Viscount Valentia also started on the same day in the sail steamer Moor. Farrier-sergeant C. Boyles returned to Bicester on Saturday, having been invalided home. He sustained a broken leg and other injuries while out in South Africa. This leaves four Bicester men with the Imperial Yeomanry, viz., Sergeant F. Goble, Sergeant-Major Matthison, Trooper Stanley Holiday, and Trooper J. King. Sergeant Goble, in his last letter, says that he is quite well, but did not know anything about coming home. He had been under fire 37 times. At the time of writing, he was at Rustenburg, where, he said, there was plenty of fruit."

"In the other regiments there are seventeen local men, excluding the two – Mr S. H. Swell and Mr H. F. Reeves – who have been invalided home, the latter sustaining a sprained ankle. Most of these have been in action, while Arthur East, of the Medical Staff Corps, has been through the siege of Ladysmith. We have been informed this morning of an accident to George Baughan, of the Royal Artillery. From the few lines that have been sent about this it appears that while riding his horse at a fast rate the animal suddenly stopped, and threw Baughan, thereby injuring him. He is now in the hospital."

"Two deaths have been recorded, viz., Capt. Dewar, of the King's Royal Rifles, and Thomas Holt, of the Grenadier Guards. This latter person, though his home was at Kingswood, was working at Bicester, and was greatly respected."

Arthur Annesley, the 11th Viscount Valentia (23rd August 1843 – 20th January 1927), mentioned above, was the Conservative Member of Parliament for Oxford between 1895 and 1917 rising to become Comptroller of the Household in 1898. A prominent Freemason: he was Mark Mason in Berkshire and Oxfordshire, and Deputy-Grand Master of the Craft Masons in Oxfordshire, the Advertiser of 30th November reported that Freemasons in Oxfordshire were arranging to give him a welcome-home banquet to mark his return from South Africa.

By the end of the month another Bicester man had returned home. The Herald of 30th November reported the arrival of Sergeant Henry Sawyer, a driver in the Army Service Corps, returning on the same ship as Redvers Buller. He was the sixth to return home of the thirty-nine Bicester men who had helped during the South African War. According to the Herald's

calculations, there remained in South Africa: four men in the Imperial Yeomanry, ten in the Oxfordshire Light Infantry, two in the 17th Lancers, and one each in the 1st and 2nd Coldstream Guards, 12th and 16th Lancers, 15th Hussars, 2nd Irish Fusiliers, Royal Engineers, Royal and Field Artillery, Medical Staff Corps, Army Service Corps, Army Medical Corps, Rifle Brigade and Cape Mounted Rifles – this list included Sergeant Lewis Turney.

At this point the diary becomes difficult to read. Perhaps conscious that he was running out of space, Lewis Turney begins doubling up the entries, cramming two lines of minuscule text in the space intended for one, making any interpretation increasingly uncertain.

While the people of Bicester were burning effigies of Kruger and kicking flaming footballs about the streets, Lewis was having more Boer activity to contend with, being sniped at by them before artillery fire forced them to withdraw. On Friday, 9th November he appears to have been involved in an action that resulted in the capture of about 200 cattle and 2,000 sheep and goats. It is unclear if this was part of the 'scorched earth' tactic used by the British against the Boer irregulars. This involved the burning of Boer farms and crops, the driving off of their livestock and the internment of non-combatants in concentration camps – one of the more shameful episodes of the British Empire's history. Eventually there were 45 tented camps for Boer internees with another 64 for black Africans. As mentioned previously, the majority of the male prisoners: 25,630 out of 28,000, were sent to prisoner of war camps overseas, leaving behind the women and children. Over 26,000 women and children perished in these camps.

On Tuesday, 13th November, for reasons that it is difficult to make out, Lewis Turney's unit came under very heavy fire from the Boers, but fortunately suffered no casualties.

Three days later, on 16th November, he records reaching a personal milestone – that of completing twelve years with the colours and beginning his thirteenth. If there was any celebration of the event, he makes no mention in his journal. The relentless cycle of army life moved on regardless of whatever personal milestone may have been reached.

[To be continued.]



Lewis Turney in his uniform.

Bygone Bicester

All articles taken from the Bicester Advertiser for November

17th November 1882

Tea in Crockwell School Room

A public tea is generally a very successful and happy gathering, and that given in Crockwell School Room, on Thursday evening last was certainly no exception to this rule.

Mr Kane, cordially and generously assisted by Mr John Baker and Mr J.W. Hunt, made the necessary arrangements. The invitation was issued for five o'clock, and soon after that hour about 130 sat down to tea.

The room had been beautifully decorated for the occasion: pictures, flowers, banners, etc, having been tastefully arranged upon the walls and in the windows. But the tables were the chief centres of attraction. These were adorned with a delicate and rich display of choicest flowers, which, together with the happy faces around the cloths, presented a most pleasing picture.

The following ladies presided at the trays: Mrs John Baker, Mrs Hunt, Miss Palmer, Miss Coleman, Miss Bates, Miss Matthews, Miss M.E. Phillips, Miss E. Phillips, Miss Harwood, Miss Thomas, Mrs Moulden, and Miss Easted.

The tea having been fully enjoyed, the Crockwell Church Choir sang pieces from Hymns Ancient and Modern. A word of commendation must be awarded to the choir for the very efficient manner in which they rendered the musical items in the evening's programme.

Mr Kane next gave a very short address, after which the choir sang the anthem "O Praise God in His Holiness". The Rev. J.J. Duncan, vicar of Christ Church, Carlisle, then addressed the meeting. He complimented Mr Kane upon the orderly and satisfactory manner in which his parochial work was carried on. Mr Kane at once declined to accept all the honour, and declared that quite as much credit was due to Mr John Baker and Mr Hunt as to himself.

The choir next sang hymn 257, after which

another cup of tea was enjoyed. Then hymn 240 was given. Next Mr Green gave an interesting address and an anthem "Lord for Thy Tender Mercy's Sake" followed. This beautifully sung by the choir, time and tune being perfect. Mr John Baker then addressed the meeting, urging a greater interest and enthusiasm in their Crockwell services.

After another hymn (232) had been sung, Mr Kane announced that a Mission Service would be held each evening next week, and he earnestly invited all to assist by their presence at the services, and by their influence upon others, in forwarding the good work.

A very short service brought the meeting to a close. Mr Kane, and those who so kindly assisted him, are to be congratulated upon the successful accomplishment of a very enviable task - giving pleasure to others.

Sudden Death at the Bicester Workhouse

Mr A.H. Franklin, Coroner for the Central Division of the County, conducted an inquest on Monday afternoon, touching the death of James Savin, a resident of Cottisford, who had been admitted to the Workhouse on the previous Saturday.

Elizabeth Farrer said: I live at the Kennels, Cottisford, and am the wife of Henry Patrick Farrer, at present serving in H.M. Forces. The body the jury have viewed is that of my brother-in-law, James Savin, of Cottisford, who was a farm labourer. He was 76 years of age last birthday, and had previously been an inmate at the Bicester Workhouse. He left about May 11th and came to live with me at Cottisford. He was with me until Saturday last. He filled up his time doing odd jobs and was in receipt of an old age pension, 7s 6d per week.

I had noticed for some time that he had been queer in his ways. He had been funny in his head for the last few weeks, and consequently I called in Doctor Parkhurst, of Brackley, who said he ought to go to the Workhouse. Accordingly Mr Durrant, the relieving officer, was sent for and he conveyed deceased there. He seemed quite willing to go.

I have had considerable trouble with him for the last three or four weeks, especially at night time. He has fallen out of bed several times. On Wednesday last I was in his room when he had a fall from his bed. He complained that time of having hurt his side. Doctor Parkhurst paid a visit on the following day and I told him about the fall, and also of deceased's complaint with regard to his side. I saw a bruise but cannot say if Doctor

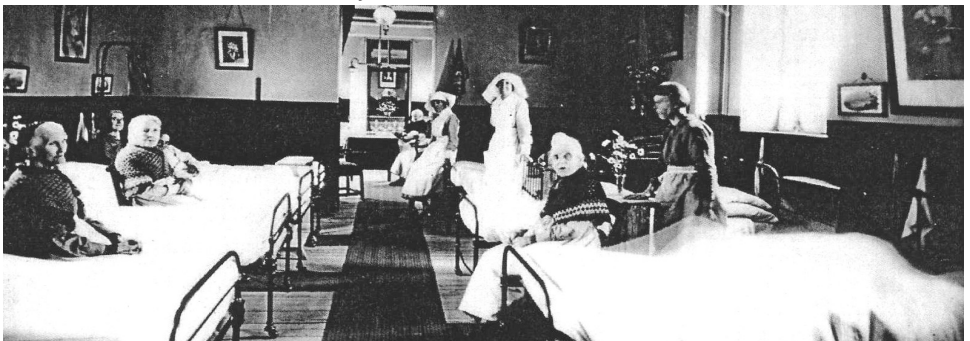
Parkhurst did. He never complained again of his side. I cannot say for certain if he has hurt himself on any previous occasion. Replying to Doctor Long, witness said deceased had no difficulty with his breath, neither had he a cough.

Sarah Ellen Parks, Matron at the Union Workhouse, said: Deceased was admitted to the Receiving Ward on Saturday last at about 12:35pm. He said he had had his dinner. He had his supper in bed and ate it nearly all. He was previously in the Workhouse from January to May this year. At that time he was frequently troublesome at nights, having a habit of getting in and out of bed. On Saturday night last I saw him in bed between 9:30 and 10pm. He was then fast asleep and was alone.

