



Bicester Historian

Issue: 95 October - December 2023

bringing local history to life...



Bicester in Motion

Our 2024 calendar in more detail

Slimming Down British Railways

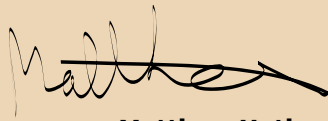
The Beeching Axe strikes Bicester

Progress Opens the 1965 Pram Race

Opening parade led by a traction engine

From the Editor

When planning this issue of the magazine, themed around transport to tie in with our 2024 calendar, I hadn't quite realised how heavily centred around cars and trains it would be. I was able to find a few other items to provide a bit of variety though, and hopefully it all proves just as interesting to you as it did to me. I even managed to squeeze in Father Christmas and his sleigh!



Matthew Hathaway
Editor



Contents

4

Road Safety Measures

10

Easter Gliding Meet a Washout

14

**Bicester in Motion
2024 Calendar**



**Bicester in Motion
Our 2024 Calendar**

18

**1960s Traffic
Management**

24



**Bicester's Second
Railway**

28

**"Wings for Victory"
Presentation of Plaques**

Roll of Honour

30

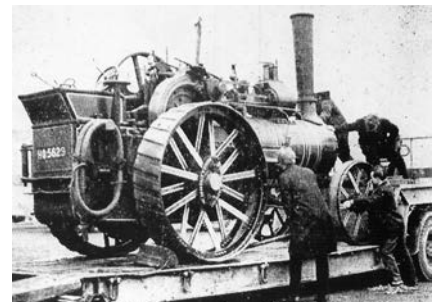


**Parking Problems
Aplenty**

34

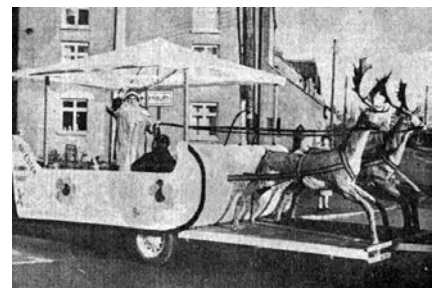
**Slimming Down British
Railways**

42



Bygone Bicester

49



**Father Christmas 1962
Style**

Road Safety Measures

Written by Matthew Hathaway

If a van driver can manage to hurtle into town at 95 miles an hour, then you have to wonder why the town councillors in the 1960s were so worried about the prospect of the train service to Oxford being replaced by buses. The roads clearly can't have been that congested or slow moving.

But, on the other hand, it does go to show that road safety measures, particularly educating children of the dangers, were just as necessary in the 1960s as they are today, if not more so.

This selection of articles highlight some of the dangers around at that time, and what the people of Bicester were doing about it.

Road Safety Meeting

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 23rd February 1962

After complaints at the last meeting of Bicester Road Safety Committee regarding lack of interest by organisations and persons in the town, improved attendance was made at the meeting of the local Committee held at The Garth on Wednesday evening. Inspector G.C. Callis attended his first meeting of the Committee and was appointed Vice-Chairman.

A proposal was received from the Bicester and District Trades Council asking whether some of the disused airfields in the district could be made available for the use of learner drivers. The matter is to be investigated.

With regard to the Cycle Training Scheme, there are still some 200 children under the age of 12 who are in need of this training, and the Bicester Round Table undertook to provide examiners in co-operation with the Police for future cycle training schemes.

A new idea for the under fives has been put forward by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, by way of a Rufty-Tufty Club. This club, for all children under

the age of five, will give mothers and children an opportunity of meeting together and discussing the problem of road safety. In the near future a letter giving details of the new club will be circulated to mothers of children under five, together with the Rufty-Tufty badge. The possibility of one being formed in Bicester will then be considered.

In connection with pedestrian crossings, particularly in Sheep Street, the Ministry of Transport are to carry out a pedestrian count, and whether a pedestrian crossing is placed in Sheep Street or not, will depend on the result of the count.

Another traffic problem, was that concerning the one-way street. A number of strangers passing through tended to continue into North Street. It was decided to press for an advanced direction sign in the vicinity.

