

Bicester Historian

Issue: 92 January - March 2023



Copyright © Bicester Local History Society 2023

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

Performance of "Santa Claus"	4
Entertainments at Bicester Workhouse	5
Christmas in Bicester	6
Voices of the Victorian Poor in England & Wales	8
The River at War Talk	10
The Coming of Benedictine Nuns to Bicester	14
Bicester v. Cowley Barracks	16
Bicester's Drama Festival	17
Bicester's Boer War (Part 7)	18
Report of the Evacuation Committee	30
Roll of Honour	31
A Pleasant Evening at the Wesley Hall	32
The Coronation Baths	34
Bicester Bowls Club's Good Prospects	35
Bicester's Great War (Part 2) Talk	36



Bygone Bicester

All articles taken from the Bicester Advertiser or Bicester Herald for January

3rd January 1902

Performance of “Santa Claus”

The annual performances of the choir girls of St Edburg’s Church have become very popular, and the operetta they gave on Wednesday and yesterday was well patronised. The piece was entitled “Santa Claus” (the words by Louis Tisdale and music by Gilbert), and was given a few years ago, but doubtless the success it attained then was the reason why it was chosen for this year’s entertainment.

The various scenes were bright, the dresses pretty, and the characters were well sustained. The chorus singing was very good, as were also the solos rendered by the several characters, there being a marked improvement on previous years in the latter. Altogether the performance reflected the greatest credit on those who took part in it, and also to Mrs Hunt and Miss L. Hunt, who must have spent a good deal of time in their training of the girls.

The cast was as follows:

Santa Claus - Janet Ashmore
Inky - Kathleen Durrant
Mirth - Emily Plater
Peace - May Dagley
Love - Amy Ashmore
Joy - Annie Timberlake
Happiness - Mary Smith
Content - Edith Jackson
Starlight - Florence Evans

The chorus was taken by “The Spirits,” twelve in number, who were as follows: Edith Plater, Mabel Wesker, Edith Elliott, Lily Wakenell, Emily Palmer, Hilda Alley, May Davey, Evelyn Clarke, Audrey Clarke, Edith Ward, Elsie Buckle, and Elsie Bond.

The “Mortals” also did their part well.

They were:

Florrie - Louisa Smith
Hetty - Nellie Alley
Jenny - May Clark
Millie - Alice Freeman
Bessie - Nellie Jackson

At the conclusion of the performance the girls gracefully executed a dance, given with remarkable precision. At intervals on Wednesday songs were rendered by Miss G. Bowen (“Ever So Far Away”), Rev. C.J.N. Page (“O Promise Me”), and Mr F. Clifton (“The Village Smithy”).

Last evening the girls performed even better than the previous night. Songs were rendered by Dr Long (“Children’s Voices”), Miss G. Bowen (“John Bull’s Letter-bag”), and Mr F. Clifton (“Because I Love You”). At the conclusion of the entertainment the Rev. C.J.N. Page proposed votes of thanks to all who had assisted in any way. The performers were afterwards entertained to supper.

The accompaniments to the operetta, singing, and dancing were played by Mr G.F.H. Kemp.

Assistance was rendered by, amongst others, Misses Finch, Hunt, and Campin, who helped to get the children ready for the performance, Rev. C.J.N. Page, Messrs. C. Hunt, W. Davey, H. Jackson, and G. Timberlake.

The profits from the performances will go towards a summer outing for the choir girls.

Entertainments at Bicester Workhouse

The Rev. C.E. Prior, rector of Charlton-on-Otmoor and Guardian for that parish, arranged an entertainment for the inmates of Bicester Workhouse. This was given on Wednesday afternoon and was most successful, the inmates enjoying themselves immensely. The programme was most entertaining. At the close Mr W. Parks (master) thanked the Rev. C.E. Prior and the performers for giving the inmates such an enjoyable entertainment. We might state that the Rev. C.E. Prior provided cake for the inmates' tea.

The following was the programme:
Piano solo - Miss D. Miller
Song - Three for Jack - Mr F.T. Prior
Duet - No, Sir - Miss D. Miller and Mr F.T. Prior
Song - Rev. G.B. Cronshaw
Quartette - John Peel - Miss Miller, Miss D. Miller, Rev. G.B. Cronshaw, and Mr Fred Prior
Piano solo - Teddy Bear - Miss Miller
Song - Under the Old Umbrella - Mr F.T. Prior
Duet - Where Are You Going To - Miss Miller and Mr F.T. Prior
Song - Young Richard - Rev. G.B. Cronshaw
Quartette - Dinah - Miss Miller, Miss D. Miller, Rev. G.B. Cronshaw, and Mr Fred Prior
Duet - The Twins - Rev. G.B. Cronshaw and Mr F.T. Prior
Musical monologue - Man With a Single Hair - Mr F.T. Prior
Dramatic sketch - A Medical Mystery - Miss Miller and Mr F.T. Prior
Quartette - Ring-tailed Coon - Miss Miller, Miss D. Miller, Rev. G.B. Cronshaw, and Mr Fred Prior

Then, last evening, the Bicester YMCA carol party paid their annual visit to Bicester Workhouse, and entertained the inmates with some carols, whilst members of the carol party rendered songs, the result being a very enjoyable concert. The accompanists were Mr S. Stockley, Mr J. Wood, and Mr Vernon Barnes.

The following was the programme:
Carol - Never Shone a Light so Fair
Carol - The First Nowell
Carol - As With Gladness Men of Old
Song - When the Sunset - Mr E.A. Clifton
Song - Robin Redbreast - Mr M.W. Smith
Song - Hearts of Oak - Mr J. Wood
Song - Comrades - Mr W. Clifton
Song - I Do Like to be Beside the Seaside - Mr E.A. Clifton
Song - Do You Know Charlie Digby - Mr M.W. Smith
Carol - Hail, Smiling Morn

The Master thanked the YMCA carol party for being so kind as to give that entertainment which, he assured them, had been thoroughly enjoyed.

Christmas in Bicester

Following the general shopping rush, Christmas, as usual, passed off quietly in Bicester. Trade during the days immediately preceding was good, the extra bus services, instituted through the auspices of the Bicester Chamber of Commerce, affording the residents of the villages in the vicinity added facilities for shopping in the town, which, especially on Christmas Eve, presented a gay and busy scene. Fortunately the weather was kinder than last year, and little or no inconvenience was caused to travelling arrangements. There was the usual influx of visitors and family reunions. Carollers were not so numerous this year, and there was no band in evidence to strike up the familiar Yuletide tunes.

For some time preceding Christmas postmen have an exceedingly busy time, and as the 25th draws nearer so does it become a sort of nightmare to GPO officials. At Bicester the posting was heavier than last year, extra mails pouring in from the Monday onwards. Temporary men were engaged to cope with the work, and by Christmas day a general clearance had been effected, the remnants of the Christmas posting, which came in on Boxing Day, being delivered on Sunday and Monday.

With the welcome absence of fog, buses and trains kept up to time, and passengers on the whole found travelling conditions favourable.

Christmas Day was, in the main, an indoors day for families, although the mild weather enticed more than usual to take a stroll until such time as the roast turkey, plum pudding and sweets, etc., should demand undivided attention. For many households the afternoon was spent in lazy enjoyment, the pulling of crackers, tasting of the many good things, and

songs, etc., being the general order, while after a welcome cup of tea, a settling down, in some cases to listening in to the excellent wireless programmes, in others to awaiting the arrival of friends and relatives and subsequent revelry. Outside, in fact, Bicester was strangely quiet.

At the parish church in the morning, there were four celebrations of Holy Eucharist, the Vicar (Rev. W. O'Reilly) being the celebrant. At 6am the number of communicants was 20; at 7am it was 60; at 8am it was 97; and at 11:15am it was 20. The Vicar also officiated at Caversfield church at the 10am Holy Eucharist. St Edburg's interior presented a very nice appearance during the festival services, the decorations having been carried out by the following: Mrs W. O'Reilly, high altar and lady chapel; Mrs P. Harris and Mrs R.B. Goble, pulpit; Misses Finch, font; and Mr J.H. Walker, children's corner.

Members of the Methodist and Congregational churches held a united morning service in the Congregational church, when there was a good congregation, the Christmas hymns being heartily sung. The Rev. E.R. Bishop, Methodist minister, conducted the service and preached an able and appropriate sermon.

The patients at the Bicester Cottage Hospital were few, and these, thanks to the efforts of the Matron and staff, had an enjoyable time, the wards having been appropriately decorated. Similar conditions existed at the Isolation Hospital, where a small company had a thoroughly happy time in true festive spirit and in a seasonal atmosphere created by the decorations, etc., through the Matron and staff.

The excellent fare provided for the casuals at the Public Assistance Institution was thoroughly

enjoyed by the smallest number - 17 men – in the wards at Christmas for years. Roast beef and vegetables, followed by Christmas pudding and mince pies, all ad lib, was the dinner menu, while for tea there was cake, jam and fruit extra. Sweets, the gift of Miss E.C. Ashwell, were distributed, and an ounce of tobacco given to each man after dinner. The Chaplain (Rev. W. O'Reilly) and friends visited the Institution during the afternoon, and kindly distributed tobacco, cigarettes, sweets, periodicals and playing cards, which were gratefully appreciated. The Superintendent (Mr S.H. Brown) and his staff ensured that the inmates had a good time, and that they succeeded was evident by the thanks they received from the casuals, who, in the evening, held an al fresco concert, providing their own talent, which was particularly good.

Boxing day, which, for a large portion of the community in Bicester and district is hunting day, dawned with a thick fog enveloping the district, to cause bitter disappointment to those who had planned a day with the hounds. Despite the unfavourable conditions, however, there was a large crowd scattered on and in the precincts of the Market Square as eleven o'clock drew near, while Sheep Street was almost impassable from the Midland Bank corner to near the Post Office, cars, cycles and vehicles of every description being parked therein. Many had doubts as to whether the meet would be held, but eventually Johnson hove into view with the pack and shortly before eleven o'clock rode on to the Square, to be welcomed by a host of followers and members of the public. The Master and Mrs Field Marsham were present, together with a number of well-known hunting ladies and gentlemen of the locality, and a fair sprinkling of farmers. The move-off, on account of the

weather, was delayed, and it was nearly noon before the start was made, the red coats of the huntsmen blending with the colouring of the hounds, forming a pleasing and typically country scene as the Hunt moved slowly up Sheep Street, followed by a steady stream of cars, cycles and pedestrians. Some considerable time had elapsed before one could travel without difficulty through the main street. Several followed the Hunt during the day, but sport was disappointing.

There was no football in the town during the afternoon, and numerous soccer enthusiasts visited Northampton, Reading and Oxford; while other residents of the town found the fireside much more comfortable in view of the miserable weather. In the evening both the Regal and Crown cinemas were well patronised, while some people visited the pantomime at Oxford. Dancers made their way to various places in the district, Bicester being strangely lethargic in the matter of providing a similar form of entertainment during the holiday period.

Sunday was a day of rest in more senses than one, and in many cases the opportunity was taken to prepare for work on Monday. Thus Christmas, 1936, in Bicester was spent in much the same way as many of its predecessors.

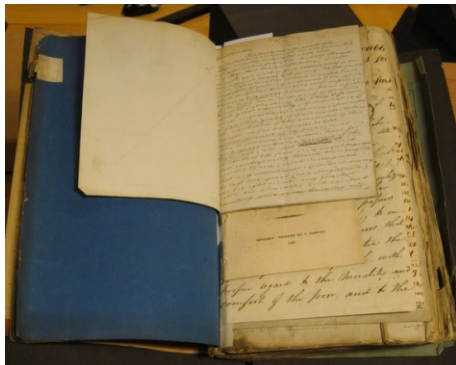
Voices of the Victorian Poor in England & Wales

National Archives Online Lecture by Dr Paul Carter, 14th October 2022

By Sally James

If one can describe it as such, one of the benefits of Covid has been the increase in online resources for local historians, particularly in the way of lectures, and wider access to existing holdings. The British Association for Local History and the National Archives, to name just two organisations, have enhanced their online presence to keep in touch with their members or enable access to their collections at a time when personal research was restricted. At BLHS we have endeavoured to advise members of the ongoing opportunities available.

As part of the 'In their own write' project, Dr Paul Carter and his team from the University of Leicester examined Poor Law correspondence (National Archives reference MH12) from 1834 to 1900. This correspondence has been preserved because it has been bound into volumes at Kew.



The presentation looked at the poor's perception of their treatment in the world at a time when they had nominal influence. The weight of letters, petitions and witness statements serve to dispel the myth that the poor had left little in the way of an archive. A

companion project, 'Teaching the Voices of the Victorian Poor' aims to make the material available for schools. A set of about fifty letters, intended for teachers, but available to all researchers, is online at: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/workhouse-voices/>

Examination of the welfare system of the time (the New Poor Law) from the perspective of the English and Welsh poor, rather than the administrators of the scheme, is possible through these records. It can be seen how the Victorian poor explained their poverty; their living conditions and what they considered to be their rights in times of unemployment or sickness. Dr Carter identified four main themes within the correspondence, viz:

- Complaints of general conditions/treatment of indoor and outdoor paupers;
- References to the breaking up of families and family homes;
- Concerns regarding medical care;
- Paupers knowing and establishing 'rights'.

It was established through this correspondence that the poor were more than willing to complain of ill-treatment or neglect and did so in their thousands. The Poor Law Commission in London was regarded as a sort of court of appeal and the poor expected the Commission to chastise the local Poor Law Unions when fault was found.

A letter from Mary Herbert in the 1840s outlined her complaint that the Poor Law Guardians in York were pressuring her to enter the workhouse. The guardians claimed that they had stopped outdoor relief because Mary had failed to provide evidence of settlement. The Poor Law Commission stated that settlement was within a magistrate's jurisdiction, rather than the guardians, and that the guardians were

not able to refuse relief to the destitute, regardless of the circumstances. Ultimately, Mary Herbert forced the local poor law authorities to reinstate relief and this is evidence of the power behind the letters written by paupers.

Petitions, such as that from Kidderminster on 27th December 1864, gave illiterate paupers a voice. On this occasion, the complaint centred on the lack of ‘indulgences’, e.g. beer for the over sixty year olds, and the quality of cheese provided.

The quality and quantity of food was also the subject of a witness statement from March 1843, instigated by one John Cowles. It is clear that the poor were not only prepared to complain about insufficient and inedible diets, but also to demand that they be improved.

Researchers discovered that 85% of letters related to deficiencies in medical care.



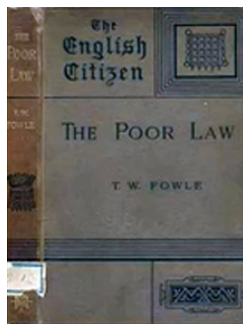
The poor developed and maintained a theory of ‘rights’ in regard to relief and that became stronger towards the end of the Victorian period. Certainly, those who had paid poor rates and church rates felt an entitlement to help if they fell on hard times.

Information as to legal rights could be gained from public libraries in publications such as T W Fowle’s *The Poor Law* and details of the relevant

law and regulations can be found quoted in the paupers’ correspondence. Fowle was the Rector of Islip.

The study of these records raises a number of questions:

- Are levels of literacy in letters typical?
- Are we only seeing evidence from paupers who could write?
- Did illiterate paupers use scribes?
- How did paupers in the workhouse obtain paper/pens/stamps?
- Where did paupers write their letters?
- How did they get letters to the post office?