The tragic circumstances were reported to me at about 7:15 on Sunday morning. I went to the Receiving Ward and saw deceased lying on the floor near the bed. He was on his back and was quite straight. He was dead. The bed clothes were considerably scattered.

Doctor H.B. Long, of Bicester, said: I have made a post mortem examination of deceased and among other things he had two fractured ribs on his right side. I examined his heart and found evidence of degeneration of the muscle and blood vessels. I attribute his death to this degeneration. Replying to the coroner Doctor Long said he was not prepared to say that the broken ribs had anything to do with the death.

Without retiring the jury returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence.



Inquest on Bletchingdon Stationmaster

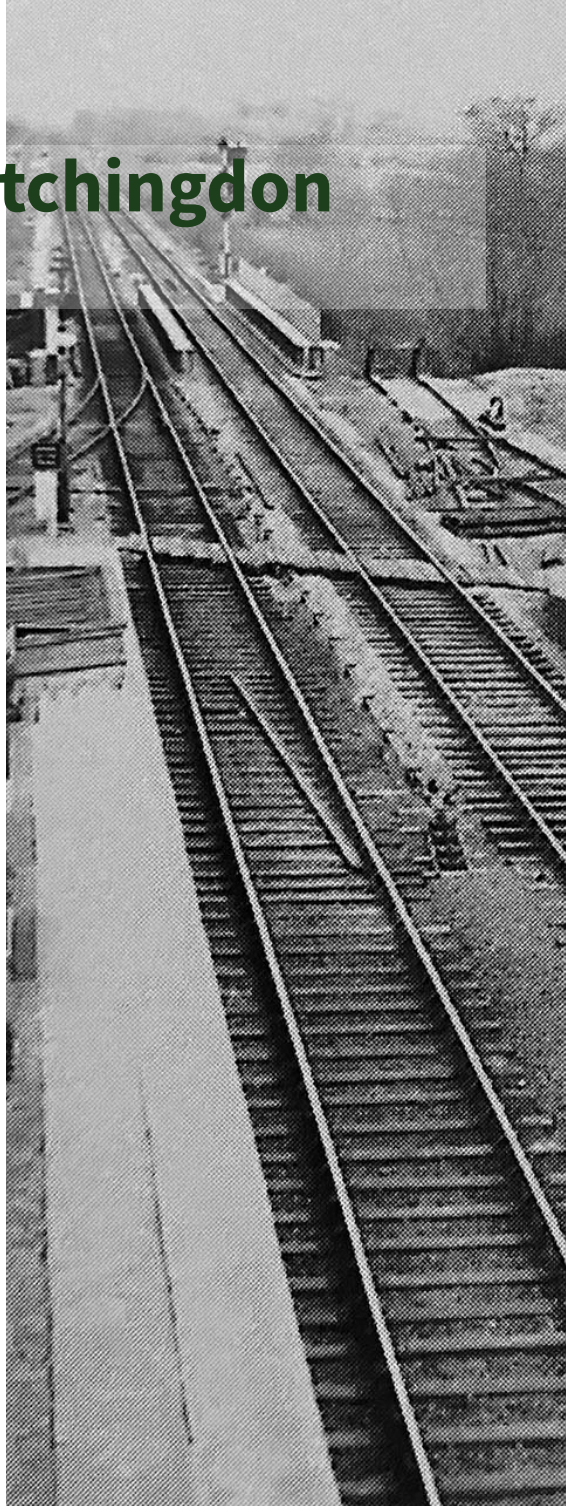
The Coroner for Mid-Oxfordshire (Mr Harold Franklin) resumed the inquest at Bletchingdon on Tuesday evening on Mr Arthur Richard Garton, G.W.R. stationmaster at Bletchingdon, who was killed on the railway on the evening of 10th November. Mr Garton was delivering a message to the driver of a goods train when he was knocked down by a light engine proceeding from Banbury to Oxford.

Mr F.J. Grimsdale, of Oxford, represented the widow; Inspector Gwynn appeared for the G.W.R. Company; and Mr W.J. Evans (organising secretary of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen) represented the drivers and firemen concerned.

The first witness was John Thornton, of Tackley, who said he was signalman at the G.W.R. Station at Bletchingdon. At 6:22pm on Monday 10th November he was on duty and signalled a light engine going towards Oxford. He saw it pass his box. Prior to this he had telephoned the station to ask them to move a goods train to the siding to clear the line for an express. He felt sure it was Mr Garton who took the message.

Replying to Mr Grimsdale, witness said a strong wind was blowing. The goods train which his message referred to was standing in the station. He agreed that if the engine was throwing off steam, and a high wind was in evidence, it would have been difficult for anyone to hear the light engine.

Joseph Onions, of the locomotive department at Wolverhampton, said he was the driver of the stationary train at Bletchingdon Station and was waiting for the signal for a clear line. "I saw a figure on the lines," said witness, "and I heard the call 'Driver'. At the same time a light engine passed, but I did not hear it coming. The figure spun and dropped in the 6ft way, and I saw he was deceased. I went to him and saw he was beyond human aid."





Dr Tothill, of Woodstock, said the cause of death was due to an extensive fracture of the skull and laceration of the brain.

George Fortnum, of King's Sutton, a checker at Bletchingdon Station, said he saw Garton leave the office and run along the platform. Witness went into the office and heard an engine go by, but he did not hear its approach.

Richard Oxlade, of 164 Warwick Road, Banbury, the driver of the light engine, said that when he arrived at Oxford he was informed that someone had been knocked down. The light on the engine was on when the engine left Banbury, but was out on arrival at Oxford. He saw a train at Bletchingdon Station and blew his whistle, and the engine was shut off going through the station.

William Henry Mantham, of 44a Ferguson Road, Banbury, fireman on the light engine, said Oxlade shut off and blew the whistle at Bletchingdon.

Percy Timbrell, foreman at the G.W.R. locomotive department at Oxford, stated that he

found a smear of blood on the buffer plank of the engine.

Replying to Mr Evans, witness said deceased could have seen the signals for the light engine to pass. He should have looked; they were his protection.

Mr Onions, recalled, said that Mr Garton had no knowledge the light engine was coming through the station.

P.S. Kirk said there was no doubt deceased was standing on the 6ft way when struck.

The Coroner returned a verdict of "Accidental death while on duty."

Mr Garton was well-known among the personnel of Bicester and Ploughley A.R.P., which he joined in 1938, as a first class lecturer on first aid. He visited Bicester once fortnightly to lecture at the A.R.P. headquarters, and was very popular. A member of the St John Ambulance Brigade, he entered several competitions before the war in connection with first aid, and enjoyed considerable success. He was 43 years of age.



Twins Remember

Wreaths were laid by Bicester's West German twins at the war memorial at the start of the Remembrance Day service on Sunday.

A small group from the twin communities Neunkirchen-Seelscheid spent the weekend in the town for the service marking the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War and the 71st anniversary of the end of the First World War.

In his sermon the Rev. John Nixon, a member of the Bicester Team Ministry, said the demolition of the Berlin Wall in the past two days was a sign of peace.

Mr Nixon added: "Since 1914 Europe has not had a true peace. The events of the last week should have produced one of the most optimistic Armistice Days in 70 years. What will happen we do not know."

He added that there were still parts of Europe where conflict reigned, with the totalitarianism in Romania in one corner and Northern Ireland in another.

Although Neunkirchen-Seelscheid is a long

way from the border it has so far not had to find homes for people from East Germany.

Frau Ulla Harvardt, vice chairman of their twinning committee, said that the big cities were helping with providing houses. However, Neunkirchen-Seelscheid had been housing some families who had left Poland and who had German connections.

Frau Harvardt, a teacher, said she had about half a dozen Polish children in one of her classes. "They know some German, but only a little," she said.

After the service members of the Royal British Legion, the Army, Scouts, Guides, St John Ambulance and others paraded through the town centre with Stonesfield silver band.

The salute in Market Square was taken by Brigadier Keith Mullins, director of the Directorate Supply Computer Services at Bicester Ordnance Depot, Bicester Town Mayor, Mr John Brown, Colonel John Marsh, chief flight surgeon at the USAF base, Upper Heyford, and Mr Don Jelfs, vice chairman of Cherwell District Council.



War Commentaries in Bicester

Taken from the Bicester Advertiser, 17th October 1941

As announced last week, the Ministry of Information have arranged for a series of war commentaries to be given in Bicester, the first of which is on Wednesday 29th October, in Wesley Hall, at 7pm prompt.

The speaker, Mr Desmond O'Neill, rejected from military service on health grounds, has had a varied career, and he is now serving his country by giving war commentaries. He is the son of Mr H.D. O'Neill, chairman of the Association for the Welfare of the Blind, and a nephew of the late Lord Moynihan, who was president of the Royal College of Surgeons, and who did great work in surgery during the last war.

Educated at Lancing College and Cambridge University, where he read law, Mr O'Neill was in the cavalry of the University O.T.C., and in 1929–30 was several times a Judge's Marshal. He worked on the London Stock Exchange and was for about two years in the Mounted Division of the Special Constabulary. In 1934 he went out to Shanghai to organise the London Department of a big firm of American stockbrokers there. Four years later he went to Switzerland, remaining there until June of last year, when he had to make a thrilling dash for this country. With his wife he got out of the country by the last Simplon-Orient express into France. When they arrived in Paris they found the Germans uncomfortably near, but managed to leave by aeroplane at the last moment, and arrived safely in London.