On completion of the roads on the new housing estates in the area, it was considered that approaches should be made to the County Council with a view to placing Halt signs on the approach roads.

Alleged Speed of 95mph in Minivan

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 23rd March 1962

Anthony Brian Tyler of Aerial View, Ancil Avenue, Launton, appeared before the Bicester Magistrates on Monday. He was alleged to have driven a van at a speed dangerous to the public at Bicester on February 18th.

Inspector G.C. Callis, prosecuting, stated that the case arose from a check made by the traffic control officers when Tyler was travelling from Weston-on-the-Green to Bicester on the Sunday lunch time. PC Franklin, acting as observer in the patrol car, stated that a minivan passed their car when they were stationary near to the Weston-on-the-Green Service Station. They noticed the van to be travelling at a very fast speed, and immediately followed it.

It was stated that even when the police car travelled at speeds of 95mph it was difficult to keep the van in sight.

Approaching the Middleton Stoney road junction the van crossed it at 75mph, and on passing the King's Avenue junction, Tyler's speed was 65mph. Taking the right hand turn at the Fox Inn the speed of the van continued at 40mph. A vehicle was overtaken at

the Cemetery Road entrance and the van's speed remained at 40mph through to the Market Square, where Tyler was stopped by the police.

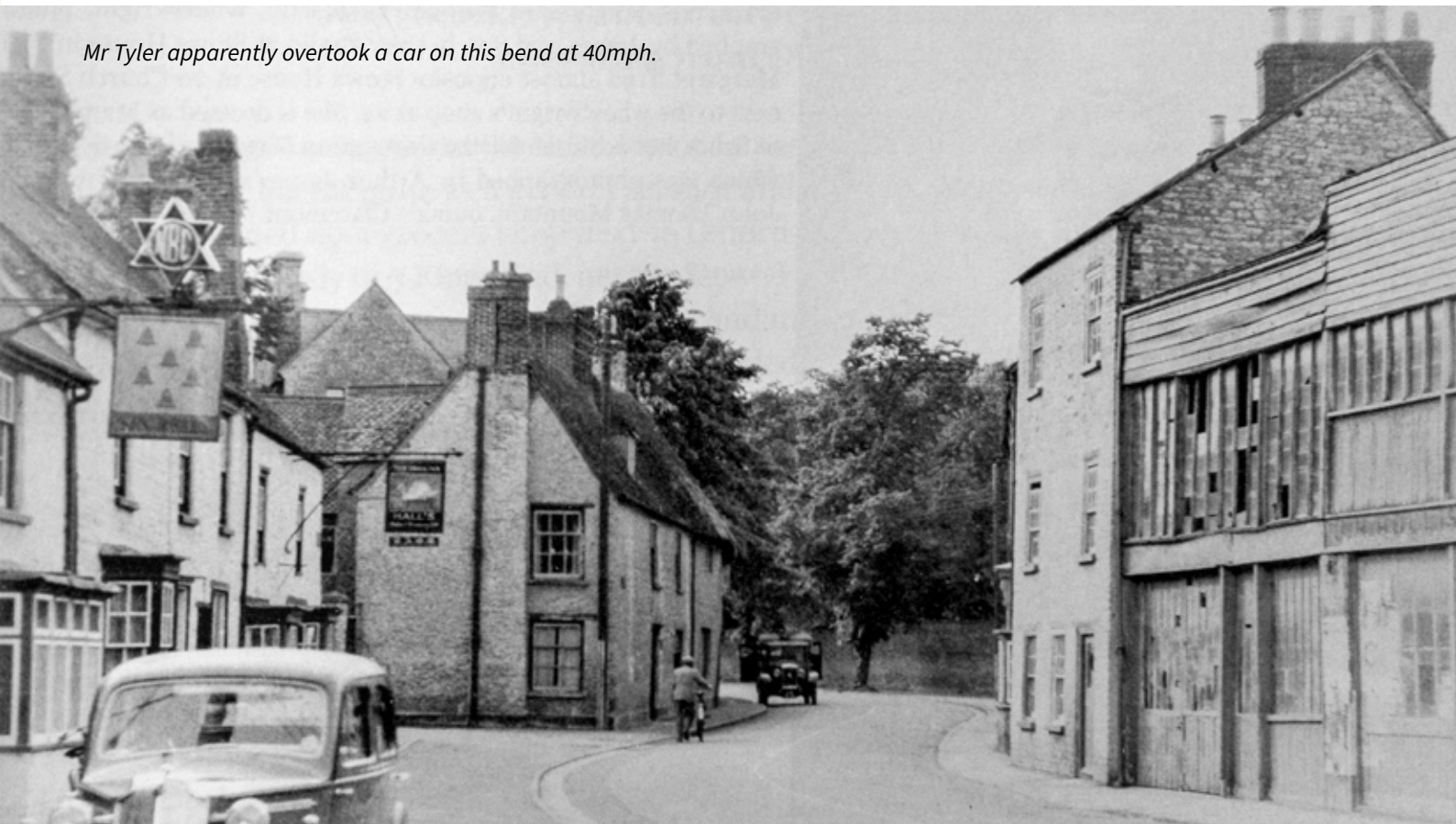
It was alleged by the prosecution that this van had been driven at a dangerous speed.