We know that petitions and witness statements allowed the voices of the illiterate poor to be heard. There’s little evidence of common handwriting that suggests that scribes were being used to any great extent, although the literate might write on behalf of those who lacked the skills to do so themselves (without pretending to be the person concerned). Visitors to the workhouse would bring writing equipment and stamps would come through the post from family and friends. Paupers whose task was to post the workhouse master’s post could also carry paupers’ letters. Considering that the workhouse was a place of surveillance, successfully communicating with the authorities in London would have taken some ingenuity.



A wealth of information on this fascinating topic is available here:
<https://intheirrownwriteblog.wordpress.com/>

Upcoming talks from the National Archives can be booked here:
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/visit-us/whats-on/online-events/>

Most of the National Archives’ previous talks can be replayed here:
<https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/all-posts/>

The River at War Talk

By Mark Lewandowski



Bill King prefaced his talk in October 2022 by making the observation that there had been several previous occasions on which the talk had been scheduled, all postponed because of the Covid restrictions. He was grateful that at last he was able to deliver his talk. By way of an introduction, he related an occasion when the Oxfordshire Home Guard, of which he is a member, met up with Sir Tony Robinson of Time Team fame in connection with the reason for there being pill boxes along the course of the Thames.

The subject, he began, would be the use of the Upper Thames as a defensive barrier and how it had been used as such over the centuries. Old Father Thames was one of Britain's longest rivers covering some 146 miles from its source near Kemble in the Cotswolds to its mouth at Southend-on-Sea where it flows out into the North Sea. As such, the Upper Thames was an important defensive barrier and the bridges across it of vital importance to both the attacking and defending forces.

The first such occasions of which we have a record were the two expeditions that Julius Caesar mounted in 55 and 54 B.C. in response to the support that the Belgic tribes in Gaul had been receiving from their kin in Britannia during his Gallic Wars. During his first sortie, after

landing at Deal, he only penetrated as far as the Medway, but the second foray the following year penetrated much further. He crossed the Thames at what is now Twickenham and eventually reached St Albans, the Roman Verulamium, in the territory controlled by the Catuvellauni. He took hostages from the local tribes and demanded that tribute of cattle, women, and wheat, in that order, be paid to Rome. The eventual invasion in 43 A.D. was caused in part by the tribute, the agreement of which had been extracted at the point of a gladius, ceasing to be paid.

Bill King then moved on to the period known as The Anarchy, a period of civil war between 1138 and 1153, being a time when "Christ and his saints were asleep" so great was the chaos, according to contemporary chroniclers. Caused by the death of Henry I's only legitimate son when the White Ship was lost in the English Channel in 1120, it pitted the armies of Matilda of Boulogne against those of Stephen of Blois, both grandchildren of William the Conqueror. During part of the conflict Oxfordshire was on the 'front line' of the areas controlled by the two parties - Oxford was besieged, and Matilda was forced to secretly escape from Oxford Castle across a frozen River Thames dressed in white. The river had inadvertently again played an important role in the history of the nation. After she had

fled the garrison surrendered to the besieging army. The speaker focussed on the importance of Radcot Bridge, the first bridge after the Thames has entered Oxfordshire, and the proximity of it to Matilda's Castle, excavated by Time Team in 2008. (Oxoniensia, Volume XIV, (1949) pages 46-52 and plates, has an excellent item on the old and new bridges at <http://oxoniensia.org/volumes/1949/toynbee.pdf>)



The Anarchy brought about the Treaty of Wallingford in 1153 by which Stephen became King and Matilda returned to France on the understanding that her son, Henry Curtmantle would succeed him as Henry II, the first of the Plantagenet kings.

Radcot Bridge was the scene of a battle on the 19th of December 1387 between forces loyal to Richard II, commanded by Robert de Vere and those of Henry Bolingbroke, the latter emerging victorious.

Moving on to the English Civil War, Oxford was the de facto capital of England between 1642 and 1649. More than two hundred and fifty years later the bridge was again the scene of a major incident. Royalist forces captured the bridges and established a garrison at nearby Radcot House. This helped to protect the supply route to loyalist Oxford. The Royalists held out against the Parliamentarians

despite severe losses, but finally, in May 1646 the bridge was recaptured and as a consequence Oxford fell to the Roundheads.

The speaker then moved the story on several centuries to the Second World War and the period following the evacuation from Dunkirk in which the little ships, some 850 of them, played such an important role, many of which were Thames launches. Every year in June there is a Rally of the surviving little ships at Henley-on-Thames.

Among the slides presented by the speaker was the below iconic image of a Luftwaffe Heinkel He 111 bomber over the Surrey Commercial Docks in South London and Wapping and the Isle of Dogs in the East End of London on 7th of September 1940 – the area now better known from the 'Eastenders' titles. At the time London's Docks were the busiest in the world and the river was the aorta carrying the lifeblood they delivered to a nation under siege.

Although, thankfully, never called upon to do so, the river stood ready to play another vital role; this time in the defence of the nation – as Bill King related. Under Unternehmen Seelöwe,





or Operation Sea Lion, it had been planned to invade Britain by sea and air on a wide front from Ramsgate in the east to the Isle of Wight in the west – map above. The invading forces would then push north from their beach head to their primary objective, a line running from Rochester, through Reigate, and on to Southampton. The second objective was a line running from Maldon, through St Albans and on to Gloucester. From the map it is clear to see that the crossing of the River Thames would be a formidable natural obstacle to the German advance between the two objectives. Key to that, as our interlocutor had already mentioned, were the bridges across the river. The role of the defenders in the southern part of England, including Captain George Mainwaring and the men of the Walmington-on-Sea Platoon of the Local Defence Volunteers, later the Home Guard, was to delay the German advance as much as possible while the forces assembled in the north of the country moved south to launch a counterattack. Crucial to this, as has already been mentioned, were the numerous bridges across the Thames, there are 44 between

Lechlade and Teddington, and a difficult balancing act to be carried out by the defenders. They had to keep the bridges open for as long as possible to allow the counterattacking forces to cross, but to destroy them when they could not be held to deny them to the invading armies. In preparation for the latter many were primed with explosives ready to be blown at the push of a plunger. Many still carry signs of this planned but never carried out destruction in the form of newer brickwork under their arches marking the places where the explosives had been placed and later removed.

To aid in their defence concrete pillboxes were often constructed close to the bridges, often as part of several stop lines that crossed the countryside generally following watercourses and with overlapping fields of fire.

To illustrate this Bill King returned to Radcot which, in the centuries since Matilda and Stephen, had acquired a second bridge across the Thames to cross the new cut dug to improve inland navigation. Both had to be defended – and they were by two pillboxes (below): one a type 22 to be crewed by eight men with rifles and a machine gun, the other a type 28A which would have housed an anti-tank gun. Both were part of stop line blue which followed the Kennet and Avon Canal.

Bill King reflected on the fact that the passage of many centuries had not diminished the strategic importance of Radcot as a river crossing.

The security of the river itself was overseen by the Upper Thames Patrol, or U.T.P. and given that its members would often be based in riverside



inns it did not take long for a different meaning to the initials to arise: Up The Pub. At this point I defer to Bill King's excellent article on the U.T.P. on the website of our colleagues at the Wargrave Local History Society: <http://www.wargravehistory.org.uk/july21.html>

Inland too, the county had to be protected. Thankfully Oxford was spared the fate of many other historic towns and cities in what became to be known as the "Baedeker Raids". It and the surrounding countryside were, however, of strategic and military importance. The Morris Motor works at Cowley and MG in Abingdon were both converted to war work. Horsa Gliders, used in the D-Day Invasion and in Operation Market Garden which included the abortive attempt to capture the bridge at Arnhem, the "Bridge Too Far" of film fame, again demonstrating the importance of rivers and bridges in military strategy, were assembled at Brize Norton – some 4,500 were made. Bossoms and other boatyards along the river, built landing craft and seaplane tenders. The skills in the handling of timber in the making of furniture and other wooden products were repurposed to aid the war effort.



Bill King, shown below during the question and answer portion of the programme (the image on the screen is of him, Sir Tony Robinson and members of the Oxfordshire Home Guard outside of one of the many pillboxes that are still found in the local area), also pointed out the large number of airfields in the Oxford area – there are some 52 within a 25 mile radius of the city, with a number local to Bicester: R.A.F.

Bicester itself, R.A.F. Upper Heyford, R.A.F. Weston-on-the-Green, R.A.F. Croughton (although in Northamptonshire but still close enough to count), R.A.F. Finmere (in Buckinghamshire, but just over the border). Between 1935 and 1945 some 600 airfields were built across the country.

Although the local airfields never achieved the fame of those of 11 Group in south-east England that bore the brunt of the Luftwaffe attacks during the Battle of Britain, or those of East Anglia from which the bomber offensive was launched during the later stages of the War; they were nevertheless important for the roles that they played in the training of new pilots to replace those lost in action, killed, wounded or serving as prisoners of war.

They also served the A.T.A., the Air Transport Auxiliary, whose job it was to fly replacement aircraft from their manufacturer to the airfield where they were needed. Often these pilots were women in addition to men judged too old for combat duty, and the aircraft being delivered were without radio or armament. During the War some 350,000 aircraft of 308 various types were delivered giving the unit a different interpretation of its initials: 'Anything to Anywhere', although some, casting an eye on the advanced age of a few of the pilots, maintained that it stood for 'Ancient and Tattered Airmen'.

In conclusion Bill King returned to the first slide of his talk, that of him, Sir Tony Robinson, and the members of the Oxfordshire Home Guard and their pillbox "somewhere in southern England". A short question and answer session and refreshments followed the talk for which those present, and the Committee of the Bicester Local History Society, expressed their gratitude in the customary manner.



Bygone Bicester

All articles taken from the Bicester Advertiser or Bicester Herald for February

21st February 1902

The Coming of Benedictine Nuns to Bicester

Henceforward the Roman Catholics of Bicester and neighbourhood who have had to journey to Hethe on Sundays for devotions will be spared the distance. There will be a mass in Bicester on Sundays, at nine o'clock, as a small French exiled Benedictine Community is taking up its abode in "South View" house, adjacent to the R.C. School. The house will in future be known as "Saint Edith's Priory."

In view of the establishment of this Priory, we have been requested to give a short historical sketch of the new tenants, and how they came to seek a home in Bicester. The article, which has been communicated to us, is as follows:

This little Community of French Nuns, who are they? They are simply exiles from their quiet Normandy village, near Rouen. They have been driven forth, by the recent French *loi d'accroissement*. Last summer, and for many summers, they followed a life of industry, as teachers of a secondary school, and fine needlework – uniting this with the conventual or household duties enjoined by their Benedictine rule. As they have had to part with nearly all their belongings, by a forced sale, and those belongings were very modest, they have come to Bicester, with the thought of industry and economy uppermost in their minds. But why come and settle down in Bicester? They are of the self-same Benedictine family as was St Eadburg, as was also the mediaeval patroness of their sex, St Edith, whose renown was great for centuries in Mid-England.

In November last, the two Nuns who were deputed to choose a "pied-a-terre" across the English Channel, heard of South View, Bicester. But when they arrived at Bicester station, their first desire was to visit St Eadburg's ancient church. They did so. They would fain have adopted this saint's name, and styled their little priory "St Eadburga's." But with practical good sense, they did not wish to create difficulties at the Post Office, as St Eadburg's name is already appropriated. They simply nestle under the shadow of the ancient tower of Bicester's patroness.

What was the origin of this particular branch of Benedictines? The most direct answer is: They owe their existence to a noble-hearted, French lady, who was a martyr to the due observance of Sunday. For although she was not actually guillotined, the glittering huge knife of that dread instrument of death was about to fall on her neck, when a sudden providential circumstance snatched her from beneath the blade. How came this lady to be placed in that predicament? The simple answer is this: She had preferred the death of a quasi-criminal, rather than break the Divine law of the Christian Sabbath. The Revolutionists had abolished by law the observance of the Sunday in France. Mademoiselle le Chevallier at that time kept a Christian bookseller's shop and repository in Rouen. She was ordered to keep her shop open every Sunday by the Atheists who were in power. She nobly refused to do so; and put up her shutters. She was indicted forthwith, summoned



before the Tribunal, and condemned to death. The morning of the execution came. Her hair was cut off; she was taken to the foot of the scaffold. There she stood, awaiting her turn. The knife was already dripping with the hot blood of another victim. Her turn was next. But her own brother, an officer of the guard, was there. He was standing next to the officer who called out the name on each appointed form of condemnation. His eye saw his own sister's name the very next on the list. The head officer was looking away. The brother's eager hand dextrously abstracted the fatal document... The officer saw not this, but he read out the next and the next... The sister was calmly awaiting her summons. She waited on, the guillotine had done its morning's work. She was standing still there. The gaolers hurried her back to prison. Before any inquiry was made, Robespierre had fallen. She was saved. But she had given up her life for the due

observance of Sunday. When the Reign of Terror was over, and peace restored, she, in gratitude to God, established this Congregation of Olivetan Benedictine Nuns, to thank Divine Providence for this wondrous intervention of His right hand on her behalf.

But, how, and by what means do these Nuns propose to live, and maintain themselves in Bicester? Not in idleness; not merely by prayer; but by endeavouring to find pupils, by giving daily lessons in French, and by their skill with the needle.

Meanwhile, on Sundays, those whose faith teaches them the value of Holy Mass, have a new opportunity of satisfying their devotion in the temporary chapel of St Edith's Priory, Bicester.

Bicester v. Cowley Barracks

Cowley Barracks provided the opposition in a friendly football encounter at Bicester on Saturday. The homesters played a mixed eleven, only three of the regular team appearing. The result, a draw of 1-1, was a fair criterion of the play, which was unfortunately spoilt by the furious cross winds.

Mr F. Kirtland was the referee and had charge of the following teams: Bicester – H. Clifton, goal; W. Lambourne and I. Smith, backs; A.J. Baker, W. Clifton, and H.G. Philpott, halves; E. Stone, H.K. East, H. Ward, J. Hickman, and Meredith-Brown, forwards. Cowley Barracks – Pte. Lewis, goal; Sergt. Stallard and Sergt. Muddle, backs; Corpl. Inwood, Lance-Corpl. Muns, and Corpl. Stevens, halves; Pte. Parr, Corpl. Yeomans, Sergt. Grant, Pte. Barnes, and Pte. Roach, forwards.

The visitors won the toss, and were soon within shooting distance, but I. Smith effected a timely clearance, and play was transferred to the other end, where the stalwart Stallard relieved. Ward and Hickman were next conspicuous, but offsidcs against the latter spoilt the bout. East got through soon after and with only the custodian to beat his shot wildly over the bar. The visitors pressed, and forced a couple of fruitless corners, and then Bicester returned, and East was bowled over in a race for the leather, and the ball cleared. H. Clifton was tested with an awkward bouncing shot, which he fisted across the goal, the wind carrying the ball over the touchline for a corner. Nothing, however, accrued, and the Bicester left wing was next in evidence, Hickman eventually kicking behind. From the goal-kick East received, but put over the bar. Attacking again Cowley looked like scoring, and H. Clifton did well in kicking away a shot from close quarters. A corner was forced,

however, but proved unproductive, and then the visitors opened the scoring from a well-placed corner, Muns putting the ball through in a "mix-up." Bicester gained a foul in midfield, and play was confined to the visitors half for a time, but the locals could do nothing in the way of scoring, and H. Clifton was not tested up till the interval, which arrived with the visitors one up.