These war commentaries should be of special interest to the public generally in Bicester, and no doubt will prove as popular here as they have done in neighbouring towns. Up-to-date events in connection with the war are put in their true perspective by the speaker and in an understandable manner. Questions are invited at the close.

Roll of Honour

The following are the local men, and those buried locally, who died in the Second World War, 80 years ago.

Major John DeGrey Tatham-Warter MC, of Kirtlington.

Died: 2nd November 1942 Aged: 27 Served in: Dragoon Guards

Sergeant Alfred Stephen Blackshire, of Ealing, Middlesex. (Buried in Bicester)

Died: 6th November 1942 Aged: 21 Served in: Royal Air Force

Canteen Manager William George Paintin, of Souldern.

Died: 8th November 1942 Aged: 31 Served in: Royal Navy - HMS Hartland

Major General Merton Beckwith-Smith MC DSO, of Stratton Audley.

Died: 11th November 1942 Aged: 52 Served in: Welsh Guards

Gunner Francis Thomas Wickson, of Upper Heyford.

Died: 12th November 1942 Aged: 34 Served in: Royal Artillery

Gunner Benjamin Robert Buck, of Finmere.

Died: 29th November 1942 Aged: 27 Served in: Royal Artillery

Able Seaman J. Rouse, of Stoke Lyne.

Died: 17th December 1942 Served in: Royal Navy - HMS Firedrake

Sergeant Jack McDonald, of Ontario, Canada. (Buried in Middleton Stoney)

Died: 28th December 1942 Aged: 26 Served in: Royal Canadian Air Force

Pilot Officer John Foulkes, of Bromley, Kent. (Buried in Middleton Stoney)

Died: 31st December 1942 Aged: 22 Served in: Royal Air Force

Flight Lieutenant Vernon Sutherland, of Wellington, New Zealand.

(Buried in Middleton Stoney)

Died: 31st December 1942 Aged: 30 Served in: New Zealand Air Force



All is Safely Gathered In

By Mark Lewandowski

Before the age of mass, long distance transportation of food the annual harvest was of vital importance to every rural community. A good and bountiful harvest would mean food to eat during the coming year. A poor or failed harvest could result in hunger or starvation as food became scarce and prices rose for what little surplus there was to buy. With roads at times all but impassable and transportation costly you tended to eat what was grown locally. The threat of famine was perennial, and the history of Medieval Europe is liberally peppered with episodes of famine sometimes less than a decade apart. Closer to our own time the Great Irish Famine of the 1840s claimed more than one million lives and the Ethiopian Famine of the 1980s “of biblical proportions” led to the Band Aid concerts. Today there are ongoing famines in Yemen, Tigray, Ethiopia, and Madagascar.

In an age before agricultural science and the knowledge of what made the crops grow or not grow much was attributed to the action of supernatural agencies whose intercession had to be sought and whose bountiful fruitfulness had to be acknowledged through annual ceremonies and rituals. The farmer might have sown his seed, but once in the ground it was, literally, he believed, in the lap of the gods. The soil was seen to almost be a living entity, to nurse and venerate, the mother of all things and the goddess of fertility. The rural year was marked by a number of these: Wassailing of apple trees, Plough Monday – the return to work after Christmas, and most important of all, the Harvest Festival. No farmer would be willing to risk the failure of that year’s crop because the correct rituals and customs had not been observed.

One of Bicester’s historians, John Dunkin, in his “History and Antiquities of Bicester”, published in 1816 relates the nature of the Harvest Home in that place. 1816 was,

coincidentally, the ‘Year without a Summer’ when the dust and ash sent up into the atmosphere by the eruption of Mount Tambora, on the island of Sumbawa in Indonesia in April of the preceding year led to a decrease in temperatures of 0.4-0.7° Centigrade globally and the coldest summer temperatures in Europe on record. The low temperatures and abnormally high rainfall resulted in failed harvests in Great Britain, Ireland, and across a Europe still recovering from the Napoleonic Wars with the resulting famines.

John Dunkin relates Bicester’s Harvest Home as follows: “This custom still prevails among the farmers, and nearly according to ancient usage. It simply consists in a supper given to those employed in getting in the corn, some of whom ride to the farm on the last load, shouting “Harvest home!” But if this happens to lie through the town, their merriment is frequently interrupted by the pails of water which the sportive inhabitants endeavour to throw on them from their windows. The harvest home is a relic of servile customs; and in ancient times was considered a part of the reward for customary services. The present mode of hiring labourers has certainly rendered the custom unnecessary; yet it remains for the farmer to consider how far the prospect of the merry-making stimulates the exertions of the workmen.”

“A similar supper was given by the late Joseph Bullock, Esq. of Caversfield, at the close of the season for gathering hops.”

In stating that the “harvest home is a relic of servile customs” Dunkin possibly alludes to the pagan origins of many of the country customs; that would in time become Christian celebrations with their appeal for the blessing of one God who would be requested to “speed the plough” rather than various nature spirits. There was a practical aspect also – in many communities the village plough had ‘hibernated’

in the local church during the winter, sometimes with just a votive plough-light for company, until the Christmas festivities were over, and the work of the new farming year could begin. After it and the ploughmen were blessed, the plough would be dragged through the village to the local pub where food and drink would be served to music, dancing, and other merriment. For many it was not the reluctant return to work after Christmas that it has become, it was an opportunity to earn some money to feed their families.

Elsewhere, Dunkin relates the conditions under which many of the agricultural workers would have been employed "...it plainly appears that many of the natives, cottars, and villeins, were bound to perform their various services without food, or, at least, with only one meal from their lords. The land that they held by these services was their only wages: but, at the close of harvest they usually had an extra meal or dinner, called the harvest-home. On this day all the families of the customary tenants were bound to give their services, except their wives and shepherds, the former being supposed to be unable to leave the house, and the latter their flocks. This day of rejoicing was usually celebrated with singing and feasting; and from this the present custom of keeping harvest-home had its origin." Dunkin may be mistaken in saying that the womenfolk stopped at home during the harvest - harvest was such a vital and urgent task and so dependent on the clemency of the weather that all except the very young or the very old took part. The entry in the Logbook of St Mary's School, then in Piggy Lane, for 11th September 1885 reads "Fair attendance this week, some scholars working in the carrot fields". On 30th July 1886 it closed for a six-week break described as a harvest holiday. The beginning of that the following year was moved

to 6th August, for five weeks, again described as being a harvest holiday.

The expression "Harvest Moon" for the full moon nearest to the autumnal equinox, falling in either September or October, could reflect this sense of urgency, its light enabling the harvesters to work through the night to get the job finished.

Before the coming of agricultural machinery to ease the labourers' task, the harvest was a very labour-intensive job. The illustration below is from the Luttrell Psalter, which amongst its wonderful, and sometimes nightmarish, images gives us an occasional glimpse into the annual cycle of the medieval world. Two women are cutting wheat using sickles while a third, with her sickle on her shoulder, has stood up and is giving her back a much-needed rest. A fourth figure, with a sickle in his belt, presumably a man, appears to be gathering the cut wheat and binding it into sheaves. In later years, when scythes became more common, the roles were reversed with the men cutting and the women collecting and binding.

The beginning of the harvest would sometimes be preceded by its own small ceremony when a libation of drink was poured onto the ground to thank Mother Earth for her bounty. Traditionally the start would be on the 1st of August - Lammas Day, from the Anglo-Saxon hlaf-mas, "loaf-mass", the mid-point between the summer solstice and the autumn equinox. On this day it was customary to bring a loaf of bread, made from the first wheat harvested, to the local church to be blessed at the Lammas Lauds as the first fruits of that year's harvest. The loaf might then be divided into four, each quarter placed in a corner of the barn to



protect the grain.

Being a small community set in farming country it is not surprising that both of Bicester's papers of the time devoted many column inches to reports from and future prospects for the farmer and smallholder. For example, the Bicester Herald of 15th August 1890 reported on a meeting on the previous Friday "Only a thin attendance at the Corn Exchange this day, agriculturalists being engaged with the corn harvest, which promises an abundance. The grass crops have been heavy, but the weather has often been very hindering, and it has not been easy to secure the hay in good condition. Corn trade slow and last week's rates scarcely obtainable." Whereas that of 19th September reported from the Bicester Corn Market "A brilliant week for harvesting has much improved the prospect, and large quantities of grain have been secured in excellent condition." And on the 26th "We have had another glorious week and most of the grain is secured. The yield is spoken of as good. At the Corn Exchange this day trade was firm at fully late rates." There were the perennial concerns about the weather - from 3rd July 1891 "The hot forcing weather is telling with increasing power upon the crops by its prolonged continuance, and the progress of the wheat towards maturity, which was at first too slow, is now greatly accelerated over a large area. They have come well into ear, whilst in some very forward spots they are said to be well on towards blooming. These latter instances are however exceptional."

The Herald of 23rd September 1892 related the following reflection "Farmers are proverbially given to grumbling and this is not to be wondered at, as they are more dependent for their livelihood and their success in business upon the general state of the weather in the spring, summer, and autumn months of the year than any other class of the community. September has brought some excellent harvest days, but they could not, unfortunately, restore the grain to good condition, which had previously undergone harm from an excess of moisture, cold, or other causes. On a wide scale the hay and cereal crops show a considerable falling off to what would be the case in average seasons. Some consolation lies in the fact that root crops are in excellent condition and give the promise of a first-rate yield. Different kinds of crops would require different sets of weather, but meteorologists must confess themselves unable to meet the wishes of farmers by bringing about this desirable arrangement."