Mr Tyler stated that the van was not capable of doing anything like the speeds given by the police, and owing to a technical fault which arose on occasion, and which he stated had again occurred at the time of the alleged offence, it was even more improbable.

The solicitor defending Tyler drew attention to the fact that it was a Sunday lunch time and one would normally expect to meet little traffic and pedestrians.

Tyler, a Sales Executive, asked the magistrates not to disqualify him in view of his employment. In finding the case proved the Chairman, Mr F.T.J. Hudson, told Tyler that his speed was very dangerous, having regard to all the circumstances, and stated that the driving through the town only had been considered. Tyler was fined £20 together with an endorsement on his licence.

Mr Tyler apparently overtook a car on this bend at 40mph.



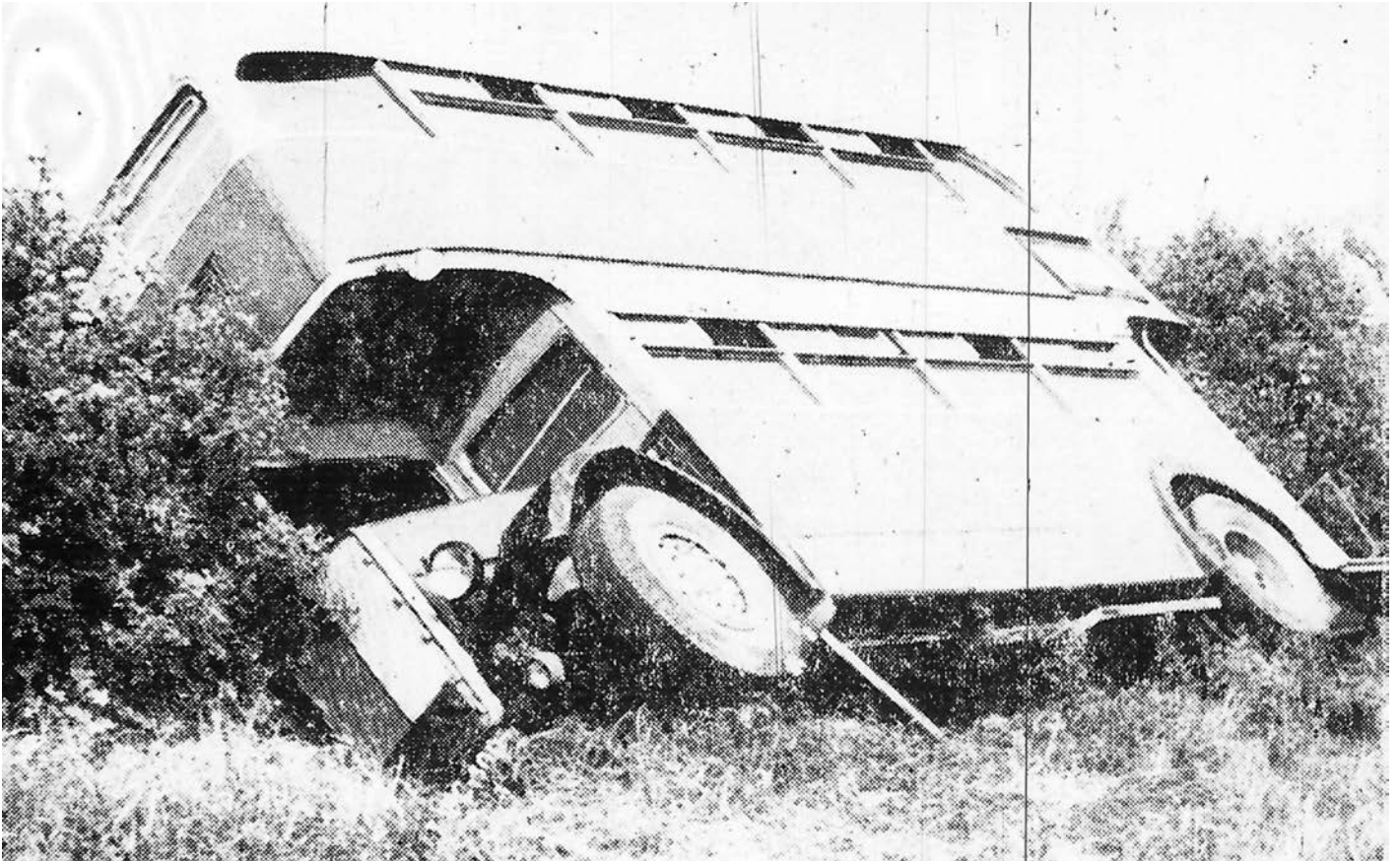
Bus Overturned

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 15th June 1962

Ten passengers travelling in this Charlton-on-Otmoor bus were uninjured when the vehicle suddenly veered off the Launton to Blackthorn road near the railway bridge, and overturned, just before midnight last Friday.

The driver, Mr Reginald Gibbons, of Launton, was not so fortunate. He suffered serious injuries, and an ambulance conveyed him to the Radcliffe Infirmary.

No other vehicle was involved.



Bus Driver Fined £20

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 3rd August 1962

Reginald Gibbons, of Knight's Bridge, West End, Launton, appeared at Bicester Magistrates' Court last Monday to receive sentence for driving a bus without due care and attention on June 8th.