On resuming Bicester went away and J. Hickman essayed a solo effort, but overran the ball and a clearance followed. The Cowley right became next engaged, but Smith relieved in his usual characteristic style. Play became slow for a time, and then good shots were registered by Ward and Baker, following which Bicester gained another unproductive corner. Baker was responsible for several good centres, and then Bicester gained the equaliser. H. Ward was responsible, scoring a good goal, with a deceptive shot, at 25 yards range. The game was keener after this, and Lambourne neatly intercepted an attack by the visitors' left. Bicester returned and forced a corner, which was passed to Baker, who centred, but nothing materialised. Ward caused the next applause, placing a long shot a foot above the cross-bar. Play was once more taken to the other end, where Yeomans got through, only to be brought down by Smith when a goal seemed certain. A penalty was awarded, but Clifton rose to the occasion and the ball was safely cleared. Roach was given offside on the left wing, and then at the other end Hickman was fouled. The resultant free-kick was placed over. The visitors attacked on the left again and Lambourne was fouled in attempting to clear. Each side made numerous attempts to score, but defence prevailed over attack, and the end arrived with the result, as above stated, a draw of one goal each.

Bicester's Drama Festival

A drama festival was held at Bicester last Friday, under the auspices of the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council; it was the first occasion on which the town has been honoured by a festival within its borders. Eight plays were performed on the stage of St Edburg's Hall, the first beginning soon after 2:30pm and the final adjudication taking place a little after nine o'clock. The complete success of the festival can best be acknowledged by stating that the hall was overflowing for both afternoon and evening sessions. The adjudicator, who pleased everyone by her sympathetic manner as well as by her critical appreciation, was Miss Gladys Wyles.

The Tusmore Players were first to appear on the stage and gave an impressive production of "The Patchy Quilt." The play is of considerable interest and afforded the actors unusual scope, in its subtle distinctions between the real and the spirit world. Both the "set" and the stagecraft were of great merit, and the whole play received the appreciation and applause which were its due.

Bicester County School, Form Vb, satisfied both adjudicator and audience with "The Stolen Prince," a Chinese play with distinct charm. It was a good choice for young people, in that it allowed a pleasing expression of lively personality.

The Iffley Women's Institute gave "Deep Waters," by F. Morton Howard. Here the main problem for the actors was to work up the atmosphere, and this was satisfactorily accomplished.

"Thereby Hangs a Tail," by Girvin Cosens, was presented by the Headington Women's Institute. This is a detective play, with the dramatic demands of its type. Every point in the whole plot was brought out clearly by the players, whose performance reached a high standard of merit.

The evening session was opened by the Chesterton Women's Institute, who gave "A Family Affair." This was described by the adjudicator as an amusing little play and quite within the range of the team.

"A Room in the Tower," a play dealing with Lady Jane Grey, was presented by Thame

Women's Institute. Of this play, Miss Wyles said "What beautiful costumes!" The general production and characterisation, with its great attention to detail, were also highly praised.

"How very brave of this team to tackle such a tremendous play," was the comment on the choice of "King Lear" by the Quarry Women's Institute. But the choice was to a large extent justified by the ability and conscientious work of the actors. Miss Wyles, who evidently was much interested in the problems of Shakespearean tragedy as exemplified in "King Lear," gave some thoughtful comments on characterisation which should prove helpful to other teams engaged in producing tragedy.

The final play was presented by the staff of Bicester County School. "Birds of a Feather" is a delightful comedy, which was enthusiastically received by judge and audience alike. Miss Wyles' confession concerning this play was, "I was so engrossed in the whole thing that I forgot to make any notes."

The plays in this festival which reached a certain standard of merit will be sent to Oxford for performance in the Central Festival, at which teams from other regional festivals in various parts of the county will also take part.

As stated above, the Bicester Festival was an undoubted success, which it is hoped will be repeated next year. The arrangements for the seating, however, left much to be desired, complaints being received of patrons with higher priced tickets being unable to claim their reserved seats, which were already occupied. The fault appeared due to the selling of a larger number of tickets than there were seats. Again, there was at times little regard for silence on the part of some people while the plays were in progress, and in this respect some of the artistes who had performed their "turn" were not entirely blameless. However, these irritations will doubtless be remedied in future. Should the event be held at Bicester again it would be very pleasing if more teams from the town and district would try to arrange for the performance of plays. They would quickly find how enjoyable is the production of a successful play, while the town audience would greatly appreciate their appearance on the stage.

Bicester's Boer War (Part 7)

Continuing the reminiscences of Lewis Turney

By Mark Lewandowski

In the third instalment of this series, published in issue 88 of the Bicester Historian, dated May 2022, mention was made of the celebrations that took place in the town following the Relief of Mafeking on the 17th of May 1900, and the unfortunate scenes that took place in the Market Square regarding the business premises and the home of Frederick Hedges. Since that issue went to press another source, unknown to the author at the time, has come to light, that is worth mentioning.

In the mid-1950s the pupils of the Fifth Form of Bicester Grammar School, then housed in what is now Hometree House, compiled a large volume of words, all neatly handwritten, and images of the Bicester of their time and of its history. In the days before the internet and electronically searchable indexes this is a praiseworthy piece of work and deserves to be better known. It is in the Oxfordshire History Centre, accession number: COS 2022 56, and it and a companion later volume of similar dimensions are in the process of being digitised. Among its various items recorded is the following:

"MAFFICKING" IN BICESTER

The relief of Mafeking during the Boer War occasioned wild demonstrations all over England. The shop in the Market Square now occupied by Mr Harris Morgan was then in the possession of a jeweller who was said to be a pro-Boer. Like the rest of the town, however, he hung out a flag. People said it had been dipped in blood, although the jeweller maintained that the colour had run. His premises were attacked, windows smashed, and rotten eggs thrown; some say the marks of these are still visible! Overnight, Mr Jagger, the

Chairman of the U.D.C., Captain Fane and Mr George Whale, clerk to the magistrates, erected a large blue and white board inscribed "I am converted". It was a Sunday; boys rushed out of the Congregational Sunday School in Chapel Street to see the fun.

Source: Mr L. S. Smith in 1951; he was one of the Sunday School boys involved in the incident.

The scrapbook was produced as part of a county-wide competition and would go on to win a prize of £5 which was put to good use in buying books for the Grammar School Library, but to use a tired old cliché, is a tale for another time. Bicester's rotten eggs must have been made of stern stuff and have been laid by robust chickens for their marks to still have been visible half a century later.

To continue the narrative of Bicester during the Boer War and of one of its sons in South Africa. Earlier in the month the Bicester Advertiser had published details of the human cost of the war in South Africa (detailed in the previous instalment of this series). On the 23rd of November 1900 it felt compelled to comment on its financial cost as well in the following editorial; "Parliament is to meet for the purpose of passing a War Vote simply, and the word has gone about in the world of finance that the paltry sum of ten millions sterling only will be asked for. It is astonishing how we have become accustomed of late to big figures. A year or two ago a demand for a few extra millions for defensive purposes was sufficient to put the whole nation into a flutter, but to-day, with a war costing, it is said, a million and a half per week, and the prospect of an expenditure of ten millions on guns over and above war charges, nobody troubled much about the outlay already incurred, or which may be inevitable in the near future. The sum of ten millions can easily be arranged

without premature disclosure of Budget proposals, or hastening those financial operations which must be the logical outcome of the war, whereby the burden of its cost may be adjusted to the proper shoulders – colonials, mine owners, and the British taxpayers each paying their share.”

However, it was not only the country as a whole that was feeling the cost of the South African War; individual families and businesses were also beginning to feel the cost. A fortnight later the Advertiser addressed the fact that the absence of so many reservists had caused a continued drain on their employers’ pockets, and that “...it may be hoped that the Government will do something for them.” It continued calling on “rich cities” to dig into their reserve funds and if it were “...known that the Government intended forthwith to fulfil its pledges to widows and orphans and so make it no longer necessary to ask the public to contribute to their support.” Money thus released “...might be forthwith applied to the families of men, Yeomanry included, who are still fighting in South Africa.” But it was not all bad news on the financial front. On the 8th of December Sir Evelyn Wood, the acting Commander-in-Chief, issued a notification that all troops would receive a gratuity, according to rank, at an as yet undecided date in the future.

The amounts were announced as follows:

Field-Marshal	£2,500
General	£2,000
Colonel	£160
Major	£80
Captain	£60
Second Lieutenant	£30
Private	£5

The following week, on the 14th of December, the Advertiser reported that another of the sons of Bicester had safely returned home; “On Saturday last Bicester welcomed home another of its citizens who had volunteered for service in South Africa, where he had been “doing his country’s work” for nearly twelve months. Mr. H. C. Jagger went out with the yeomanry in a veterinary capacity, and with the temporary rank of lieutenant, and again landed in England about a fortnight ago, having been invalided home. It was expected he would return to Bicester by the five o’clock train on Saturday, and in



Top: Bert Bourton (holding the horse); Fred Smith (blacksmith); Jessie Smith and Walter Pitts (assistant) staff of H.C. Jagger, Veterinary Shoeing Forge. Image courtesy of the Oxfordshire History Centre. POX0066920.

consequence the platform was occupied at that hour by an enthusiastic crowd. Although they were then disappointed, the enthusiasts who assembled to meet the 7.34 were not less numerous. On his arrival Mr. Jagger was cheered with the utmost vigour and made his way through the crowd to an open carriage which awaited him. In this he was speedily drawn with several friends who had met him, to Alchester House (residence of Mr. Gordon Walsh), by a number of willing hands, the horses having been taken out. Outside Alchester House Mr. Jagger briefly addressed the crowd. He thanked them for the hearty welcome they had given him, which, he assured them, was wholly unexpected, and said he was glad to get home once more and to see all his old friends. The cheering was renewed as he entered the house, and after it had been kept up for a few minutes the welcomers gradually dispersed." The Bicester Herald of the 14th of December also had a similarly worded item. Alchester House still stands in Sheep Street, next door but one to the White Hart. In later years it would become Lloyds Bank, sandwiched between Ashmore's and

Woolworth's, now Iceland, and is now occupied by a bookmaker, image below.

Hugh Cleivion Jagger's business premises, described as a veterinary shoeing smith and blacksmith, were on the Market Square close to the two red Sir Giles Gilbert Scott telephone boxes, in the building with its gable end facing the Square, as shown on the previous page.

The Bicester Advertiser of the 11th of January 1901 informed its readers that; "The employees at the Bicester Post Office have received a letter from Sergt. Turney, formerly rural postman to Hethe, thanking them for their Christmas present of tobacco, which he safely received. Sergt. Turney is in good health and, at the time of writing was near Heidelberg." The Bicester Herald of that Friday also mentioned the letter. The same issue of the Advertiser also gave an update on the continually rising cost of the South African War, based on a monthly return from the War Office, "...the following statement represents the casualties in the South African Field Force reported up to the end of December:

	Officers	Men	Total
Killed in Action	324	3,216	3,540
Died of Wounds	97	1,035	1,132
Wounded	1,132	13,416	14,548
Missing / Prisoner	7	898	905
Died in Captivity	4	92	96
Died of Disease	174	7,011	7,185
Accidental Death	5	200	205
	1,743	25,868	27,611

Perhaps with these losses in mind, the War Office published "A fresh appeal to the manhood of the nation...". The call went out for an additional 5,000 Imperial Yeomen and Volunteers in addition to the recruiting for the South African constabulary then taking place. It was, as the Advertiser of the 18th of January informed its readers "...to reinforce the regiments in the field whose strength has been depleted by sickness and death." The War Office, should, the Advertiser argued; "...take steps to remove the disabilities attaching to an invalided Yeoman who comes back to this country unfit for further active service, and finds his previous employment closed to him, whilst no source of assistance is extended to him either by philanthropy or the State."

But the main item of news at the end of that January was the death on the 22nd of Queen Victoria at Osborne on the Isle of Wight, which she and her beloved Prince Albert had bought in 1845. The long Victorian Era was over, and the Edwardian was about to begin.

Meanwhile, in South Africa, things were not going well for Sergeant Lewis Turney. On the 26th of January 1901 his military record states that he was demoted to the rank of Corporal "for misconduct". Neither this record nor his diary, which just gives the simple fact that he was demoted, give any further details. For an unknown reason there is a gap in the entries between the 23rd of November 1900 and that just mentioned. The text is continuous on the

page; he just made no entries. He makes no mention of writing the letter of thanks for the Christmas gift of tobacco from his Post Office colleagues mentioned in The Bicester Advertiser of the 11th of January; something that he would regularly record when writing home. The following day, the 27th, he records being on a mobile column, moving out and relieving a Company of the Scottish Rifles at Val Station on the 22nd of February. Again, there are no entries in the intervening period.

The Bicester Herald of the 18th of January 1901 reported on "A Specimen of Yeomanry Life in South Africa." In it Sergt.-Farrier C. Boyles of King's End, who had been invalidated home, refers to a letter he had received from Sergt. F. W. Goble of the Oxfordshire Imperial Yeomanry. In this the latter gentleman reports that; "We had a good month's rest at Zeerust, doing outposts every other day. Then we came here (Lichtenburg) to the relief of the 5th; stayed here a week, and then went on the trek with the column to Jacobdale. We did no fighting going, but the rain came down in torrents all the time. The first day there we had two horses shot, and Walker wounded. We were away seven days, on five of which we were fighting. We had a hard day's fighting into Wonderfontein and had three horses killed; but the next day capped all. My troop and one of the 39th were acting rearguard. The enemy commenced at daylight on our left flank, and then came on in rear. I was told to dismount and to make out who they were who were advancing. I thought they were the advance of Methuen's column. They advanced in open order at the walk; but when they got to within 900 yards I could see they were Boers, although they were dressed in khaki. I mounted; then went on and turned round to have a look at them. I saw they were coming at a gallop, and before we could get cover, they opened fire upon us. We got to cover, dismounted as quickly as possible, and got on a bit of a ridge with our horses under cover. By then they were within 400 yards of us. One of them was General Lammer. We shot him through the heart and his orderly through the neck. In all the Boers had 11 killed and 36 wounded. Not a man or horse of ours was hit (one of the 39th was wounded slightly), which was good work, and which I think adds another laurel to our fame. The Boers retired after that, having had enough. We were not sorry, as my troop fired 1,500 rounds in half-an-hour; so you can tell it was warm. They say we were moving again on Saturday and coming back here on the 23rd (December) for Christmas. I do not think there is any more news. Pleased to say I am quite well.

They all wished to be remembered to you and hope you are better."

Back home, apart from covering the death and funeral of Queen Victoria and the accession of King Edward VII at some length, the Bicester Herald, with much black on its pages as a sign of mourning for the late Queen, of the 1st of February informed its readers that; "A hearty response has been made to the call for reinforcements for the Imperial Yeomanry. The test for riding has been conducted at Hall's Close, Oxford, and shooting at Bicester, owing to the Hincksey [sic] range being out of order. On Tuesday night Troopers John King and Stanley Holiday returned to Bicester from South Africa. 798 Trooper John King is the son of Mr H. King, of Waterloo Farm, Bicester, and volunteered for active service, and went out with the 40th Company (Oxfordshire) of the Imperial Yeomanry early last year. He has been in several engagements. He has suffered from rheumatism and was invalidated home. This is the second son of Mr King that has returned from the war. 8080 Trooper Stanley Holiday, son of Mr F. D. Holiday, of Bicester and Merton, joined the 50th Company of the Imperial Yeomanry, or the second contingent from Oxfordshire, and he has been in many skirmishes. He has had a slight attack of enteric fever, and was recovering from this when he received sunstroke, and after being ill for some time he was invalidated home. - We are pleased to state that Sergeant-Major Mathison, who has been dangerously ill, is much better now."