The annual harvest benefitted the wider community. In the Bicester Herald of 29th August

THE CHEAPEST, THE BEST,
BEER
FOR HAYMAKING AND HARVEST.
BY
PARROTT, WALKER, AND CO.'S
CELEBRATED AYLESBURY ALES—
Agent—**T. SARE,**
3, CAUSEWAY, BICESTER.

WHO begs to thank all his Friends for their kind support, and to assure them that the Beer offered below are not to be beaten for price and quality.

PRICE LIST.

Per Gall.		Per Gall.	
PAIN ALE 8A	1/0	MILD ALE 17	7/6
" IPA	1/0	BEST TAMES BEER	7/6
" 1A	1/0	COMBE & COMPANY'S	
" 2A	1/0	LONDON STOUT & PORTER.	
MILD ALE 11XX	1/0	" DOVERLE STOUT	1/6
" 11X	1/0	" RUSSELL STOUT	1/6
" 11	1/0	" FINEST	1/6
" 1A	1/0		
" 1	1/0		

WATERBURY'S BOTTLED ALE

THOMAS AND CO.'S BOTTLED STOUT

A Large and Varied Stock of CIGARS AND TOBACCOES always on hand at the lowest possible Prices for good quality.

T. SARE, 3, CAUSEWAY, BICESTER.

HANLEY & COMPANY
LIMITED,
THE BREWERY, BICESTER.

8d. per Gallon.

HAY-MAKING BEER,
SOUND—BRILLIANT.

8d. per Gallon.

CARRIAGE PAID.

ADDRESS— PROMPT DELIVERIES.
THE BREWERY, BICESTER.

1890 W. McKay, drapers, of Sheep Street were advertising men's harvest trousers from 1s 6d a pair. Hanley & Company of Oxford were producing a "sound, brilliant," Harvest Beer at 8d a gallon in the Bicester Herald of 8th July 1892, along with T. Sare, of the Causeway who were selling "The Cheapest, the Best Beer for Haymaking and Harvest".

An important, arguably the most important from the point of view of the farmer and harvesters, point in the process was the cutting and destiny of the last of the standing wheat. Dating back, almost certainly, to pre-Christian animism, the last of the standing wheat was seen as the abode of the corn spirit and had to be

nurtured and treated with reverence if the soil was to retain its fertility during the following year's growing season. The belief in a Corn Spirit or Corn Mother was widespread reaching across Europe from Ireland to Poland (see James George Frazer's "The Golden Bough" for more on this) and as mentioned, was ancient, possibly going back to when our ancient farmers tried to puzzle out what made their crops grow better in some years than in others. It was surrounded by superstition; for example, it was considered bad luck to begin the harvest on a Friday. The image below, from the Luttrell Psalter, shows men gathering the stooks of harvested grain and putting it in a regular pile. It seems that gloves were a necessary part of the equipment – the central figure has his tucked into his belt. The last bundle was treated differently from its predecessors – it was not destined for the thrashing floor. It might be given a nickname to reinforce the belief that it was an animate being. Its cutting might have been accomplished by the harvesters throwing their sickles at it. When scythes replaced sickles one of the harvesters might be blindfolded, spun around to lose his bearings, then set loose to cut the last stalks. This was in the days before health and safety and the prospect of having a blindfolded, disoriented, perhaps tipsy, labourer randomly swinging a large, sharp cutting implement about must have made sense to someone at some time. The last bundle would then be carried back to the farm with great solemnity and be put in a place of honour in the barn or farmhouse, sometimes dressed in women's clothes. There it would be kept over winter and was ploughed back into the soil the following spring so that the spirit dwelling therein would impart fertility into the earth for the new growing season. It is from these that corn dollies, elaborate constructions of interwoven and platted stalks of straw in a myriad of designs, such as Mother Earth, developed, again kept over winter, and ploughed into the earth the following spring to ensure a fruitful bounty. There were also several

local and regional variations such as the: Staffordshire Knot, Northamptonshire Horns, Cambridgeshire Handbell, Suffolk Horseshoe, Essex Turret, Herefordshire Fan, Yorkshire Candlestick, Welsh Fan and Oxfordshire Crown. This may now seem to us as a quaint, slightly amusing, superstition, but to a society whose well-being or even survival depended on the success or failure of the harvest, any sign or portent of the future, many born of years of observation and experience, were sought out and interpreted. One of particular importance in the run up to the harvest related to St Swithun, a former Bishop of Winchester from 30th October 852 until his death on 2nd July 863 whose feast fell on the 15th of July:

"St. Swithun's day if thou dost rain
For forty days it will remain
St. Swithun's day if thou be fair
For forty days 'twill rain nae mare."

A Buckinghamshire version is:
"If on St. Swithun's day it really pours
You're better off to stay indoors."

There is a scientific basis for this observation relating to the path of the jet stream which follows a stable course until the end of August. If it runs to the north of the British Isles, it allows warmer, drier continental weather systems to predominate.

In Bicester, as John Dunkin relates, if the course of the last cart of wheat took it through the town, the harvesters might be on the receiving end of buckets of water thrown from upstairs windows. He gives no explanation as to the origin of this custom but after a hot day spent harvesting, covered with sweat and dust, a quick dousing with water might not be unwelcome.

Early harvest celebrations apparently were drunken and raucous affairs with the farmer laying on food and drink, possibly purchased



from Sare or Hanley, if not home brewed, and food for the harvesters to thank them for a job well done. This might have been a continuation of the harvest itself which appears to have been a boozy affair. In the decades around 1800 the harvesters in Worcestershire and South Devon were provided with unlimited beer or cider. In Shropshire farmers are recorded as giving no more than five to eight quarts per head per day. In eastern Suffolk, in the late nineteenth century the ration was down to seventeen pints.

Dating from 1683 “The English Housewife” offers the following advice for keeping the harvesters active; “For the lethargy, or extreme drowsiness provoked by heat, you shall try by all violent means, either by noise or other disturbances, force perforce keep the party from sleeping and whosoever calleth for drink, you shall give him white wine and hyssop water, of each a little quantity mixed together, and not suffer him to sleep above four hours in four-and-twenty, till he comes to his usual wakefulness. Which as soon as he hath received, you shall then forthwith purge his head with the juice of the beets squirted up into his nostrils.”

The coming of mechanisation of the harvest on the farm and the growth of agricultural science marked a decline in many of the old customs and traditions. What had taken a whole community days to do could now be accomplished by a man in a big machine in a fraction of the time. Why throw a bucket of water over a combine harvester – even if you could get one up one of Bicester’s narrower streets? With it went that sense of continuity that would bind people to each other and to their ancestors and descendants. Rural life was hard and uncertain, and unchanging “...so life in the Shire goes on very much as it has this past age full of its own comings and goings, with change coming slowly if it comes at all. For things are made to endure in the Shire passing from one generation to the next.”

By the start of Queen Victoria’s long reign in 1837 this type of post-harvest celebration had more or less disappeared, the result of middle-class moralists and temperance campaigners who regarded it as a ‘disorderly, drunken rout’. The current model of the Harvest Festival can possibly be traced back to two West Country vicars: George Denison of East Brent in Somerset and R. S. Hawker of Morwenstow in Cornwall who simultaneously introduced a harvest festival service, followed by a tea for the parish harvesters. Within a decade these ‘respectable and morally sound’ harvest services with the decoration of churches had received the blessing of Queen Victoria herself. By 1889 one rector

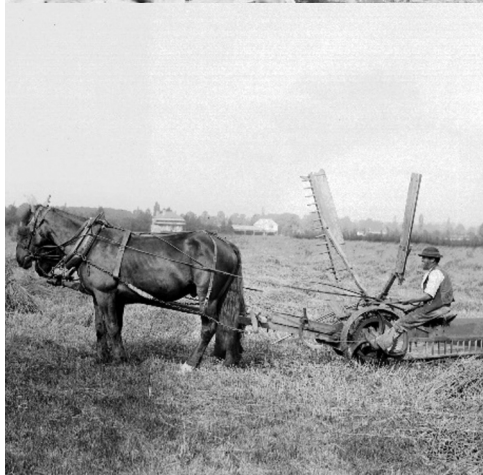
could declare that the old Harvest Home was no more and that we had moved on to Harvest Festivals with tea and cake at sixpence a head in the schoolroom with a choral service and a sermon in the church. This was a subject that the Bicester Herald mentioned on 30th September 1864; “The great and salutary changes that have taken place in connection with rejoicings for the successful in-gathering of the harvest in Oxfordshire have affected the observance of the custom in that county most beneficially, in an equal degree with many of the leading agricultural districts in the kingdom. In place of the week’s excess and dissipation that formerly characterised these gatherings, the landowner, the clergy, the tenant-farmer, and the leading inhabitants generally make it the occasion for social gatherings of an improved kind in which all may partake, and it is satisfactory to find that this, among other efforts for the social improvement and rational diversion of the labourer, is duly appreciated. The proceedings have invariably been inaugurated with Divine service ... followed the attractions of the festive board, the after-dinner addresses in all cases abounding with sterling advice, and instead of the harvest-homes as heretofore, rendering the domestic circle unhappy by reason of the privations they engendered, the wives and families of the labourers have been allowed to partake in the festivities, provision for which has been made most unsparingly.” The item concludes with the observation that with the new manner of celebration there had been no “calling for police or magisterial interference”.