The bus, which contained ten passengers, overturned into the hedge on the Launton to Blackthorn road near the railway bridge just before midnight.

Appealing to the Bench not to disqualify him, Gibbons said that he relied on driving for a living. He also had five young children and a wife to support.

Mr F.T.J. Hudson, chairman, told him that the magistrates had taken into consideration the fact that he was a professional driver and were not disqualifying him.

Gibbons was fined £20 and his licence was endorsed.

“What does the Winter motorist need besides a reliable and well serviced car”?

**Snow Grip Tyres Chains
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Road Safety Meeting

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 13th July 1962

Twenty-eight children received cycle pennants, badges and certificates for cycle proficiency at a meeting of Bicester Road Safety Committee held on Thursday last week. The awards were presented to the successful candidates of the cycle training scheme. The children received their awards from the chairman of the committee, Mr S.A. Winterbone, and Inspector G.C. Callis, of Bicester police sub-division.

The prize-winners were: Sheila Grace, Glyn Owen, Nicolas Eastcott, Elizabeth Townley, Eric Morris, Gordon Gray, Jeremy Anderson, Beryl Kirby, Patrick Gatt, Paul Jobling, Michael Liseter, Peidre McMiken, Patricia Ashmore, David Coxell, Martin Naylor, Calvin Smith, Michael McKeon, Clive Hutt, Patricia Hopcroft, Robert Smith, David Winfield, Peter Richards, Desmond Kerwood, Richard Powell, Alfred Mansfield, Henry Bonner, Charles Brookes and Jennifer Faulkner. All Bicester Primary Schools were represented.