Sadly, this was not the case for another Bicester man, Private William Baughan, as the Herald of the 8th of February reported; "It is with regret that we announce the death of 3693 Private William Baughan, of the First Oxfordshire Light Infantry, who died at Kroonstad on Tuesday from enteric fever, and whose death was announced this morning. A few days previously it was published that he was dangerously ill.

The deceased leaves a widow and a child (twelve months old), who live at Banbury-road. His mother, who resides in Sheep-street, has another son at the war, who has met with an accident, but no further tidings of him have been received for a long time.

William Baughan, who is the first Bicester man that has met his death in South Africa, has served in the Indian Frontier War, and his time having expired he was put on the reserve list, and was

called up about fifteen months ago. He has seen much active service, being with the sixth division, under General Kelly-Kenny.”

Meanwhile, it was not just Yeomen from the Bicester area who were departing for South Africa, as the Herald of the 15th of February reported; “Yesterday morning Messrs George and Joseph Ancil, sons of Mr George Ancil, of Launton, left Bicester for South Africa, having efficiently passed the examinations for the South African Constabulary, and will most probably sail to-day in the S.S. “Aurania.” The following Friday the Herald carried the good news that a Royal Warrant had been promulgated increasing the daily rates of pay to non-commissioned officers and men of the Imperial Yeomanry. Among the list of ranks benefitting Sergeants would receive seven shillings and Corporals and paid Lance-Corporals six shillings. It also reported that another Bicester reservist, William Lee of the 20th Hussars, had received orders to embark for South Africa on the 28th of the month. This, the Herald confirmed, was the fortieth man from Bicester serving in South Africa before adding that the local villages were also well represented.

On the global stage the same edition of the Advertiser also reported that Marthinus Wessel Pretorius, (image above) the first elected President of the South African Republic in July 1855, had surrendered. Although he had been counselling peace for some time, he had warned that the Boers were more determined than ever to fight to the last man and that he had lost all influence with them. Just three months later, on the 19th of May 1901, he passed away at Potchefstroom, aged 81. As if to illustrate the Boer’s willingness to continue the fight, the next issue of the Advertiser, dated 15th of February, carried a report or a communique received from Lord Kitchener about an engagement in the Transvaal, when Boer attacks “Were repulsed after severe fighting”, leaving 24 killed and 53 wounded on the British side. This issue also devoted a considerable number of column inches to a selection of nine reports from Lord Roberts sent at various dates during 1900 referring to various episodes including the sieges at Ladysmith and Mafeking. In one he states that; “The frontier of Cape Colony was weakly held, and the attitude of a portion of the colonists was in some cases doubtful, and in others disloyal. The conclusion I arrived at was that no sensible improvement in the military situation could be hoped for until we were prepared to carry the war into the enemy’s country, and all my efforts have been accordingly exerted in that direction.” At the end of this document, he touched on the

greatness of the task before him adding that; “The difficulties of carrying on war in South Africa do not appear to be sufficiently appreciated by the British public. In an enemy’s country we should know exactly how we stood, but out here we not only have to defeat the enemy on the northern frontier, but to maintain law and order within the Colonial limits.” In a later quoted dispatch, dated 15th of November 1900, he returns to the subject; “The magnitude of the task which her Majesty’s Imperial troops have been called upon to perform will perhaps be better realised if I give the actual number of the several lines of communication, each of which has had to be carefully guarded, and compare with the well-known countries of Europe the enormous extent of the theatre of war from one end of which to the other the troops have had to be frequently moved. The areas included in the theatre of war are as follows:

	<u>Square miles</u>
Cape Colony	277,151
Orange River Colony	48,326
Transvaal	113,640
Natal	18,913
Total	458,030
Rhodesia	750,000
And the distances troops have had to travel are:	
	<u>Miles</u>
Cape Town to Pretoria	1,040
Pretoria to Komati Port	260
Cape Town to Kimberley	627
Kimberley to Mafeking	223
Mafeking to Pretoria	160
Mafeking to Beira	1,135
Durban to Pretoria	511

He continues by adding that; “From time to time it will be seen that after having brought by sea 6,000 miles and more from their base in the United Kingdom, an army in South Africa had to be distributed over an area of greater extent than France and Germany put together, and, if we include that part of Rhodesia with which we had to do, larger than the combined areas of France, Germany and Austria. And it should be remembered that over these great distances we were dependent on single lines of railway for the food supply, guns, ammunition, horses, transport animals, and hospital equipment – in fact, all the requirements of an army in the field – and that along these lines bridges and culverts had been destroyed in many places and rails were being constantly torn up.” Lewis Turney and his comrades in arms had an elephantine task ahead of them when they arrived, and one that seemed to get no less difficult as time went by. Although the South African veldt might have been far removed from the leafy lanes of northeast Oxfordshire, let us hope that his route



FIELD MARSHAL LORD ROBERTS.

between Bicester and Hethe, if he either walked or cycled, steered his legs for the distances that he had to travel when on campaign in the Cape.

Elsewhere the item quotes an assessment of the Boers by another of the commanders in the field, General Sir Archibald Hunter; "Some Boers are crack shots; man for man their shooting is not so good as ours. Their mobility is the main point where they excel us. By reason of superior mobility, they can hold on till turned, when instead of being beaten they take up a fresh position or reinforce their flank, and so convert our flank attack into a frontal one with all its drawbacks to us. Their local knowledge and power of getting over the country, their being masters of three languages in use here to our one, their sources of news from all men and women, their not wearing uniform, and so posing one moment as a peaceful farm dweller and the next proving an active enemy, their secret supplies of arms, ammunition, and food, their hardihood and physical training, their expert and universal skill with horses and transport, with every resource of the country in their favour and denied to us; these are some of the advantages to the Boers in this warfare." The South African Wars were a different style of conflict to those fought against Napoleon or in the Crimea by regimented blocks of troops of British Redcoats facing similarly regimented blocks of the enemy. But the British were learning. The impracticability of bright colours whilst skirmishing had been recognised as far back as the early nineteenth century – the green worn by Richard Sharpe's Rifles; the "Chosen Men", was perhaps a precursor of the forthcoming changes. Khaki-coloured uniforms were used officially by British troops for the first time during the 1868 Expedition to Abyssinia,

when Indian troops travelled to Ethiopia. Subsequently, the British Army adopted khaki for colonial campaign dress, and it was used in the Mahdist War (1884–89) and Second Boer War when Lewis Turney and his fellow soldiers were known as "khakis" because of their uniforms. One of the sparse diary entries, dated 14th of March, at this time lists some new kit that Lewis Turney, consisting of: one silver grey shirt, one pair of drawers, two pairs of socks, one razor, one knife and one fork.

It was not only through the printed page, letters, and photographs that the people of Bicester received news about their loved ones in South Africa, but also through cutting edge technology, for its day, the cinematograph. On Thursday, 21st of February, Mr J. T. Timms of Oxford visited Bicester and gave two cinematograph entertainments at the Corn Exchange behind the Crown Hotel. According to the report in the following day's Advertiser "The enthusiasm of the audience was roused to a high pitch by the numerous pictures of striking events in the Boer war, and the feelings of those present were made equally melancholy by illustrations from the funeral procession of Queen Victoria. Altogether Mr Timms met with a good reception, which was certainly well deserved."

With an ominous foreshadowing of the forthcoming global conflict, the South African War continued to suck local men in, as the Herald of the 1st of March reported, "We are informed that Mr W. Grace, nephew of Mrs Hadland, Ivy House, who is serving with the 46th Field Company of the Royal Engineers, has received orders to proceed to South Africa, sailing from England on the 7th March. The Company will relieve the 23rd Company of the Royal Engineers now stationed at Ladysmith."

The Herald of the 5th of April brought bad news to the family of Sergeant Frederick Goble, previously mentioned on the 18th of January. The latest report reads as follows; "We are extremely sorry to state that the list of war casualties published on Wednesday contained the announcement that Sergt, F. W. Goble, No. 7969, 40th Company Imperial Yeomanry, was dangerously wounded in action near Boesmanput, on March 29. The sad news was communicated to his father, Mr William Goble, by telegram from the War Office on Tuesday afternoon. The announcement was received with profound regret by the many friends of Mr Fred Goble, and expressions of sincere sympathy were extended to Mr and Mrs Goble and family. Their son was one of the first volunteer from this district and having colonial experience in addition to being a good shot and rider, he was

at once accepted for active service. He has seen a good deal of the war and been in a great many engagements. As the leader of his troop, he has set an example of true courage which has not failed to impress his comrades with a sense of his sterling soldierlike worth, and his general conduct has won the affection of his fellows. All who know him will fervently hope that he may be spared to return to Bicester.” That of the 12th of April brought the worst news possible to another local family, made all the worse because of the tragic circumstances of the death; “A friend of Sergeant Pickett, of the Imperial Yeomanry, has sent the following particulars to the father of the late sergeant, who is well-known to the Bicester troop of Yeomen: “Just a few lines to express on behalf of the squadron the deepest sympathy with you and your family in the sad loss of poor Tom. I can’t tell you how grieved we all are at his death, for he was thought such a lot of, not only by his troop, who simply worshipped him, but by the whole squadron. He was as brave a man as ever lived; it is a wonder he was not hit before; he would always push right out to the front before everybody, and only two days before he was killed I asked him to be careful, but the poor chap didn’t know what fear was. I’ll try and tell you how he met his death. He was sent to the left flank of the squadron with six men to keep the enemy from coming round us, and was nearly shot as he got up, as the Boers fired at us from about thirty yards off. They laid down and fired at the enemy, and some Australians (Victorian Bushmen) came up behind, and mistaking these seven of ours for the enemy, fired straight into them. Tom was hit in the second volley, and then the bushmen saw the mistake they had made, as one of our chaps came back and told them. Of course, they were very sorry, but is a wonder there were not more killed from the same cause. At this time the fire was terrific, and as the Boers are dressed in khaki it is hard to tell who are friends or foes. I helped to carry him to the ambulance after his wound was dressed, and

never thought he was hit dangerously, for he was quite cheerful, although he was suffering great pain. When he got to the convoy he was very weak, and said to young Whitlock, who was with him to the last, that he was dying. He died quite peacefully and we buried him next day at the cemetery here. I hope it won’t distress you to read this, but I thought you would like to know all about him. It was a hard day for the Oxfordshire Yeomanry; we had four killed and eight wounded. We have been pretty lucky, but it changed that day.” The herald of the 3rd of May carried an update on the condition of Sergeant Frederick William Goble in the form of a letter sent to his father by a member of staff at the hospital in South Africa. The letter reads as follows;

*“Hospital, Christiana, Transvaal Colony,
March 31st, 1901.*

Dear Sir. – At the request of your son (Sergt. F. W. Goble) I write you this brief letter to let you have full particulars of his recent and regretful disaster. In charge of a company of his fellow troopers from Lord Methuen’s column, he was driving in a herd of captured cattle and horses, under the fire of the Boers. Your son, chancing to look round, saw a comrade without a horse, and rode back to give him assistance. While rendering this praiseworthy act, I regret to say he was rather seriously wounded in the buttock, also in the right hand. The bullet entered him in the back, passing through him, emerging just above the bowels, and finally striking the hand and making a nasty flesh wound. The casualty occurred near Boesmanput, in the Orange River Colony. The wounds received immediate attention, and although of a dangerous nature, I trust, thanks to good attendance and promptitude in dressing, that complete recovery will only be a matter of weeks. At present your son is lying in our hospital at Christiana, awaiting recovery sufficient to warrant his removal to the general hospital at Kimberley. Trusting he may have a speedy return to full health, and assuring you he will have every

	Officers	Men	Total
Killed in Action	355	3,667	4,022
Died of Wounds	115	1,230	1,345
Died in Captivity	4	92	96
Died of Disease	232	8,949	9,181
Accidental Death	8	336	344
Total Deaths	714	14,274	14,988
Still Missing	7	774	781
Invalided Home	1,977	41,762	43,739
Totals	2,698	56,810	59,508

care and attention from myself and the orderlies, and that you may soon welcome him back to England.

I remain, dear sir,

Yours respectfully,

James H. Taylor,

Corporal, Cape Medical Staff Corps."

"TOTAL CASUALTIES TO DATE OVER 63,000."

This was the headline that greeted readers of the Bicester Herald dated Friday, the 10th of May 1901. The item continued as follows: "The British casualties in South Africa during April totalled 112 officers and 2851 men. Eighty-six were killed in action, 44 died of wounds and 386 of disease, 36 were "accidental deaths," 96 were captured, and 2315 sent home as invalids.

Our losses from the commencement of the campaign to the end of April are summarised in a War Office return as follows:

It is interesting to note that the bacillus was a greater threat to the wellbeing of the British soldier than the Boer bullet. There were no figures regarding the Boer losses. That May the War Office also gave an analysis of the forces in South Africa:

Regulars	138,002
Colonials	58,821
Imperial Yeomanry	23,104
Volunteers	9,385
Militia	20,104
Total	249,416

And of the Regulars, non-commissioned officers, and men:

Cavalry	14,000
Artillery	11,500
Infantry and mounted infantry	95,700
Others	13,619

The same item also gave the total financial cost to the exchequer of the South African war to date: £153,317,000, or more than £24 billion today, adjusted for inflation.

The 10th of May issue of the Herald also had an update on the condition of Sergeant Frederick William Goble, again with the assistance of Corporal James Taylor. The wounded man had recovered sufficiently to be moved from Christiana, which he was sorry to leave as he had been receiving assiduous attention night and day, preferring to remain there until fully recovered, to the No. 11 General Hospital at Kimberley. "However, the corporal trusted that the better accommodation would be for his benefit. ... He was getting on very well, but it would be a long time before he was quite himself again." He had recovered sufficiently to be able to conclude the letter himself. The news the

following Friday was not so good; "Unfortunately we have this week to announce that a telegram has been received from South Africa stating that Sergt. F. W. Goble, who received a gunshot wound at Boesmanput a month or two ago, is dangerously ill. In his letters Mr Goble said he would be removed from Christiana to Kimberley, and this move has been affected. We hope that he may have a speedy recovery."

The second half of May was an important one for Lewis Turney, although the records differ as to the exact date. His military record lists the event as taking place on the 17th, whereas his journal twice lists it as taking place on the 25th. Regardless of the timing of the event, it was that he had won his third stripe back and was again Sergeant Lewis Turney, which he would remain for the remainder of his stay in South Africa.

Whilst he remained in the Cape, other local men were gradually returning home – the Herald of the 24th May; "Last evening Sergeant-Major Matheson, of the 59th Company of the Imperial Yeomanry (2nd Oxfordshire), arrived in Bicester. He volunteered for active service about eighteen months ago, and a few months back was dangerously ill. He, however, is better now. Out of the six men who have represented Bicester in the Yeomanry there is but one left in South Africa, viz., Sergt. F. W. Goble, who is severely wounded. The remainder have all been invalided home, and we hope that Sergeant Goble may soon be able to undertake the journey homeward. It seems rather unfortunate for him, that, having served during the whole campaign, he should not be able to return with the remainder of his company, which sails from Cape Town tomorrow. Such, however, are the fortunes of war."