Naturally, Bicester’s local newspapers of the time carried full accounts of local Harvest Festivals. For the benefit of its readers, the Herald of 23rd October 1896 carried a short history of harvest festivals since deep antiquity. Beginning with a description of a bas-relief from Nineveh that shows a procession, headed by musicians, of men carrying bundles of grain and baskets of fruit, followed by a rejoicing crowd, heading towards a temple above which is a representation of a harvest moon. The item argues that the Harvest Festival as we have it today has its origins in Old Testament Judaism when the Feast of First Fruits was one of the most important of the year when offerings were made at the temple. In Egypt, monuments of about 2,500 B.C. show processions with music and dancing, bearing sheaves of corn, bags of grain and flagons of wine and oil making their way to the temple of the God of Agriculture. Moving to the orient, where it claims that the Chinese claim an antiquity running back for 100,000 years [sic], agriculture is deemed the most ancient and honourable of occupations. There, every spring, when the ground is in suitable condition, the

Emperor, in person, attended by the court, goes to the field and ploughs a small piece of ground. Similarly, when the harvest of rice or grain is ready, he goes into the field with a sickle in hand and reaps and binds a few sheaves with his imperial hands. Returning closer to home the ancient Greeks and Romans, who had a god or resident spirit for every object and aspect of human behaviour, had Ceres, the corn-goddess, who was worshipped on the Aventine Hill and her festival was their harvest festival when all the fruits of the earth were offered to her. The worship of Ceres, the item argues, had come down to their time in the form of the reverence afforded to the last sheaf of grain, the embodiment of bountiful fertility, and its close relation, the corn dolly. In some early cultures agriculture itself had been the gift of one or several of their gods.

Locally, mention of Harvest Festivals first appears in the Bicester papers in the 1860s, on Thursday 19th September 1861 there were "Harvest Rejoicings at Marsh Gibbon" listed in the Herald, and one was announced for the 3rd September 1863 at Launton. The Herald of the 3rd October 1863 carried the following account of the first Bicester Harvest Thanksgiving; "The voice of Thanksgiving for the great and good harvest which we have been permitted to gather in, found its fitting expression in the Services, which were celebrated in Bicester Parish Church, on Wednesday, the 23rd ult., when for the first time in this town, it is supposed, a Harvest Home Festival was held.

The first service commenced at 12 o'clock, when the prayers were read by the Rev J. W. Watts, Vicar of the Parish, and the Lessons by the Rev R. G. D. F. Frampton, Curate, the Sermon being preached by the Rev J. C. Blomfield, Rector of Launton and Rural Dean. He chose for his text the 22nd verse of the 8th chapter of the Book of Genesis, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." The sermon was a very plain and practical one, and well adapted for the occasion. The congregation was not quite as large as might have been wished, but this is probably to be accounted for by the fact of many persons supposing that this service was intended for those only who were to



Top: Harvest in Oxfordshire. Packer Collection. Image courtesy of Oxfordshire History Centre. POX0184839.

Middle: Hay harvest in Oxfordshire, by Henry Taunt. Image courtesy of the Oxfordshire History Centre. POX0087098.

Bottom: A foretaste of the mechanisation to come. Harvesting in Oxfordshire by Henry Taunt. Image courtesy of the Oxfordshire History Centre. POX0088950.

take part in the Harvest Home Festivities. At the conclusion of the service, an adjournment was made to the Marquee for the dinner, an account of which will be found elsewhere.

At half-past six o'clock, the Church was again open for evening service, and a large congregation assembled. The service commenced with the Harvest Hymn – "Come ye thankful people come," which was heartily sung by all present. The Prayers were read by the Vicar; the First Lesson by the Rev R. G. D. F. Frampton; and the Second Lesson by the Rev J. C. Blomfield. The hymn – "Father of mercies, God of love," was then sung, and the Ven Archdeacon Bickermath ascended the pulpit and preached a very impressive and appropriate sermon. Our space will not allow of our giving an outline of the Archdeacon's discourse, which was listened to throughout with great attention.

It was at first intended that a collection should be made after the service, but this part was afterwards abandoned. Those, however, who are desirous of contributing what they are able to a thanks offering for this beautiful harvest, will very shortly have given them an opportunity for so doing.

When it is considered that this was the first Festival of this kind known in Bicester, we have every reason to be satisfied with the day's proceedings, & it is to be hoped that in future we may, every year, hear the voice of thanksgiving in our church, and experience the good effects of the kindly spirit which it generated by these gatherings."

The Rev J. C. Blomfield, Rector of Launton, mentioned above, is the local historian who published his "History of the present Deanery of Bicester, Oxon" in 1882.

The Bicester Herald's account of the marquee dinner, mentioned in the above report, appears on the same page. The persons responsible for setting this up are listed as: Mrs Ann Phillips and Messrs T. Taylor, C. Fowler, T. Paxton, and J. Paxton in the Marquee that had been used for the recent flower show and ball. Invitations were extended to their haymaking and harvest labourers and their families with Mr Fowler extending his to the tradesmen in his employ. The menu that afternoon consisted of roast and boiled beef with vegetables and prime plum-pudding, with good ale followed by tobacco and snuff. About 120 of Bicester's citizens sat down to the dinner that was served to them by: Mrs T. Phillips, Mrs Watts and Mrs Bennett and Misses Paxton, Phillips and Hitchman and Messrs Starling, R. and W. Phillips, C. Franklin, and W.

Hitchman. The Chairman, Mr Charles Fowler, Mrs Jonas Paxton, and Mr G. Kirby acted as carvers. Grace before and after the dinner was said by the Rev J. Watts. After the dinner there were several speeches and toasts, and a cricket match between Mr Fowler's men, who scored 51 runs in their two innings and a team chosen by Mr Phillips from the assembled party, which was won by the latter who scored the required 52 runs with nine wickets left to fall. After the repast there was a large quantity of food left over and, the following day, this was distributed to the poor with the largest families.

With this the pattern and custom of having a Harvest Festival in late summer or early autumn became established and issues of the Bicester Herald from that time in 1864 lists a number taking place in the area, but oddly, not in Bicester itself – but the pattern had been set. A selection of reports from the years following may be used to illustrate these. Landowners would continue to express their gratitude and it became common practice for the farmer to reward his labourers with a feast at the end of the harvest, as did Mr G. Drake, of Bucknell, whose "...harvest was finished on Saturday evening. Commemorative of the bringing of the last load, the workpeople and children of the village, together about 66, by Miss Drake and Miss Susan Drake, with bread and cheese and beer, with apples to the young people. The old men of the village were presented with a shilling each."

The inmates of the Bicester Union Poor House were not excluded from the harvest festivities. On 6th October 1889 the service, conducted by the chaplain, the Rev J. H. Moore, accompanied by Miss Finch on the harmonium, was followed by a repast of tea, cake, bread and butter, etc., liberally provided by Mr W. W. M. Dewar, the chairman of the Board of Guardians.

In September 1887 the Bicester Herald reported; "The harvest thanksgiving service was held at St Edburg's Church, Bicester, on Thursday evening last, Sept. 15. There was a good congregation, considering the wet weather and other attractions in Bicester. The service was commenced with the processional hymn "Come, ye thankful people, come." The service was taken by the Rev J. W. Morgan, of Cottisford. The first lesson, read by the Rev E. R. Massey, vicar of Merton, was from Isaiah xxviii, from the 23rd verse. The Rev J. C. Blomfield, rector of Launton, read the second lesson from Matthew vi from the 19th verse. Special psalms were sung by the choir, and the anthem "Thou crownest the year" (Psalm lxxv) was rendered in a very creditable manner, Miss Kirby presiding at the organ." An

“excellent sermon” was preached by the Rev F. G. Kiddle, vicar of Buckingham was based on the same text from Genesis that the Rev Blomfield had used during the first harvest service some years previously. This time there was a collection that amounted to £7 3s 1½d, which was divided between the Radcliffe Infirmary and the Bicester Provident Society. The item continues with a minute description of the elaborate and sumptuous decorations of the various parts of the church with a list of who did what bit and where.

On Monday, 3rd October 1892 there was a united harvest thanksgiving service at the Bicester Wesleyan Chapel which had been decorated with flowers, fruit, and vegetables from many donors. The Rev Mr Collier of the Cowley Road Chapel in Oxford preached an appropriate sermon. The collections and proceeds from the sale of the gifts of produce came to £3 15s 1½d, in aid of the funds of the Radcliffe Infirmary.

The Bicester Herald of 28th September 1900 informed its readers that the first Salvation Army Harvest Festival had taken place at their Barracks on Sunday and Monday. On the latter day a special musical evening was given by the children and band.

A fortnight later, the same paper carried consecutive reports on Harvest Festivals at St Edburg's Church, Bicester Workhouse, the Crockwell Mission Room, and the Wesleyan Church, in one continuous column running down on its second page. At the eleven o'clock matins the large congregation at St Edburg's listened to “an excellent sermon by the Rev Canon Sir John Caesar Hawkins, Bart, on Ephesians, v: verse 20; “Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”. In it he impressed the necessity of giving thanks for everything that they had – it was a duty of gratitude. He gave two examples: Jesus Christ at the feeding of the five thousand and St Paul after his deliverance from shipwreck. The preacher also made an urgent appeal on the behalf of the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution – and the parishioners of St Edburg's responded with £7 15s 7½d over all the services that Sunday. In the Workhouse the festival “was of the highest description”. The chapel had been decorated by the Master and Matron, Mr and Mrs W. Parks with products all obtained from gardens connected with the Union. The Chaplain, Rev G. P. Crawford, conducted the service at 4.30 accompanied by Mrs Hunt on the harmonium with hymns such as “Come ye thankful people, come” and “We plough the fields and scatter”. At the Crockwell

Mission Room, Mr L. G. P. Durrant led the evensong service amidst tasteful decorations of fruit and vegetables arranged by Mrs Durrant, Mr W. Horwood, Mrs T. Horwood, Miss Checkley and Mrs Gostelow. Preaching on John vi: 27, Mr Durrant “...first spoke on the multitude following their spiritual food, Jesus, and of the necessity of labouring for the heavenly food. Man had to do battle with the powers of nature, and the victory had to be won, all classes of mankind having to take part in it.” The following day the gifts were distributed to the local sick and poor. All did not go according to plan at the Wesleyan services. At the morning service the minister Rev R.H. Tregunna discoursed on the parable of the rich man. That afternoon there was a special service for the children, which was well attended. However, as the Herald related; “An exceptionally good congregation attended the service, but the service itself was marred by an unfortunate incident, the incandescent gas going wrong, and consequently had to be extinguished. The service was curtailed, the lessons being left out. The minister preached on charity, his text from 1 Cor. xiii. 13. Altogether the place was in semi-darkness for just over half-an-hour, in consequence of which many left the building, and the collections fell short of previous years.”

In October 1910 at Bicester's Wesleyan Church where; “Very successful harvest thanksgiving services were held on Sunday last. The church had been most tastefully decorated. The bulk of the gifts (which were numerous) of flowers, fruit, and vegetables, were arranged in front of the rostrum, and the display was a very pleasing one, including a large number of bunches of choice grapes. The windows were well filled with decorative material, and the gallery was entwined with flowers, greenery and autumn leaves.”

“In the morning there was a large congregation. The Rev F.T. Beckingham preached from the words “By their fruits ye shall know them,” and discoursed on character.”

“In the afternoon there was a special service for children, who presented their gifts. Mr Beckingham gave an address on “The mission of the beautiful.”

The church was packed in the evening, when Mr Beckingham preached on the words “Be not deceived; God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap” (Galatians vi, 7). The choir ably rendered the anthem “O Lord, how manifold are Thy mercies” Mr G. Layton accompanied on the organ.



On Monday evening a successful sale of the produce, etc., was conducted by Mr F. C. Holiday and Mr W. Holiday, the result being about 30s more than last year.

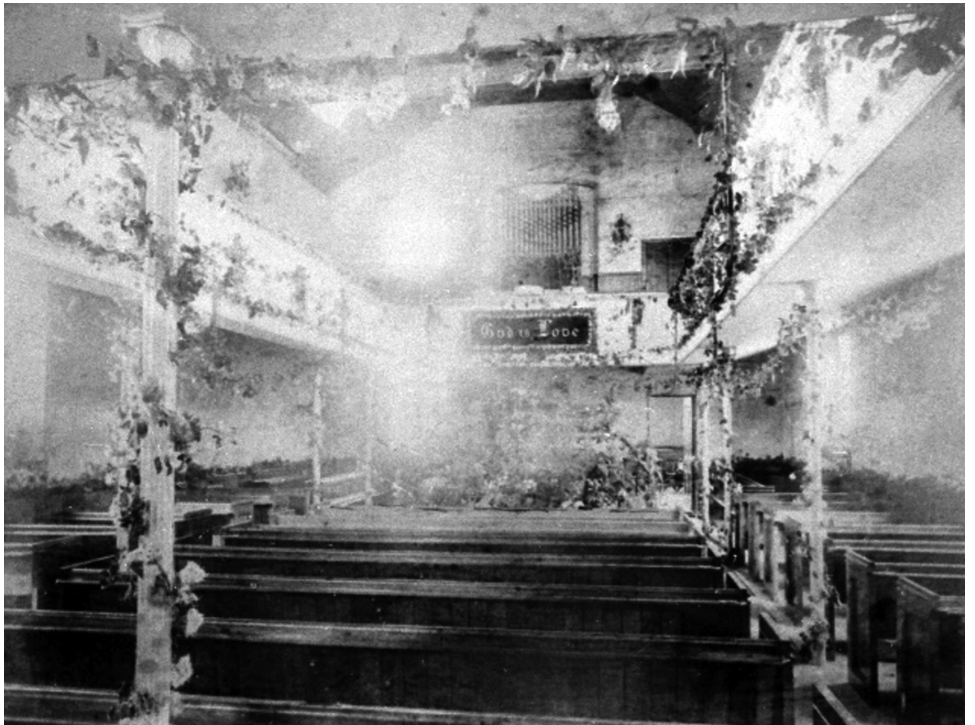
At the conclusion the Rev F.T. Beckingham thanked the auctioneers for their kind services and the friends who had assisted to make the harvest festival a success.

Half the proceeds of Sunday's collections and the sale on Monday were divided between the Bicester Nursing Home and the Radcliffe infirmary, Oxford. The total amount collected, and the proceeds of the sale, amounted to nearly £14, and £3 10s has been sent to each of the institutions above-mentioned. This is well in advance of last year."

Locally, the importance of the harvest is recalled in two local place names: Lower and Upper Heyford, or "hay-ford". These were places on the River Cherwell where it was possible to take the hay harvest from one bank to the other,

as it made its way across Oxfordshire to join Old Father Thames at Oxford, the latter being upstream of the former. Bridges may have now replaced the fords, and there might be few loads of hay crossing them, but the names remain.

The changes in the countryside in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, the drift from a rural to an urban population, the advance of mechanisation and the two World Wars led to the passing of many of the harvest customs and traditions. The globalisation of the food supply, the year-round availability of previously seasonal produce and the easy purchase of formerly exotic tropical fruit all led to a change in the way the harvest has been celebrated. The perfect, plastic wrapped fruit and vegetables on the supermarket shelves do not have the same intimacy with nature as do the home-grown equivalents and the soil that grew them. We neglect that link, the close fellowship with the earth, that Tolkien ascribes to the Hobbits, that our forebears had with the soil at our peril.



Above: Decked out for the Harvest Festival, Bicester's Methodist Church in North Street. Image courtesy of the Oxfordshire History Centre. POX0220814.

Left Top: Hay harvesters taking a break from their toil at Abwell Farm in Gloucestershire in 1921. Photograph by Beatrice Vernon.

Left Bottom: The harvest in Blackthorn. Herring collection. Image courtesy of the Oxfordshire History Centre. POX0626269.

Bygone Bicester

All articles taken from the Bicester Advertiser for December

15th December 1882

St Edburg's Hall - The Opening

On Wednesday last, the new hall, named after the patron saint of Bicester church, St Edburg, was opened.

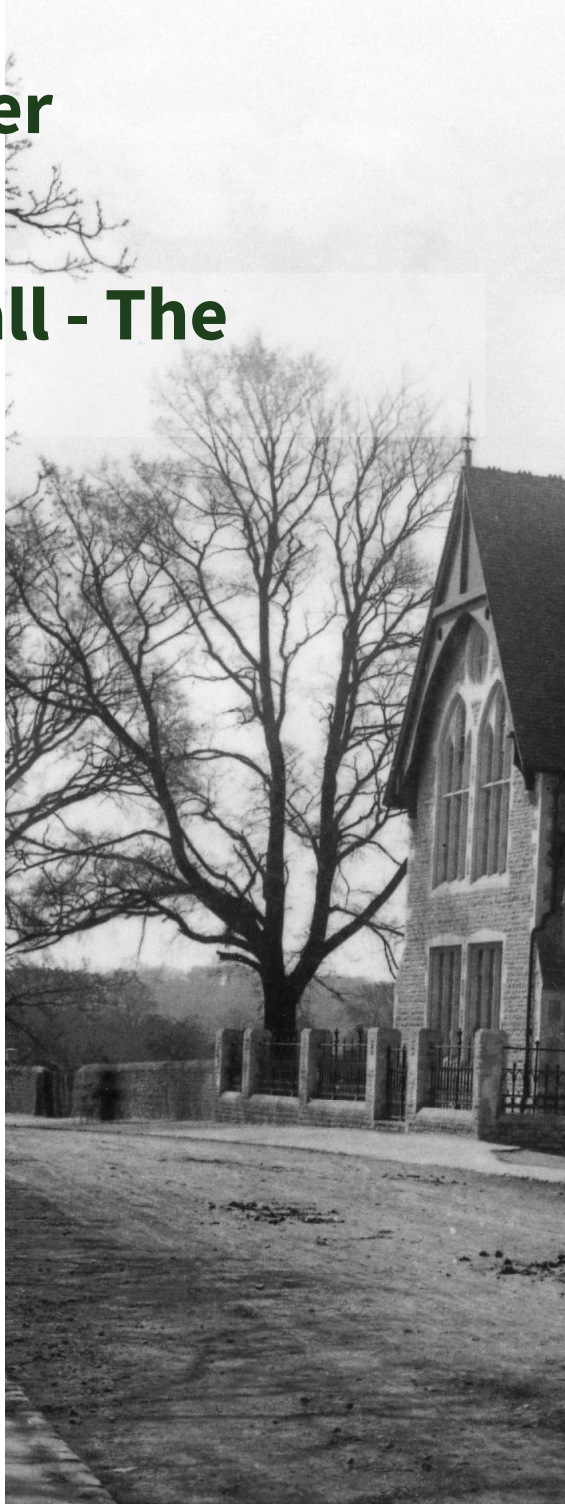
The building is of the most compact character, and in addition to the large room of the hall, so much to be desiderated for parochial purposes, has upon its basement certain subsidiary rooms which may be utilised as classrooms, and thus pressed into the service of science, or can be, as they were on Wednesday, turned into refreshment rooms, with the happiest effect upon the popularity of the Church and Church managers in Bicester.