By the end of June there was good news of a different sort for one Bicester family, as the Herald reported; "Quarter-Master-Sergeant W. Collins has attained the rank of warrant officer, having been promoted Regimental Sergeant-Major of the 2nd Battalion "Princess Victoria's" Royal Irish Fusiliers. He has served in South Africa since the commencement of the present campaign, being at the reliefs of Ladysmith and Mafeking with his regiment, which also formed part of the brigade that first crossed the Vaal River and entered the Transvaal." But there was silence regarding another local man, the wounded Sergt. F. W. Goble. No new bulletin regarding his condition had been issued by the War Office during the week preceding the 28th of June, but "...it would appear that he is progressing favourably" and "Bicester people are hoping for the speedy recovery of one who has served his country so gallantly."

Matters concerning local men in South Africa and their families now go quiet until the 2nd of August when the Herald reported that Private James Holland, of the Army Medical Corps, left Aldershot for Southampton to embark on the S.S. Aurania. He was the son of John Holland of the Buckingham Road. According to the following week's Herald, the Aurania had been chartered from Cunard and had departed from Queenstown before calling at Southampton to collect one officer and 118 men of the 1st Oxfordshire Light Infantry, in addition to 53 men of the South Lancashire Regiment and 100 men from the Army Medical Corps, including Private James Holland.

The lack of recent news about the wounded Sergeant F. W. Goble was broken by the Herald on the 16th of August when it reported that; "We are sure that all Bicester people will be glad to hear of the return of Sergeant F. W. Goble. On Friday last he embarked on the Assaye, his parents receiving a telegram on the same day stating the fact. All will wish that he has fully recovered from the severe wounds he received on the 29th of March last. Mr Goble was corporal in the Bicester troop of the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars, and when the call for volunteers was made, he immediately responded to it, and early in last year sailed to South Africa with the 40th Company (Oxfordshire) of the Imperial Yeomanry and was quickly promoted to sergeant. As a soldier he was of sterling worth, having previously had experience in Australia, and was a good rider and shot. His genial manner has been greatly missed by Bicester people, and all will be glad to welcome him home. The first major engagement he was in was Boshof, and when the kopje was stormed by the companies of the Imperial Yeomanry Sergt Goble was one of the first to reach the summit. After many other battles, in which he had lucky escapes, he was dangerously wounded in action near Boesmanput on March 29. It might be as well to recall the incident by which he met with his wounds. While in charge of a company of his fellow troopers from Lord Methuen's column Sergt Goble was driving in a herd of captured cattle and horses under the fire of the Boers. He saw a comrade without a horse and rode back to render him assistance. While doing this praiseworthy act, he was rather seriously wounded in the buttock, and in the right hand. The bullet entered him in the back, passing through him, emerging just above the bowels, and finally striking the hand making a nasty flesh wound. His wounds progressed for a time while Mr Goble was staying at Christiana Hospital, but on his removal to Kimberley he became worse and was in a very dangerous condition for some time. His splendid

constitution has at last pulled him through, and it is hoped that in about a fortnight's time he will be home at Bicester, when he is sure to meet a hearty reception. Most probably the Yeomanry and Church Lads' Brigade will be present, and it is also decided that a dinner will be given in honour of all the returned members of the Imperial Yeomanry. - Tuesday's list of departures for home states that the steamship Assaye left for England on Thursday, July 8, and is due at Southampton on Monday, August 26. On board were 71 sick lying down, 385 sick convalescent, 10 wounded lying down, 20 wounded convalescent."

However, in South Africa, all was not well with the "Very Raw Yeomen" sent out from England. In a despatch published in the London Gazette of Tuesday, the 20th of August, Lord Kitchener complained that; "It was impossible at first to put into the field a large number of the new Yeomanry recruits, many of whom were unable either to ride or shoot, and the necessity for their retention at drill and musketry upon the lines of communication unavoidably curtailed for a time the work of the mobile columns. Some few of the men have proved quite unsuitable for the work expected of them, but satisfactory progress has been and is being made, and they are gradually gaining experience in the field."

Locally, the expectation and anticipation of Frederick Goble's impending return was growing; "The Assaye, on board of which is Sergt. F. W. Goble, is due in Southampton on Monday next. In his last letter to his parents Mr Goble said that he was then at Kimberley but was shortly leaving for Capetown [sic] with nine others. He was greatly improved in health and was taking three hours' exercise each day. It is not known if Sergt F. W. Goble will return straight home when he arrives at Southampton, or whether he will go to Netley. On his arrival at Bicester a reception will be accorded him and the other members of the Imperial Yeomanry (eight in number) who have served their country in South Africa. Their names are Lieutenant H. C. Jagger, Sergt F. W. Goble, Sergeant J. Matthison, Sergt-Farrier Boyles, Trooper S. Holiday, Trooper J. King, Trooper S. H. Swell, and Trooper Hawes, of the Australian Bushmen, a former member of the Bicester troop of the Q.O.O.H." The Herald of the 30th of August hyped up the excitement; "Sergt F.W. Goble will arrive at Bicester to-day by the five o'clock train. He landed in England on Monday, coming off the Assaye at Southampton in the morning. He then went to Netley Hospital. His arrival at Bicester will be the means of creating enthusiasm, and a reception will be accorded him to-day. It is expected a large crowd will meet him at the station, and a procession

formed. The Bicester fire engine and brigade will head it, followed by a drum and fife band, which has been got together during the past week. The hero of the hour will be in a brake, and the Church Lads' Brigade and their bugle band will conclude the procession. His old comrades of the Bicester troop of the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars will also be present to receive him. The public luncheon for the local volunteers who have served in South Africa will take place in about a month's time."

Predictably the Bicester Herald of the 6th of September carried a full report of the wounded warrior's return. Although lengthy it is worth quoting in full as it does convey the excitement of the occasion; "Friday last was an eventful day at Bicester, the whole town being jubilant over the return of one who had served his country so admirably in the South African campaign. On this day crowds of the inhabitants of Bicester and the district congregated at the railway station to welcome Sergeant Frederick Goble, who was expected to arrive by the five o'clock train from Oxford. Mr Goble had endeared himself to all those with whom he moved, and when he left his native place for service for his country in South Africa well-nigh two years ago many earnest hopes were expressed for his safe return. At the time of leaving Bicester, he was a corporal in the local troop of the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars. As soon as the call for volunteers was made, he responded to it, joining the ranks of the 40th company (Oxfordshire) of the Imperial Yeomanry. His soldier-like qualities soon gained for him the rank of sergeant, and as a leader of men he was greatly respected by those who were under him. He also won esteem with those who were placed in authority over him. In South Africa his engagements were many, but till March this year he had emerged from them unscathed, though having several hairbreadth escapes. His friends at Bicester then began to think of soon being able to welcome him home, but, alas, these thoughts were not realised, for on March 29th he was dangerously wounded in an engagement at Boesmanput while saving a comrade from falling into the hands of the Boers. He was in Christiana Hospital for some time, but on becoming slightly improved he was removed to the base hospital at Kimberley. He, however, had a relapse and was for several weeks in a critical position. At this time all Bicester people were anxious to hear news, which would tell them of an improvement in his condition. Ultimately his strong constitution pulled him through, and a few weeks back he was able to leave the hospital at Kimberley and undertake a journey to Cape Town, where he embarked on the steamship Assaye, arriving at Southampton on Monday week. Sergt Goble then went to Fort

Brocklehurst for a few days, and returned to Bicester, as stated above, on Friday last. As the train steamed into the station "Home sweet home" was played by the "Queen's Birthday" drum and fife band, the members of which very willingly gave their services for aiding the reception. On alighting on the platform Sergt Goble was greeted with deafening cheers from the hundreds of persons assembled to do honour to one who had served his country so well. Amongst the first to shake hands with Mr Goble was Lieut-Col E. S. Harrison, while he was similarly honoured by Mrs Tubb. Most of the principal residents of the town and neighbourhood were included in the large crowd. The sergeant was escorted to a brake in readiness at the station, those accompanying him in the vehicle being Mr W. Goble (his father), Quarter-Master Sergeant Grimsley, Sergeant Coles, Sergeant Castleman, Sergt-Major Matthison, members of the Bicester troop Q.O.O.H. A procession was formed, the fife band leading, and was followed by the fire brigade, the members of which were on "Princess May," which was gaily decorated. Then came members of the police force, and next the brake containing the hero of the hour, which was pulled around the town by members of the Bicester troop of the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars, who were dismounted. The Church Lads' Brigade with their bugle band, the company being under the command of Lieutenant Jackson, and the band under the conductorship of Trumpeter-Sergeant J. M. King, Q.O.O.H., brought up the rear. The drum and fife band started the procession off to the tune of "Soldiers of the Queen," the bugle band following with the march "When Tommy comes marching home." As the procession wended its way along the railway road animated photographs were taken for Creighton's cinematograph entertainment, and were shown at Bicester on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and no doubt can be seen to night (Friday). All along the route taken by the procession, which was the Station Road, King's-end, Sheep street, Crockwell, New Buildings and back down Sheep-street, flags were displayed from various residences and the cheering was continued throughout. On reaching Mr Goble's residence the procession halted, when Sergt Goble addressed the company in a few appropriate remarks, stating how pleased he was to be home again, and thanking them for the hearty reception, which had come more a pleasure to him because it was beyond anything that he anticipated. This speech created a further outburst of applause. Q.M.S. Grimsley, on behalf of the committee who had organised the reception, thanked the band, the C.L.B., and fire brigade, and others who had rendered their services so ungrudgingly. He also stated that

they would endeavour to give a better reception later on to Sergt Goble and the rest of the local volunteers. The company dispersed, after a renewal of the cheering. – At seven o'clock a merry peal of welcome was rung on the bells of St Edburg's Church. This would have taken place on Sergt Goble's arrival at Bicester, but many of the ringers were taking part in the proceedings at the station.

THE DOINGS OF THE OXFORDSHIRE YEOMANRY IN SOUTH AFRICA.

As one or two local men were in the 40th company (Oxfordshire) of the Imperial Yeomanry, an account of the company's doings in South Africa may not be out of place. In giving these particulars we also deal with the personal experiences of Sergt F. W. Goble. The company, after reaching South Africa, sojourned at Maitland camp for four days, and thence they went to De Aar, and slept on the open veldt for the first time. Early the next morning it started on active service and for four days was escort to a convoy bound for Brigstown, Griqualand. Having here halted for four days the company then joined the flying column to Preiska, under the command of Lord Kitchener. It then returned to De Aar. After stopping at Kimberley, it joined Lord Methuen's column and marched to Boshof, where the whole column encamped for about a month. The battle at this place will be fresh in the memory of many, when Col Villebois-Mareuil was killed on the Boer side, and Captain Boyle on the English side. Sergt Goble and his troop went out to search for other Boers, and found one hiding and brought him in. Following this engagement Lord Methuen's column formed the right flank of the troops sent to relieve Mafeking, but when it arrived at Bothaville it was ordered to go to the relief of the Irish Yeomanry at Lindley. Though this column did not succeed in this, it drove off the Boers and buried the British dead, eight in number. Next, Lord Methuen went to the relief of the Scottish Brigade at Heilbron, and from there to Kopjes Station, where Lord Roberts' mail train had been wrecked by the enemy. After miscellaneous engagements at various places the column joined in the chase after Christian De Wet fighting with him nearly every day and taking from him many men and part of his convoy. The next important march undertaken by Lord Methuen's column was that to the relief of troops at Elands River. Sir Frederick Carrington evacuated Zeerust, but two days later it was re-taken by the mounted troops under Lord Methuen. One of the most trying periods passed by the Oxfordshire Yeomanry was when they were at Mafeking at the time of the terrible storm, which did more havoc to the town than the bombardment of the Boers.



Major General Paul Sanford Methuen, 3rd Baron Methuen, GCB, GCMG, GCVO

Having experienced a hard time in a great deal of marching and fighting the troops under Lord Methuen encamped at Litchenburg for a month, and a pleasant time was spent there, the Oxfordshires sleeping under tents for the first time since leaving Maitland. Mafeking was again visited, and the column next marched through the bush veldt country to Wolmoronstad, where they were engaged in an important encounter with the enemy. Following this a Boer laager was surprised, and 60 prisoners, 70 waggons, and 8,000 head of cattle was taken. In escorting the captured convoy to Klerkedork, the enemy opposed the column, being in a strong position at Haarsbeetfontein. The position was attacked, and out of Sergt Goble's troop of 18 men, four were killed and eight wounded. Supports having arrived, the position was carried, and the convoy reached Klreksdorp in safety. Lord Methuen personally thanked Lieut E. Fiennes for the admirable work that had been done by the Oxfordshire Yeomanry. The column then had a march to Wolmoronstad to rescue prisoners taken by the Boers, but the enemy had disappeared when the British troops arrived. However, the notorious rebel Pearson was captured by Lieut Fiennes. Blunoof, Christiana, and Fourteen Stations were visited, a rest being taken at the latter place. Lord Errol then took over the command of the column and marched to the relief of the Yeomanry garrison at

Hoopstad, who had been placed there thirteen months previously. On the second day of this march Sergt Goble was dangerously wounded. His troop were sent out to fetch some cattle in, but the Boers opened fire from a farm. The troop was returning to the column, when Sergt Goble turned and saw Trooper Wakefield dismounted. The sergeant gave orders to the troop to dismount and open fire on the enemy. He himself saw six Boers rise to shoot at Wakefield, and he rode to him. Wakefield was at the rear of Goble and was getting on the horse when the latter was hit. The former then ran alongside the horse and they both gained the troop. The pom-poms opened fire on the enemy, who retired, Sergt Goble continued to ride his horse, and had ridden about three miles, when he fainted from loss of blood. He was taken to the field hospital, and from thence to Christiana and Kimberley. Altogether he was in hospital nearly five months. Not only were the Oxfordshire company of the Imperial Yeomanry present in about 120 engagements, and marched 3,200 miles under Lord Methuen, besides the march on Prieska with Lord Kitchener, but they established a record of losing no one as prisoner, during the whole time they were in column.

At Oxford station Sergt Goble was met by some of his old comrades in the war and has since received many letters of congratulations from the officers and comrades on his safe return, and also from the gentry of the district."



Number 67 Sheep Street in the 1980s. Image courtesy of the Oxfordshire History Centre. POX0415528.

Frederick William Goble returned to civilian life. In the 1911 Census he describes himself as a coal merchant and farmer, a widower, living at 67 Sheep Street with his younger sister, May Ellison Goble, and five-year-old son, Edward George, born on the 29th of March 1906. He married twice with the Census following the death of his first wife: Ada Stevens, whom he married on 12th of June 1905. She was a local girl having been baptised at St Edburg's on the 5th of July 1868, coincidentally just four days after her future

BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of <i>Bicester</i> in the County of <i>Oxford</i> in the Year 18 <i>68</i>						
When Baptized.	Child's Christian Name.	Parents Names.		Abode.	Quality, Trade, or Profession.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
		Children.	Surname.			
1868 July 5 th No. 615	Alan Charles S. of Sarah	Charles	Ward	Bicester M.P.	Labourer	H.C. Collins Curate
July 10 th No. 616	Frederick William William George son of Mary Walter	William	Goble	Bicester M.P.	Jeweller	H.C. Collins Curate
July 10 th No. 617	William George son of Ann	George	Lee	Bicester M.P.	Labourer	H.C. Collins Curate
July 12 th No. 618	Ada George S. of Elizabeth	George	Stevens	Bicester M.P.	Butcher	H.C. Collins Curate

In close proximity, the baptism records of Frederick William Goble and Ada Stevens.

husband, the daughter of the late George Stevens, a butcher. The marriage was destined to only last three years with Ada passing away in June 1908, the funeral taking place on the 18th; she was just 40 years old. Frederick William's second wife was literally the girl next door. On the 22nd of April 1913 he married Louisa Ann Harris. In the marriage register his address is given as 50 Sheep Street, hers as 48 Sheep Street. A year older than he, she was the daughter of George Harris, a jeweller. 67 Sheep Street still exists, immediately to the left of the arch leading to Bicester Ex-Services Club. For many years it was the photographic studio of Anton Russell and is currently the home of Sarnie 67. Both 48 and 50 Sheep Street have long gone from the Bicester townscape, their place having been taken by Poundland. Frederick William Goble passed away at the comparatively young age of 48 in December 1915, the funeral taking place at St Edburg's Church on the 11th, conducted by the Rev Walter O'Reilly. Louisa Ann passed away in January 1933, aged 65, with the funeral taking place on the 30th of that month.

Frederick William Goble had returned from the South African War, albeit wounded, but Lewis Turney and other Bicester men remained in the Cape. Their turn would come, soon they no doubt hoped, and will be narrated in the final instalment of this series.

[To be concluded]

Report of the Evacuation Committee

Taken from the Bicester Advertiser, 2nd January 1942

The Evacuation Committee met recently and reported that Mrs F. Edmonds had now agreed to accept the committee's offer of £1 15s. in full settlement of her claim for damage committed by evacuees billeted upon her.

A letter had been received from the Hon. Secretary of the Evacuee Social Committee, giving details of the functions organised at 37 Market Square, and particulars as to how the funds obtained therefrom were dealt with. After a long discussion it was agreed that the views of the committee in regard to the matter should be placed before the Social Committee by the Council's representative on that committee.

A complaint as to the facilities afforded her and her family by the householder of Oxford House was received from Mrs D. Hodges, and it was recommended that the Billeting Officer (Mr H. Jones) should make enquiries into the allegations made and report.

A letter had been submitted from the Regional Billeting Officer, asking for consent to a postal survey being made so that an up-to-date record of any billeting accommodation available in the area could be obtained. The Committee recommended that a reply be sent pointing out that all the available accommodation in the area was known either to the Committee or to the Billeting Officer, and that in view of this it would be a waste of expense for a postal survey to be carried out.

An application was submitted by a householder for a boy billeted upon her to be removed for three or four months on the grounds that he had been under her charge since evacuation first took place and that she now had to assist her husband in his business. It was recommended that the Billeting Officer should billet the lad elsewhere.

Mr Jones had reported that he had interviewed the occupiers of the cottages in Hadland's Yard, as instructed, and had issued warnings of the action which would be taken if more strict control was not exercised over the children residing there. The Billeting Officer also drew attention to the very bad conditions under which many of the occupiers were living and it was agreed that the attention of the Sanitary Inspector should be drawn thereto. It was also reported that the sanitary arrangements for the persons occupying the alms houses in Chapel Street were unsatisfactory and it was agreed the Sanitary Inspector should be notified.

The Billeting Officer drew attention to the unsatisfactory arrangement of allowing firemen to occupy his office for messing and sleeping at night, and asked if the Committee would take some action in the matter. It was agreed Mr Jones had just cause for complaint, and it was recommended that the facts be placed before the divisional officer of the National Fire Service requesting that immediate action be taken to provide the men concerned with some alternative accommodation elsewhere.

The report was adopted.

Roll of Honour

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

Sergeant Ronald Ernest Keene, of Hayes, Middlesex.

(Buried in Middleton Stoney)

Died: 15th January 1943 Aged: 21 Served in: Royal Air Force

Sergeant Stuart Urquhart Trowbridge, of New Brunswick, Canada.

(Buried in Middleton Stoney)

Died: 31st January 1943 Aged: 22 Served in: Royal Canadian Air Force

Sergeant Glenwood Alexander Taylor, of Ontario, Canada.

(Buried in Middleton Stoney)

Died: 16th February 1943 Aged: 22 Served in: Royal Canadian Air Force



Bygone Bicester

All articles taken from the Bicester Advertiser or Bicester Herald for March

21st March 1902

A Pleasant Evening at the Wesley Hall

Those who attended the supper arranged by the Bicester branch of the Postmen's Federation last evening at the Wesley Hall were unanimous concerning one thing, and that was they had spent a very pleasant evening. About forty of the postmen, their wives, and friends, sat down to a supper, served in good style by Mr and Mrs Couling. Dr. Hendricks, the medical officer of the local branch of the Federation, presided in his usual able manner, and others present included the Rev. T.H. and Mrs Norton, Mr W.J. French (postmaster), Mr W.R. French, Mr J. Harris (president of the local branch), Mr E. Dagley (one of the committee), etc. Messrs. J. Coles and P. Hitchcock were unavoidably absent through illness.

Dr. Hendricks said in all gatherings of Englishmen they always began by toasting the King, and those belonging to him. The toast he had to propose was that of "The King, the Queen, and the rest of the Royal Family." Having spoken of the good period to which they belonged, and amusingly referred to some of the times gone by, the doctor alluded to the worthy promise of the King to follow in the footsteps of his beloved mother. He might add that this was the first time he had drunk the health of the King with tea, and he thought they would also drink it with loyal tea (loyalty).

The toast was drunk, and the company lustily sang the National Anthem. Followed by Master French who gave a piano solo.

The Chairman, in introducing Mr Turney, whose name was the next on the programme, said they would take that opportunity of welcoming him on his return from South Africa. He could assure him of the interest they took in him while he was at the front. He did not know how many Boers Mr Turney had killed or eaten (laughter) but, as a medical man, he could say he looked remarkably well, and South Africa had done him a great deal of good. Mr Turney then sang "It's Hard to Say Good-bye."

The Rev. T.H. Norton gave a reading in Yorkshire dialect, entitled "Progress."

Mr E. Dagley submitted the toast of "The Federation." He said the supper had been arranged by the Bicester branch. For a small town they were very strong. He spoke of the advantage of the Federation, which was now nearly 24,000 strong, and coupled with the toast the name of Mr J. Harris.

Songs, "The Anchor's Weighed," Miss L. Hudson, and "I'll be Your Sweetheart," Mr W. Dagley.

Mr Harris, replying to the toast of the Federation, first made some eulogistic remarks concerning Dr. Hendriks and his kindness in taking the chair that evening. Referring to the Federation, he said it was a very extensive one, and reached not only in England, but also in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, and every Federationist was in touch with one another. Postmen had derived many advantages from the Federation. Among other things, it had agitated for an inquiry into the postmen's grievances. Many improvements had, in consequence, been effected, and one of them was that postmen, who had three stripes, and were deserving of more, were able to get up to six. Any postman, who might be unjustly dealt with, and who belonged to the Federation, could send up to headquarters, and they would fight his battles, which was sometimes a great advantage. (Hear, hear). Then any postman who honourably left the service was presented with a sum of money, or if he died it would go to his widow. This was very acceptable. He considered the branch had been successful and he was pleased to say they had no grievance to report to headquarters. Mr Harris concluded with a reference to the good postmastership of Mr French.

Songs, "The British Lion," Mr French; "Old Folks at Home," Messrs. French (2) and Dagley (2).

Mr Kirtland proposed the health of the Postmaster, Mr French, and family. Mr French was as good a postmaster as they could have, and he very often put himself to great inconvenience in order that any of the postal staff might have a holiday. He wished him good health and long life.

Songs, "Break the News to Mother," Mr T. Clifton; "Poor Old Jeff," Mr E. Dagley.

Mr French thanked Mr Kirtland for his kind words, and he appreciated their thanks. Ever since he had been at the Post Office, which was thirty-two years, he had tried to impress on everyone connected with the Bicester branch duty. The postal work at Bicester did not decrease, and one found it tell on him as years crept by. He then spoke of the time when he first came to Bicester. He and "his little lad," Dagley, then did nearly all the work in the office, and Watkins delivered the town for a great many years. Gradually the staff was made up to 30, and now he had to answer for the conduct and behaviour of 73. That was not a small number, but everyone, he thought, was doing his best. In the Post Office there had been many societies, but he thought the Federation did the most good for the postmen. That amalgamation had been a great blessing to them, and the postmen now enjoyed privileges they never would have had if it had not been for the Federation. Much of this had been due to Mr Fossett, who was the postmen's real friend. He concluded by speaking of the value of the extra stripes.

Mr French said he had a pleasing duty, and that was to propose the toast of their medical officer, Mr Hendriks, and he spoke at length of the considerable attention of the doctor.

Song, "It's Nice to Have a Home of Your Own," Mr L. Turney; and reading, "The Buttermilk," etc., Rev. T.H. Norton.

Dr Hendriks said that in the midst of

the entertainment they had to be reminded of the existence of human ill. The introduction of the doctor marked the existence of human ill. Ever since he began his term of office some eight years ago there had been a mutual relationship between them, and he hoped this would continue to exist. The excellencies of the postal system had never been placed before him so graphically as they had that evening. He referred to the proud distinction of wearing stripes, which was also of monetary advantage to the wearer, and said that when he was a boy he was chastened with many stripes, of which he was not proud of, and there was no monetary advantage connected with them. (Laughter). Then there was another advantage, that a man marrying a young lady from the post office would not only have a handsome wife, but also a gratuity with her. There were also the pensions. Regarding the service, he could say he had the utmost respect for it, as it was one of the best conducted services there were. Whether it was due to being a healthy locality, or the employees were healthy, or whether there was a strong fear of the doctor, he did not know, but he had had very little to do, accepting at the time of an epidemic of influenza. He was very pleased to hear that his services had received appreciation, and as they thanked him for his services he must say "I thank you also." (Applause).

Song, "The Baby's Name," Mr W. Dagley; "Hearts of Oak," Mr E. Dagley.

The gathering broke up at 10:30pm with the singing of a verse of the National Anthem.



The Coronation Baths

I must thank you, Mr Editor, for your kind insertion of my previous letter, and, according to promise, I submit this one for insertion in your columns. It has been very gratifying to hear expressed the many opinions of approval of the scheme with reference to the Coronation baths for Bicester, and I should not be surprised to see in the Bicester Herald letters other than my own. As to the desirability and advantages of a public swimming bath there seems to be only one opinion, and the only vein of disapproval was on the score of cost; but I feel sure the scheme would not prove so costly as some persons may imagine.

The plan which suggests itself to my mind is to build one large central bath for swimming with dressing sheds on one side and a caretaker's store room for towels, etc., with two private baths, about the size of usual domestic baths, on the other side, and, of course, a diving plank at the deep end of the central tank or swimming bath. This swimming bath should be built of white glazed bricks, bedded in cement. The two private baths could of course be enamelled iron, as usual. And while on the matter of construction, I would like to say how essential the getting of a heating apparatus would be for providing tepid warm water in the winter and also for use in the two private baths.

Now as to the cost. In the ordinary course of events the purchase of a suitable plot of ground would be a serious item; but fortunately we have the very plot we need for such a scheme already in our possession, and this disposes of cost number one. The piece of ground to which I allude is that adjoining the Infant School playground, just inside the Bucknell Road. This piece of land is town property, and would be suitable for the purpose of the Coronation bath scheme. It would be convenient for the north end of the town and also for King's End; it stands alongside of a running brook, and at high water mark, this brook could be diverted through sluice gates in and out of the swimming bath, thus providing a stream of beautiful clear water without expense. At low water mark the water main of the town could be utilised, as it is in close proximity to this plot of ground. In this

case, of course, the filling of the bath would be done during the night time, and when emptied would be an excellent flushing system for our main sewer, right through the town.

The next serious cost would be the formation of the baths, and this need not prove so formidable as appears on the surface; the townspeople would not require an elaborate building of Bath-stone and granite with an imposing clock tower, etc., but just a boundary of corrugated iron would be quite sufficient (as I have seen at Reading and elsewhere) with roof over the sides, the centre bath being left uncovered.

Everyone using it would pay for the privilege, and certain days and hours could be set apart for the exclusive use of ladies, gentlemen, girls, also schoolboys.

If the boundary wall of the Infant School was carried straight along the side of the footpath, and the piece of grass land taken in, we could have without cost quite a useful site for our purpose.

Yours faithfully,

Walter George. 42 Sheep Street, Bicester.

Dear sir,

I was very pleased to read, in your issue of last week, Mr George's letter regarding a public swimming bath as a Coronation memorial for Bicester, and I sincerely hope his suggestion will be backed up by the townspeople. A public swimming bath should be of advantage to the town in many ways. Swimming is one of the finest and healthiest of exercises, and ability to swim well is often the means of saving life. The desirability of Bicester as a place of residence would, in my opinion, be enhanced by having a swimming bath in the town. I saw some time ago that our neighbours in Brackley have got a similar scheme under discussion. Other than eating, drinking, and making merry, let us have some permanent memorial of the coming Coronation of H.M. King George V.

Thanking you for your courtesy in opening your columns to the discussion of this project.

I am, yours faithfully,

John T. Mountain.

Bicester Bowls Club's Good Prospects

The 1936 season was probably one of the best in the long and honourable annals of Bicester Bowling Club. Fortunate in securing Mr F.E. Withington as president, the Club appeared to take on a new lease of life; there was no lack of players and plenty of games for all, in addition to which the competitions run by the Club produced some exciting and enjoyable tussles. The green looked and played remarkably well and received many visitors, some of whom were glad to spend a few tranquil hours amid the delightful atmosphere and the beautiful surroundings. An increased membership and the fine sporting spirit which prevailed combined to the realisation of a splendid season.

Notwithstanding all this, 1937 is confidently expected to eclipse 1936. The green has received special attention during the close season and it is hoped will be in perfect condition for the opening match on May 6th, when teams, captained by the President and Vice-President respectively, meet in friendly opposition, and four rinks are expected to be occupied. Practice, however, will commence earlier than May 6th.

Already a very attractive list of fixtures has been arranged by the energetic Secretary, Mr H.T. Smith, approaching a total of 30 games, including a visit from the County Executive and a new fixture with Banbury Central. In addition the usual Club competitions will be in existence. Most of the old members will be playing again this season and a hearty welcome is extended to all those interested in this age-old pastime. Novices can be assured of the willing co-operation of those more conversant with the game and will soon find themselves at home in the pleasant atmosphere associated with the game of bowls. The green is situated at the rear of the King's Head Inn and particulars as to joining, etc., can be had of the Secretary, or any of the Club officials.

Bicester's Great War (Part 2) Talk

By Matthew Hathaway

After a two year Covid-19 induced delay I finally returned to the stage to present the second half of my talk on the experiences of some of the local men who fought and died in the First World War, this time focusing on those who served in the Royal Navy and those soldiers who were deployed to Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Italy.

Engine Room Artificer Cyril George Pople Durrant, from Bicester, was serving aboard HMS Pathfinder when she was sunk by German submarine, U-21.

Cyril was the only son of Isaac George Pople Durrant and both of them were heavily involved with St Edburg's Church for many years. The Reredos was erected in 1910, then later the figures within it were donated in memory of a number of people, including Cyril.

Cyril originally worked for the Steam Engineering Works at Cowley, and then took his engineering expertise all over the country before joining the Royal Navy and being appointed to the Pathfinder just before war broke out. He celebrated his 27th birthday aboard on 4th September 1914. Then on 5th September, just 5 weeks into the war, HMS Pathfinder was patrolling off St Abbs Head, on the south east coast of Scotland when, at 3:43pm, U-21 fired a single 20in torpedo from about 2,000 yards away. Lookouts on Pathfinder spotted the torpedo wake heading towards their starboard bow, and the officer of the watch attempted to take evasive action, but since the vessel was only traveling at five knots, any reaction was already too late.