The plan of the architect, Mr Bruton, has been carried into execution very happily by the builder, Mr Kingerlee, and is as perfect in the way of accommodation as it is from a professional point of view. The site, for which Mr Jonas Paxton has to be thanked, is exceedingly convenient, and will permit of the hall on some occasion supplementing the accommodation of the Parish Church, from which it is placed at a considerable distance.

The history of the erection of the hall is, to some extent, the history of our Vicar's residence amongst us. He it was who, on his arrival, saw the need we Bicester people had of a meeting place. The need was no sooner seen than our excellent incumbent set to work to meet it.

Those who, nearly twelve months ago, joined in our parochial reunion in the Corn Exchange, were on Wednesday present at the inauguration of the new building. Not only those, but many of the busy fingers which in the summer months laboured for the good work, and afterwards with busier fingers disposed of it at our bazaars, graced the occasion with their presence.

The Countess of Jersey (who performed the





opening), with the Earl, the Baron and Baroness Schroeder, the gentry and clergy of the neighbourhood were also present in force to assist at the event, for which we bode the happiest results for our parish and town.

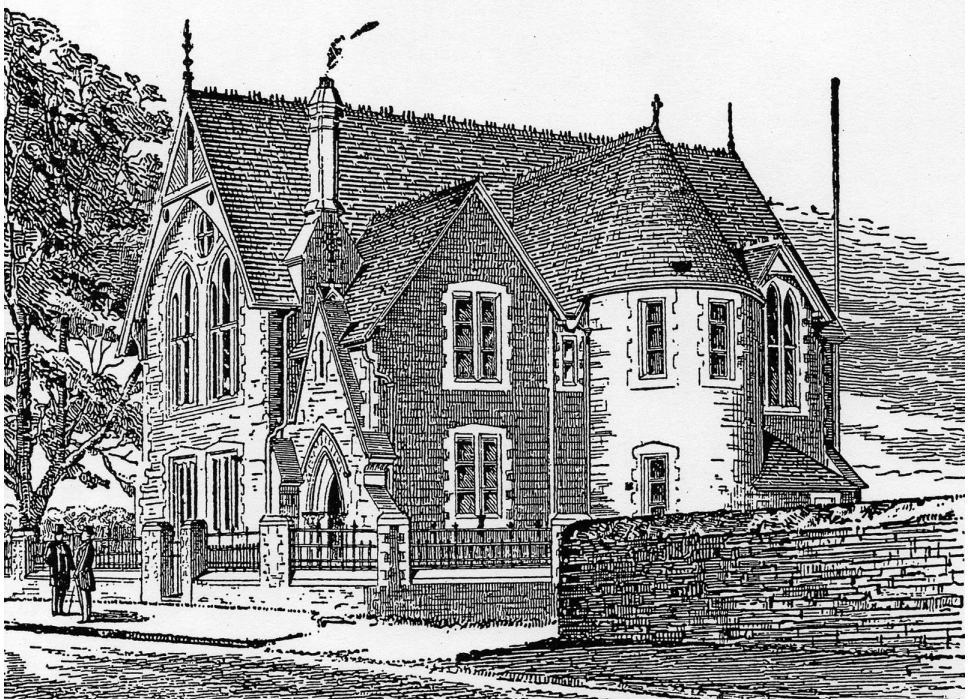
The proceedings opened with the singing of the hymn "Who Givest All," followed by prayer from the Vicar. The Countess of Jersey next performed the ceremony of opening the building. She said: "Ladies and gentlemen, the Rev. J. Blackburne-Kane has desired me to be present and to open St Edburg's Hall today. Only a few days since there has been opened in London, but on a much larger scale, the new Law Courts. You in Bicester have followed this up by opening your Parochial Hall. The Law Courts were a necessity to the great metropolis, but the Parochial Hall has been built for a special purpose and is greatly needed in this town. All will have reason to be proud of the noble building, and the architect, Mr Bruton, the builder, and all connected in any way with the execution of the work deserve our very hearty congratulations." Wishing every success to the Parochial Hall, the Countess declared the building opened, an announcement which was followed by great applause.

Baron Schroder asked for a hearty vote of thanks to the Countess of Jersey for her kindness

on this auspicious occasion, and for which they owed her many thanks. Within six months of the laying of the foundation stone they were that day assembled to open the hall. They ought all to be very thankful to Lord and Lady Jersey, and to all who have so nobly assisted in the work. Some friends who had not been able to help up to the present time would have occasion offered them to do so that day. They had collected largely, but there was a large sum to collect still. The advantages which the new hall would give to the town and neighbourhood were incalculable, and they should all join in trying to wipe off the debt remaining on the spacious building. Henry Tubb, Esq., seconded the vote of thanks, which was unanimously carried.

Baron Schroder said he had been deputed by the Countess of Jersey to thank them for the cordial way they had responded to the vote of thanks, and he assured them nothing would please that lady more than to know that a great many had to put their names on the little donation cards that day. He saw many ladies present, but not a great number of gentlemen; he suppose the ladies had been deputed by the gentlemen to pull the purse strings (laughter).

Mr Jonas Paxton proposed a vote of thanks to the architect and builder of the Hall, commenting upon the great benefit the erection



of such a building was to the parish. The vicar put the vote to the meeting, and it was very cordially agreed to.

Mr Bruton, in responding on behalf of himself and Mr Kingerlee, the builder, said it was most gratifying to himself and to the gentleman named to learn that their work had the approval of those for whom it had been undertaken. It was especially gratifying to receive so kind a recognition of their work. He expressed his confidence in the stability and general thoroughness of the execution of the work.

Hymn 380 was next sung.

Rev. J. Blackburne-Kane wished to propose a vote of thanks to those who had so generously contributed to the work. A great many friends had most kindly aided them, and those who had not done so would shortly have an opportunity to help them also. He hardly knew how to move his vote of thanks, so full of gratitude was his heart, but he remembered that great joys like great sorrows were dumb. He trusted those who had given might be blessed in their work. Their kind words and kindness had upheld him in what he had done. It was, perhaps, not the most enviable position to beg for money, but this had to be undertaken (applause).

Mr J.W. Hunt seconded the vote of thanks moved by the vicar, expressing the acknowledgement of the parish to Mr Jonas Paxton; the generous donor of the ground upon which this building stood. They must not seem to undervalue this munificent gift, nor those other gifts bestowed by Lord and Lady Jersey, the Baron and Baroness, and Mr and Mrs Tubb. But one name had been conspicuous by its absence from the vote of thanks, the name of the respected vicar. To his undaunted courage and unflagging energy the result was, in a great measure, due. He was only a seconder of this vote of thanks, but he begged leave to ask that the name of their good vicar be added to those to whom they voted their thanks that day (applause).

The vicar responded remarking upon the unanimity which had prevailed in the work throughout. It had been a labour of love and one of which he hoped they might long live to enjoy the fruits. He thought that altogether they had succeeded well (applause).

Mr Norton, who had acted as foreman of the works, was called forward and thanked for his efficient conduct, and presented with an inkstand for which he returned thanks in appropriate terms and was applauded.

The Earl of Jersey proposed a vote of thanks to Baron Schroder, who always showed great kindness towards the people of Bicester. He had proved himself to be one of the best friends of the town in more ways than one. Not only, he reminded them, had the Baron come forward most liberally to aid in the building of the Hall, but in various deeds of kindness, unknown to very many; and he was quite sure they would very heartily accord the vote of thanks he asked for to the Baron and Baroness (applause).

Baron Schroder responded, and expressed his thanks for the kind way in which the vote of thanks, so eloquently proposed by his Right Honourable friend Earl Jersey, had been accorded. As long as he was able to do his duty towards his good friends at Bicester, it was his desire and wish to do so to the fullest extent (applause).

The vicar then pronounced the benediction, and the proceedings terminated.

Christmas at the Local Red Cross Hospital

The patients at the Bicester V.A.D. Hospital spent an exceedingly happy Christmas this year, thanks to the untiring efforts of the staff and the kindness of a few individuals in the neighbourhood. The arrangements, without being luxurious, were most elaborate, indeed it was almost amazing to see the preparations that had been made.

The patients retired to bed as usual on Christmas Eve and woke early next morning. Imagine their surprise at finding at the foot of each of their beds a stocking filled with seasonable fare. Excitement was great, for no one had heard of the "scheme" and no one appears to have seen "Santa" ascend or descend the chimney; even the latest sleepers seem to have slept heavily that night.

The patients hastily dressed and many greetings were exchanged during the morning. Dinner was partaken of at 1:30pm, and consisted, amongst other things, of turkey and plum pudding. Perhaps the least said of this the better. Suffice to say (we have it on good authority) that the medical officer was busy the rest of the day.

In the afternoon Mr and Mrs Heape, of King's End House, visited the hospital for the purpose of judging the wards which had been seasonably decorated by the residents. Prizes, consisting of cigars, cigarettes, etc., were offered for the four most tastefully decorated. The task of the judges was by no means an enviable one, for all the wards looked splendid. Eventually however, the first prize went to number 12, the 2nd to number 1, the 3rd to number 11 and the 4th to number 9.