The torpedo struck the ship beneath the bridge. The detonation set off cordite bags in the ship's forward magazine, which caused a second, more massive, explosion within the



Engine Room Artificer Cyril George Pople Durrant

front section of the ship, essentially destroying everything forward of the bridge and front funnel. She instantly began sinking and within four minutes she was gone, dragging most of her crew down with her.

Fishing boats from a nearby port were the first on the scene and encountered a field of debris, fuel oil, clothing and body parts. Additionally, the British destroyers HMS Stag and HMS Express had spotted the smoke and headed in to help, only to find that the few survivors had already been rescued.

There were 268 personnel on board, plus two civilian canteen assistants. But there were just twenty survivors rescued from the water. Four of those survivors later died of their injuries.



HMS Hogue

Despite the events of that day having been easily visible from shore, the authorities attempted to cover up the fact that Pathfinder had been sunk by a torpedo, insisting instead that it had struck a mine. The true reason for this is unknown, but it was the first ever torpedo sinking of a ship and the Admiralty was probably trying to maintain the position that submarines — still a new and largely untested weapons platform — lacked the capacity to sink a surface warship with a torpedo. A local paper, *The Scotsman*, however, published an eye-witness account by one of the fishermen who had assisted in the rescue, that confirmed rumours that a submarine had been responsible. So admiralty intelligence later claimed that cruisers had cornered the U-boat and shelled it to oblivion. But still, the sinking of HMS Pathfinder by a submarine made both sides aware of the potential vulnerability of large ships to submarine attack.

Unfortunately that awareness didn't come about in time to save another Bicester man, Able Seaman Thomas Hudson, who was serving aboard HMS Hogue, one of three obsolete Royal Navy cruisers of the 7th Cruiser Squadron, sometimes referred to as the "Live Bait Squadron", that was patrolling the North Sea,

just off the Dutch coast, on 22nd September 1914.

A German U-boat, U-9, had been ordered to attack British transports at Ostend, but had been forced to dive and shelter from a storm earlier in the day. On surfacing, she spotted the three



Able Seaman Thomas Hudson

British ships, travelling at about 10 knots, and moved in to attack. At 6:20am, she fired a torpedo at the middle ship, HMS Aboukir, and struck her on her starboard side, flooding the engine room and causing the ship to stop immediately. No enemy vessels had been sighted, so the captain assumed that the ship had hit a mine and ordered the other two cruisers to close in and help.

U-9 then saw the other two British cruisers engaged in rescuing men from the sinking ship. Seising the opportunity, she fired two torpedoes at HMS Hogue, the closest of the two ships. As the torpedoes left the submarine, her bow rose up out of the water and she was spotted by Hogue, whose gunners opened fire before the submarine dived. The two torpedoes struck Hogue and within five minutes her crew were ordered to abandon ship. After ten minutes she capsized, before sinking at 7:15am. Watchmen on the third ship, HMS Cressy, had seen the submarine, opened fire, and even made a failed attempt to ram her. But they lost her when she dived and so turned to pick up survivors. At 7:20am, U-9 fired two torpedoes at Cressy. Both hit home and the ship quickly capsized, only to float upside down for about 30 minutes before she too sunk into the depths.

Several Dutch ships began rescuing survivors about 30 minutes later. Including one man, Midshipman Wenman Wykeham-Musgrave, who later reported that he had been serving on the Aboukir and jumped overboard when she started going down. He swam like mad to get away from the suction and was just getting on board the Hogue when she was torpedoed. He then went and swam to the Cressy, just in time for her to get torpedoed too. He eventually found a bit of driftwood, became unconscious and was picked up by a Dutch trawler. Giving him the possibly unique distinction of having survived being torpedoed on three different ships all on the same day.

The combined totals from all three ships were 837 men rescued, with 62 officers and 1,397 enlisted men lost. Of these, HMS Hogue lost a total of 48 men, including Able Seaman Thomas Hudson, of Field Street. He had served in the navy at the turn of the century, but had remained as a reservist after leaving the service. He worked for the Post Office in Bicester for about 8 years and when war broke out and he was immediately called up.

The disaster shook public confidence in the Royal Navy. Other cruisers were withdrawn from patrol duties and finally they started to take the

submarine threat more seriously.

Meanwhile, Captain-Lieutenant Otto Weddigen and his crew on the U-9 returned home to a hero's welcome. Weddigen was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class, and each of his crew received the Iron Cross, 2nd Class.

Luckily our naval inferiority didn't last for long though. Seaman Thomas Jeacock, of Launton, serving on HMS Princess Royal in February 1915, wrote home to his family saying:

"I suppose you have read of the action in the North Sea last Sunday, but I will give you an account of it.

We had reason to believe that another raid was intended on the coast, and early on Sunday morning we were steaming at a high-speed in search of the German ships. We were all ready and at our stations for action, when a number of battlecruisers and destroyers came up on the horizon. We immediately put on speed and steamed towards the enemy, who, on seeing us, made off at top speed. They were evidently not out to meet equals, but to bombard defenceless towns.

Our flagship, HMS Lion, opened fire, and soon we were giving it each other hot. We got several shots into them, and as each projectile weighs about 1200lbs, I think it tickled them up.

The Germans were now making off at top speed, firing as they went, but their shots were not on the map. The Lion was holed and left the line. Princess Royal, now being the first ship, led the Squadron. After we had made rings around them we engaged the Bleucher, who, seeing she could not escape, let fly with all her guns.

After a sharp action we could see that she was on fire, and one more "pill" from our 13.5s gave her the coup de grace. As she was settling in the water a huge airship hovered above, but it was "too fly" to get within range of our guns.

Eventually the Bleucher, which had been drifting around, capsized, and her boilers exploded, throwing up a high column of water into the air. Some of the German sailors were on the stern of the ship, and they jumped into the water as she dipped, being rescued by our destroyers.

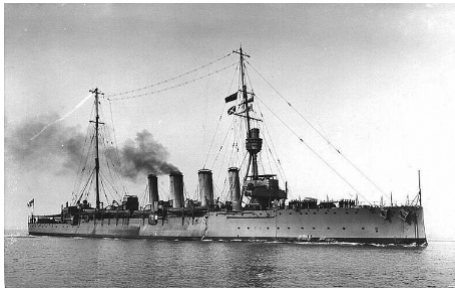
We then went in chase of the other ships, which were burning fiercely, but we were in

danger of mines and they escaped. I think they will take a very long time to repair.

Our squadron proceeded in the direction of England, after a fine action of three hours.

All the boys were very glad to get an opportunity of avenging the Scarborough business. If only their ships would give us a chance of a square fight, there would not be much left of them. Our ship escaped without a scratch.

I hope I have not seen the last of them, as I never enjoyed anything better than last Sunday forenoon."



HMS Dartmouth

Some naval encounters cost many lives but managed to stop short of losing the actual vessels involved. On 15th May 1917 HMS Dartmouth took part in the Battle of the Otranto Straits after a force of three Austro-Hungarian cruisers carried out an attack on the Otranto Barrage (an Allied naval blockade of "drifters" across the Adriatic Sea, between Brindisi in Italy and Corfu).

The attack started at about 4:20am, when 14 of the lightly armed drifters were sunk and four more damaged. The Dartmouth left Brindisi at 5:36am in company with two Italian destroyers, they were joined in the pursuit of the Austro-Hungarian cruisers by an Italian scout ship and the British cruiser HMS Bristol.

Dartmouth was hit several times by shellfire from the cruisers and had to heave to. Returning to port alone, she was then hit by a torpedo from the German submarine UC-25 and began sinking. The order to abandon ship was given, but a small team volunteered to remain on board and keep her afloat while she was towed to port.

They threw a canvas over the side to slow the water up and got the pumps running. They even shored up the hole with broken up furniture,

mattresses and anything else they could find to stop the worst of the water coming in.

After limping back into Brindisi, the Italians sent down divers who made a "mould" of the hull shape and then they built a wooden coffer dam, which they used to patch the hole. Dartmouth then sailed all the way back to Portsmouth at a nerve-wrackingly slow 15 knots, with the coffer dam in place. She was then dry docked and repaired, and went on to survive the war, eventually being sold for scrap in December 1930.



HMS Dartmouth's coffer dam being lifted into place.

Unfortunately, not all of her crew were so lucky. The torpedo explosion killed eight of the crew onboard, including one Commander Robert Fane, the fifth son of Captain Henry and Mrs Blanche Fane, who were living in Bicester House at the time.

Born in 1882, he chose the Navy as his profession from a very young age. As a boy he was taught by a naval tutor in Greenwich and was first appointed to the battleship "Victorious" as a cadet. He sailed aboard her to China, returning on board the "Revenge". He then joined the "Vernon", on which ship he studied a course on electricity.

He later again went to sea, this time on the "Bellerophon", by which time he had received promotion, and upon leaving her he again returned to the "Vernon", now in the capacity of an instructor.

When war broke out he was appointed to a responsible post on the Forth defences, and then in 1915 he was appointed to the "Dartmouth" as Commander, where he served until his death.

A grave in Brindisi contains the remains of the five crew who were found, but also commemorates the other three whose bodies were never recovered.



Cape Helles landing point, two days after Allied arrival.

Whilst all that was going on at sea, the Allied forces decided that it would be a good idea to invade the Ottoman Empire and seize control of their capital city, Constantinople, now known as Istanbul. This would give them a clear supply route to Russia from the Mediterranean.

The invasion, overseen by First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, became known as the Gallipoli Campaign, and ultimately proved to be a costly failure.

Of all the various parts of the world where Allied forces were deployed during the First World War, Gallipoli was remembered by its veterans as one of the worst places to serve and it was the scene of some of the fiercest fighting of the war. After failed naval attacks on the Ottoman coastal fortifications in February 1915, Allied troops landed on the Gallipoli peninsula in early April. They then spent months on the small peninsula of land without getting much further.

The peninsula was unsuited for the lengthy campaign that took place there. The terrain was inhospitable, characterised by rocky ground with little vegetation and hilly land with steep ravines. After the initial assaults in April 1915, the Allied invasion lost its momentum in the face of strong Turkish resistance. Complex trench systems developed as the situation descended into an uneasy siege-like state. In some places,

the Turkish and Allied lines were just a few dozen metres apart.

Ultimately, the military aims of the campaign in Turkey were not achieved and it was eventually called to a halt. The final Allied troops were evacuated in January 1916, but by then there had been many casualties, not only from the fighting, but also from the extremely unsanitary conditions. Of the estimated 213,000 British casualties, 145,000 were from illness. Surviving combatants also recalled the terrible problems with intense heat, swarms of flies, body lice, severe lack of water and insufficient supplies.



It was here that Private Charles Coles died following an engagement on 6th August 1915. He was 19 years old and well known in Bicester. The son of George and Amy Coles of Tinker's Lane. He



worked in Tubbs Bank until his enlistment on 9th March 1915 and had also been quite involved with the Church Lads' Brigade.

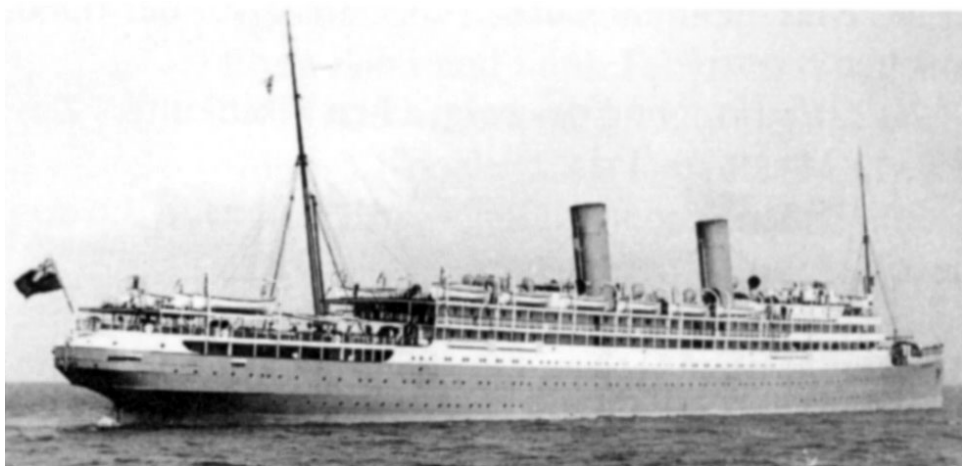
He originally joined the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, but later transferred to the Worcestershire Regiment. After his initial training he was sent out to Gallipoli, arriving in early July. Almost immediately he wrote home about his first experiences of fighting the Turks, only to be reported missing just a few days later.

Private Coles may have only been on the peninsula for a short time when he died, but at least he actually made it there. Unlike Lance-Corporal William Alldrige, a native of Bicester, who sailed all the way there, only to be killed on 13th August 1915 when his transport ship, the Royal Edward, was torpedoed by a German Submarine, the U-14, and became the first troopship to be sunk in the First World War, just a few miles from the Gallipoli peninsula.

Troops had boarded HMT Royal Edward at Avonmouth on 28th July 1915 to sail to Gallipoli. She was carrying 220 crew, 31 officers and 1,335 men. Before reaching her destination the ship docked at Alexandria on 11th August to exchange supplies and allow the men to stretch their legs on a route march through the city.

The following day, with the men back in their now familiar routine, the ship made her way through the French patrolled waters towards the Gallipoli Peninsula. Suddenly, from out of nowhere, a torpedo struck her port side, just behind the engine-room. There was a terrific explosion, the ship shuddered from bow to stern and began to sink. None of the men were wearing their lifebelts, so their first thought was to get them – but this meant going below to their bunks where the lifebelts were stowed.

Hundreds of men already below, desperate to reach the decks and the lifeboats, met on the companion ways with hundreds of men trying to go below. Some were crushed or beaten aside in the panic. The lights went out. Those who reached their bunks were trapped by the speed of the rising water and tried in vain to escape through the too small portholes. Others were



HMT Royal Edward

simply overwhelmed by the rushing in of the sea.

Within three minutes the aft deck was submerged and the bow was raising high into the air, and in just six minutes she slid beneath the waves, still with the majority of soldiers below deck.

Her wireless operators were able to get off an SOS before they lost power, and the Hospital Ship Soudan quickly arrived on the scene to rescue survivors. The final death toll varies from source to source, but it is widely accepted that ultimately 935 men died as a result of the sinking.



We don't know exactly what happened to Lance-Corporal Alldridge, but on 10th September 1915 the Bicester Herald printed the following report:

"At the time of the sinking of the "Royal Edward" on the 15th of last month it was conjectured that a Bicester soldier in the person of Lance-Corporal W.J. Alldridge was on board. Monday's list of casualties in connection with the loss of the transport confirmed this supposition, much to the regret of all who knew this keen soldier, who enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps nearly twelve months ago.

The deceased was the second son of the late Mr and Mrs W. Alldridge, of Bicester, and was 26 years old. At one time he was employed as an assistant

at the Bicester branch of the International Stores, and afterwards worked his way up to the post of manager at Chelmsford. He was a "non-com" in the local detachment of the Church Lads Brigade, and when a boy was a member of the Bicester Church Choir.

It is a matter of considerable disappointment that he met his death before having had an opportunity of taking part in any of the actual fighting."

Meanwhile, things were starting to heat up in Mesopotamia, modern day Iraq. The Ottoman Empire had conquered the region in the early 16th century, but never gained complete control. Regional pockets of Ottoman control through local proxy rulers maintained the Ottomans' reach.

By 1914 the Anglo-Persian Oil Company had obtained exclusive rights to petroleum deposits throughout the Persian Empire, including areas controlled by the Ottomans. And just before the war, the British government had contracted with the company for oil for the navy.

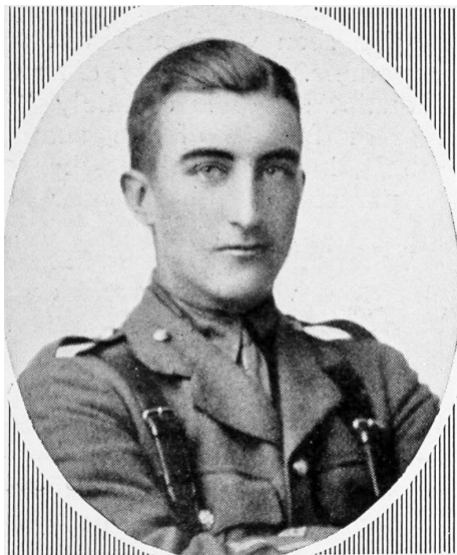
Shortly after the European war started, the British sent a military force to protect Abadan, the site of one of the world's earliest oil refineries. British operational planning included landing troops in the Shatt-al-Arab. The reinforced 6th Division of the British Indian Army was assigned the task.

In November 1914 the British offensive began and by the end of the month the British Indian Army had occupied Basra, allowing them to protect the oilfields they needed.

Things then simmered away for some time until, after defeating a large Ottoman offensive in April 1915, the War Office started to take interest and ordered the army to advance towards Kut-al-Amara, or even Baghdad if possible. They captured the city of Nasiriyah in July 1915, and with it the Ottoman's largest supply depot in the region.

In late September 1915, amidst the recent defeat of Serbia and entry of Bulgaria into the war, and concerns about German attempts to incite jihad in Persia and Afghanistan, the Foreign Secretary encouraged the further 100-mile push to Baghdad. The army thought this logistically unwise, but Kitchener advised that Baghdad be seized for the sake of prestige, then abandoned.

So the British pushed on and took Kut-al-



Second-Lieutenant Alfred Holloway Truman

Amara. But on the 7th December, the Ottoman siege of Kut began, and lasted until the British forces in the city surrendered on 29th April 1916, all 13,164 of them becoming prisoners of the Ottomans.

Whether he was one of the men under siege, or one of the ones trying to rescue the besieged city, we don't know. But Second-Lieutenant Alfred Holloway Truman, of the Oxfordshire and

Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, was killed in action at Kut on 6th April 1916. On 14th April the Bicester Advertiser wrote:

"He was the eldest son of Mr and Mrs Alfred Truman, of "Littlebury", Bicester, and was nineteen years of age.

He was educated at Oxford High School and passed the Senior Local Examination in 1914 and Responsions in March 1915, when he entered St John's College, Oxford. On 4th May 1915 he was gazetted a 2nd Lieutenant of the 3rd Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, and was confirmed in the rank on 20th December 1915.

All who knew him will regret the end of a very promising career. Lieut Truman displayed much activity as an athlete, and was a well-known member of the Bicester Cricket Club."

The British refused to let the defeat at Kut stand. Further attempts to advance in Mesopotamia were ordered by the War Office, so the British forces regrouped, reorganised and retrained, determined to succeed this time. It took them 11 months, but on 11th March 1917 they entered Baghdad and were greeted as liberators.

Unfortunately, one local man never saw the victory of the British that he had been working towards. Corporal Frank Powell, of the Welsh Regiment, died in the Amara Isolation Hospital in Basra, on 3rd July 1916, after suffering from a



Entering Baghdad.



severe attack of colitis. He was 22 years old.

It was reported in the Bicester Advertiser that he was attached to the Indian Expeditionary Force, and after serving unscathed through the whole of the Gallipoli campaign (being one of only nine surviving members of his company), he had taken part in the attempted relief of Kut-el-Amara.

In a letter received by his mother at the beginning of July, but dated two months previously, he said he was then quite well, and added:

"I don't know what they are going to do with us, but it is about time they sent us home. We have done our share, and I suppose the people are making a row in England about us being out here so long.

I wish this place was not so hot; it is 110 degrees in the shade, and worse than India. You will see an account of our fighting in the paper; they call us a fine name - The Iron Division - and it is about right after the way in which we have stuck it."

Then writing on 24th May he said:

"I am glad to tell you that I am alright at present. We are getting some terrible weather out here; you would never believe it could be so hot. I suppose you have heard about the advance we

have just made, and how they call us the Iron Division, and our men must be made of iron to stand this weather for twelve months. I do not think this will last much longer, as we have now joined hands with the Russians, and they have got the Turks nearly beat."

The Allied struggle against the Ottoman Empire also included battlefronts in Egypt.

Fighting in Egypt and Palestine had begun in February 1915 with Turkish forces attempting to breach British defences on the strategically vital Suez Canal. Seizing it would cut British communications with East Africa, India and Asia, and prevent British Empire troops from reaching the Mediterranean and Europe. But the British had expected the offensive and were well prepared, having fortified the length of the canal. The fighting lasted two days with the Turks losing over 2,000 men, while British losses were minimal.

Throughout the rest of 1915 and 1916, the British were content to just guard the Suez Canal and their territory in Egypt. But defeat at Gallipoli dashed any hope of a quick victory over the Ottoman Empire. Defending the canal from possible Turkish attack also required manpower the Army could not sustain, especially with the ever-growing demand for troops on the Western Front. So, in 1917, it was decided to push the Turks out of the Sinai peninsula.

This began as a test of endurance and military engineering in the harsh terrain of the Sinai desert, but evolved into a fast-moving mobile campaign through Palestine and Syria, which ultimately resulted in a decisive Allied victory and the eventual fall of the Ottoman Empire.

Quite a few men from the local area served in the Egypt Campaign, and three of them lost their lives there including Private Samuel Pitts, a



Trench digging in the Sinai Desert.

native of Bicester, who was serving with the Royal Army Medical Corps when he was killed on 30th October 1917.

Private Aubrey Herring, the youngest son of Thomas Herring, a grocer in Sheep Street, died from wounds on the 11th November 1917 in a hospital in El Arish. His elder brother, Thomas, was serving nearby at the time, but we don't know if he was able to visit Aubrey before he died.



The third was Second-Lieutenant John Woodall, from Islip, who died on 8th November 1917. He first joined the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry in August 1915 and then transferred to the Machine Gun Corps in January 1916, serving in France, where he was awarded the Military Cross for rushing a machine gun up to the crater of a newly exploded mine and holding off the enemy for 40 minutes whilst his colleagues withdrew. He was severely wounded in the incident, but after recovering he returned to service and proceeded to Egypt in June 1917, where he served until his death.

Before the war, Italy was part of the Triple Alliance, together with Austria-Hungary and Germany. But Italy did not declare war in August 1914, arguing that the Alliance was defensive in nature and therefore Austria-Hungary's aggression did not obligate Italy to take part.

This gave the Allied nations a chance to

muscle in. Allied diplomats secretly courted Italy during the first few months of the war, attempting to get them to come over to our side. It was finally engineered by the Treaty of London on the 26th April 1915, in which Italy renounced her obligations to the Triple Alliance. Then, on the 23rd May 1915, Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary.

The Italian Front, or Alpine Front, formed along the border between the two countries. Italy had hoped to gain their territorial objectives with a surprise offensive, but the front soon bogged down into trench warfare, similar to the Western Front in France, but at high altitudes and with very, very, cold winters.

The two countries continued to fight it out between themselves until October 1917, when, after an Italian offensive almost destroyed the Austrian army on the front line, German troops were brought in to assist their Austrian allies. They brought with them new tactics and gas weapons and drove the Italians back about 12 miles to the Tagliamento River.

Then, in November 1917, British and French troops were brought in to bolster the front line on the Italian side. They also brought with them new strategies and much needed resources, and helped to even-up the two opposing sides again.

One of the British troops brought in to fight on the Italian Front was Sergeant John Grimsley, serving with the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. His parents, living in King's End, received a letter from one of his comrades at the end of June 1918 telling them that he had been killed in action on the 15th of that month.

The letter stated:

"The enemy had made a big push and had succeeded in breaking through. A counter attack was launched, and it was during this that Sergeant Grimsley met his death. At that time the English were fighting against odds of four or five to one. The unfortunate soldier met his death almost instantaneously, having a machine gun bullet through his side, one through his leg, and another through his head. He was buried in a British cemetery two days later."

Another letter, this time from one of his officers, said:

"As I have been his platoon officer for the last ten months I knew him very well, and I have never met a more honest, brave and staunch supporter."

The Austrians attacked our positions at dawn, and your son was in the thick of it, and fought to the last against greatly superior numbers. He was killed instantaneously by a machine gun bullet,



Alpine trenches along the Italian Front.

and his death is a great loss to me and to the platoon."

Sergeant Grimsley was in the Oxfordshire Yeomanry when the war broke out. Previous to that he had served in the Church Lads' Brigade, in which corps he was a sergeant and bugler.

He took a great interest in the YMCA and, besides being a member of the band since its formation, did much good work for that institution. He was a staunch supporter of the Primrose League, a member of the Bicester Rifle Club and the Bicester Football Club.

He joined the Territorials in 1913, was mobilised on the 5th August 1914, went to France in March 1915, and from there to Italy, where he remained until his death. He went out as a private, but gained quick promotion having been a sergeant for over two years prior to meeting his death. He was 23 years old.

Back at home in Britain many men were dying in hospitals all over the country from wounds they had received on active service abroad. But illness was also a fairly common cause of death during the war, and some men, like Private

Ernest Pitts, of Bardwell Terrace, never even made it abroad.

Ernest died on 2nd January 1918 at Connaught Hospital, Aldershot, after a lengthy suffering with bronchitis. He worked as a shoeing smith for the Royal Engineers, preparing the horses for their vital work abroad.

He had been afflicted with Asthma since he was 14. But four months after joining up he was admitted to the hospital in April 1917 when he started coughing up large quantities of puss. This continued off and on until mid-November, when his condition rapidly worsened. His temperature dropped to below normal and his abdomen began to swell with fluid, which required frequent tapping and draining. After a month of this his body finally gave up the fight. He is officially recorded as having "died of heart failure following severe bronchitis, aggravated by military service". Over his one year in the army, he had spent a total of 61 days in hospital.

Richard Woodhouse died in Oxford, on the 2nd September 1917, from tuberculosis. He had enlisted in the Army Veterinarian Corps on the 14th June 1916, but was discharged and

awarded a Silver War Badge four months later on the 16th October.

We don't know for certain that TB was the reason for his discharge, but the Silver War Badge showed he was unable to serve because of poor health. The badge was issued in the United Kingdom and throughout the British Empire to service personnel who had been honourably discharged from military service due to wounds or sickness. It was introduced as an award of "King's silver" for having received injury during loyal war service to the Crown's authority.

A secondary cause for its introduction was that a practice had developed in the early years of the war where some women took it upon themselves to confront and publicly embarrass men of fighting age that they saw in public places who were not in military uniform. Presenting them with the dreaded white feathers, as a suggestion of cowardice. So, as the war developed, substantial numbers of servicemen who had been discharged with wounds that rendered them unfit for war service, but which were not obvious from their outward appearance, found themselves being harassed and humiliated without cause, and the badge was a means of discouraging such incidents being directed at ex-forces' personnel.

There were also people who served abroad, and then had time to come home before their illness caught up with them. Like Mary Hombersley, of Islip, the only female recorded on any war memorial in the area.

She had been working as a nurse in Serbia where she is believed to have developed the malignant bowel cancer that ultimately led to her death. She suffered with it for two years before having it operated on at a military hospital in Reading. The surgery itself was a success, but she suffered complications during her recovery and died there on 27th November 1917. She was 55 years old.

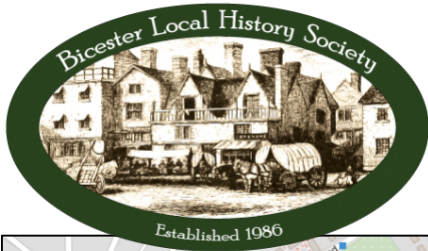
Even civilians in Britain weren't safe during the war, the Bicester Advertiser in February 1915 reported that:

"Miss Lawrence, former housekeeper for Mr H.C. Jagger, at Bicester, had an unpleasant experience during the recent air raid at King's Lynn.

It appears that a Zeppelin hovered over the house in which she was living and dropped two bombs. One falling in the garden at the rear of the house, unexploded, whilst the other went straight through the house and penetrated the ground to a distance of about 6 feet, doing considerable damage.

Miss Lawrence, although being much shaken, was fortunately not injured, and the rest of the house's occupants were away at the time.

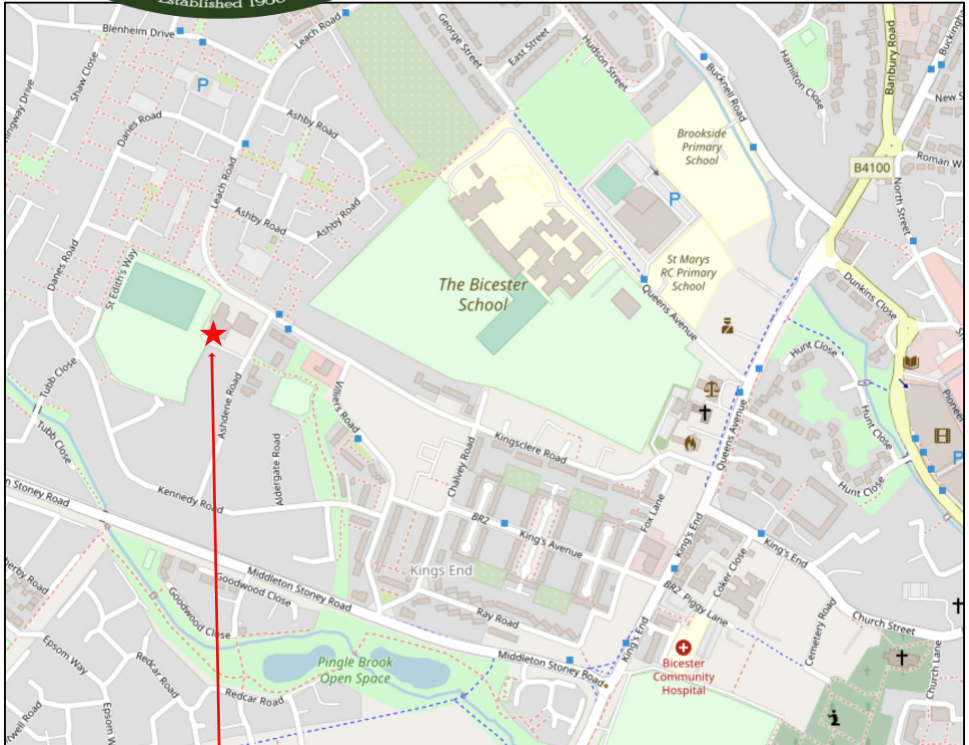
Miss Lawrence is sure to be congratulated by her many Bicester friends on her fortunate escape."



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

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

Website: www.blhs.org.uk