During the afternoon gifts were distributed to the patients. In the evening an entertainment was given by Privates Scougall and Campbell, both of whom were described as "like Harry Lauder only far more amusing." All the patients retired to bed very weary, nevertheless prepared for the further merriment which was to follow on the morrow.

On Boxing Day tea was partaken of at four o'clock, to which past patients were invited. During the day a huge Christmas tree had been erected in the recreation room and was decked with coloured candles, fruit and presents of various kinds. It was no secret among the patients that Santa Claus was coming to the hospital at five o'clock to distribute the gifts. Shortly after that hour he arrived and the distribution took place amidst much gaiety and laughter.

Later in the evening a sketch entitled "Poached Eggs and Pearls" was given by some of the staff and patients and was much enjoyed. Bedtime, we are informed, came far too soon.

If Invasion Comes!

If this country is invaded, the Home Guard has five main tasks for which it has been trained since its inception. First, its function is to scout and report; secondly, to delay and obstruct the enemy; thirdly, to guard certain strong points; fourthly, to check subversive activities; and finally, to work in cooperation with the civil authorities.

It must be remembered that the Home Guard is not a mobile but a static force. It covers the whole of Great Britain and every Home Guard has his job to do in the area he knows best. In this way these men keep the entire countryside under the most careful observation. That is why, in many cases, they would take the place of military scouts during an invasion, particularly in such great deserted areas as the northern moors and the Scottish Highlands.

Having spotted the enemy, the Home Guard's next job is to report the news to the competent military authorities. The Home Guard would now be used to delay, obstruct or destroy the enemy. It might not be strong enough to engage an enemy formation, but it might be able, through its training in concealment and its unique knowledge of the terrain, to delay it for an hour or two, which might make all the difference to the arrival of regular troops. In some places Home Guards have been issued with mines as well as explosives and flamethrowers. Many Home Guards have expert knowledge of the use of the heavy and light machine guns, rifles and revolvers and several types of grenade. New anti-tank weapons have already been issued to a number of units.

The Home Guard is expected to protect certain strong points which may include munitions factories, railways and Post Office communications. Many Home Guards are formed with industrial units and in the event of invasion it is their job to hold the factory for as long as it can be worked, being joined by more and more men from inside until the factory is defended by its maximum strength.

As members of His Majesty's Forces, all Home Guards are empowered to report or, if necessary, deal with anyone doing anything subversive. This power is important and should be used unhesitatingly, especially if invasion comes.

The Home Guard is not a force which exists in splendid isolation; rather it works in continual cooperation with the life of its own area. The local Platoon Commander probably represents the Home Guard on village committees, sitting beside members of the parish Council and representatives of the emergency food service and of Civil Defence. All these services should work in cooperation during invasion, and the Home Guard Platoon Commander will play his part in giving and receiving intelligence relating to the defence of the area.

It should be understood that in an invasion the Home Guard's role is not necessarily a defensive one. Every unit, every formation, is there to protect its own locality, and the duty of every Home Guard is to harass the enemy, day and night, to the best of his power. Should the troops in his locality be engaged in counter-attack or in driving the enemy out of the countryside, the Home Guard is trained to be equally vigorous in attack as he is in defence.



Bicester Go to the Top of the Table

Bicester Town 2, Abingdon United 1.

Matches between these two teams have always been very close, and Saturday's clash on the Town ground proved no exception. The visitors, having already beaten the Town side at Abingdon, were hoping to make it a double.

Bicester had to face strong sunshine in the first half which caused a few problems, but they still had much of the attack once the early probing was overcome – and ended up top of the league.

The busiest man on the field was the home keeper, Kevin Leach, who had to deal with many back passes from his defenders, which made play very disappointing. Only once did the visitors look dangerous. That was when Ray Green and Norman Taylor combined nicely, the former finishing the move with a centre to Taylor who was tackled by Alvin Martin. The ball ran back to Leach who cleared.

After a second corner to Bicester was again cleared, they kept the pressure on the visiting defence and almost opened the score when John Snell, playing wide on the right, picked up a long pass and fired a shot outside the far upright. Abingdon, who had now settled down, broke away to be given a free kick well taken by Sam Woods. But it found the head of Paul Evans, who sent his effort wide. On the attack again, Shaun Peake just managed to stop Ray Green when about to test Leach.

At the other end, Richardson had to clear a header from John Thorne, but he made amends minutes later when he headed in a cross from Matthew Cresswell to open the score. It was one of the best goals seen on the Town ground this season.

Just before half-time, John Snell had a good opening for Bicester. But he dithered when confronted by keeper Richardson, who left his line to face him – and then smothered Snell's attempted lob. The half ended with Bicester still in front by a single goal.

After Abingdon had kept the home side on their toes for some ten minutes, Bicester broke away and should have scored. Liam Herbert carved out the perfect opening for Martin Swanson, but he completely missed his kick from 80 yards with only Richardson to beat. In the next minute John Snell came rushing through with two defenders on his back, and although tackled, he still managed to get in a shot – which Richardson saved.

Leach, calling for a back pass, was nearly caught when Woods suddenly appeared, but managed to keep hold of the ball. Herbert, again in the Bicester attack, should have made the pass to his fellow front runners who were completely unmarked, but decided to go alone and was squeezed out by the defenders.

John Lever received a knee injury and Bicester brought on Ian John to take his place. Then Abingdon suddenly came to life again with a serious attack. Twice, shots were charged down in this sudden burst, and a free kick taken by Les James was saved by Leach.

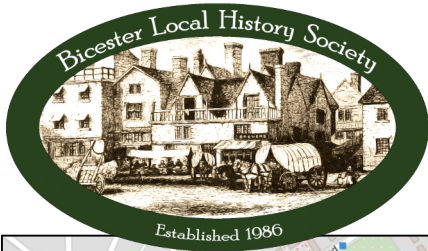
Abingdon then substituted Green for Gary Lambourne and his touch of the ball was a shot over the Bicester crossbar. Just as the Abingdon side looked to be taking over the attack, Bicester again got away to be awarded a free kick well taken by Thorne – twice it was cleared, only for it to be returned for Evans to put through his own goal when under pressure trying to clear.

Swanson and Snell got the ball into the Abingdon goal but both were disallowed. Then, in the closing minutes, Woods scored a consolation goal for Abingdon from close in.

This win places Bicester on top of the League; Sharpness, who were equal, were engaged in the F.A. Vase.



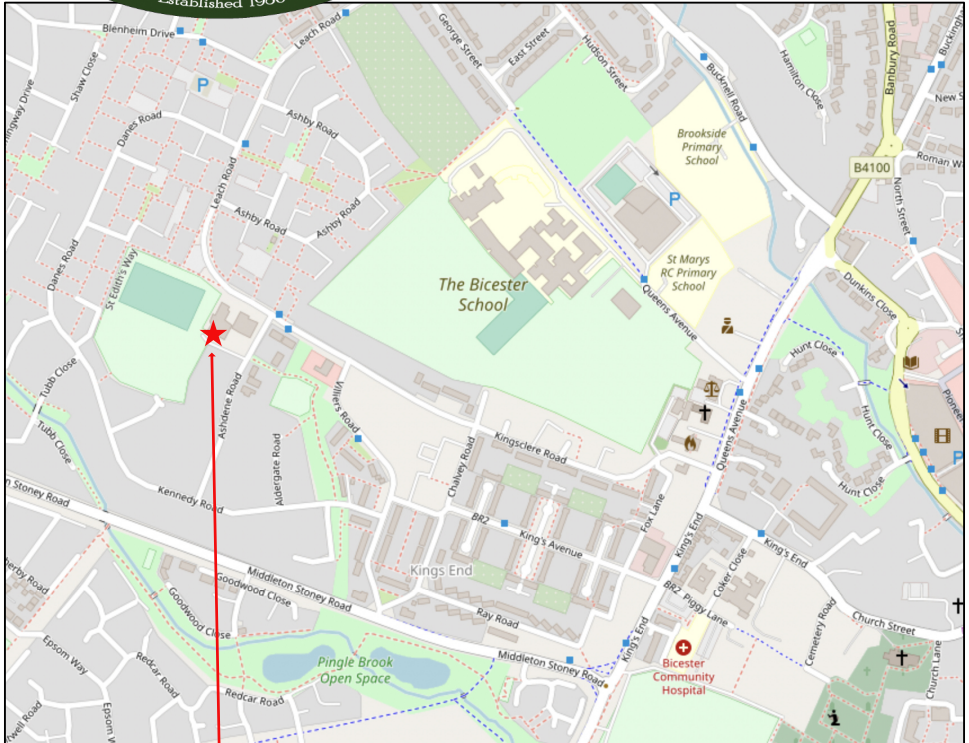
John Snell playing for Bicester Town.



BLHS's monthly meetings are held on the third Monday of every month (except August) and begin at 7:30pm. Members entry is free, visitors pay £3 at the door. Refreshments are included and a raffle is usually held at the end of the talk.

The September meeting includes our AGM and forms the start of our membership year.

Current annual membership fees are £13 for individuals and £20 for joint memberships.



Our monthly meetings are held at:

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

Committee members:

- Bob Hessian (*Chairman*)
chairman@blhs.org.uk
 01869 350662
- Sally James (*Treasurer*)
 01869 243804
- Mark Lewandowski (*Minutes Secretary*)
- John Roberts (*Membership Officer*)
- Matthew Hathaway (*Editor*)
editor@blhs.org.uk
- Peter Crook