Mr J.H. Townley, the retiring secretary of the Committee, and headmaster of Brookside School, thanked, on behalf of the children, the instructors, members of the Bicester Round Table and Police. In particular he expressed his gratitude to Sergeant P. Coxell, of Bicester, for arranging the tests for the children.

Mr S.A. Winterbone, chairman, seconded the vote of thanks, and voiced the feelings of the committee in praising the great work Mr Townley had done for the progress and advancement of road safety. “I would sincerely like to thank you,” said Mr Winterbone addressing the headmaster, “for all you have done for road safety during your period of office.”

Mr Townley had been secretary of the Committee for three years.

Mrs J. Plater accepted the position of secretary to succeed Mr Townley.

Road Safety? “It’s Up To You”

A Message From Councillor John Hollis, Chairman of Bicester Road Safety Committee

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 19th November 1965



Road safety is a problem which understandably arouses a great deal of emotion, it attracts many suggestions for action which often spring from feelings rather than from knowledge of the facts.

That accidents happen is obvious, but why they happen is often obscure, even to those who spend a great deal of their time in studying the circumstances of accidents. In trying to get at the causes, it may be felt that they arise from a variety of causes: human behaviour or failing, vehicle design, maintenance and failing, road design, maintenance and traffic control.

Vehicle design and failing are matters for the experts, but maintenance is frequently the responsibility of individuals rather than experts. Road design, maintenance and traffic control are again jobs which fall mainly to experts. There are human connections in all of these things however, and accidents most

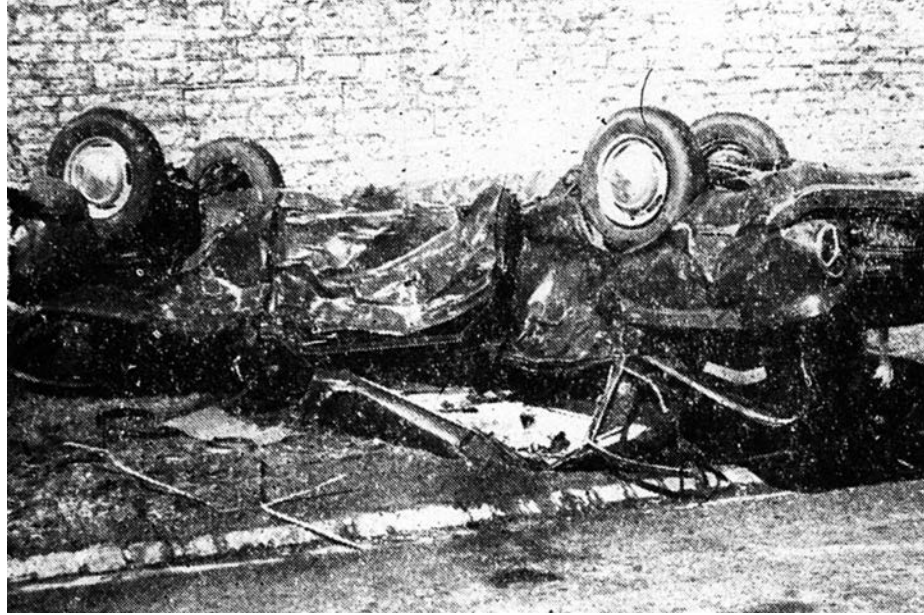
frequently happen as a result of human beings failing to conform to rules or patterns, or simply not taking sufficient care.

It is tragic to think that there were 7,820 deaths and 95,465 serious injuries on our roads last year. These figures mean more if they are related to our own small area and its share of the casualties, 4 killed (this year 21 killed) 84 seriously injured and 123 slight. The cost is not only in human life and suffering, but can also be measured as needless waste of people, materials, time and money. What can we do to reduce it?

There are a number of different aspects needing study in problems affecting safety on our roads, and in general it would seem that we have sufficient “Bodies” to deal with them. Indeed, I am concerned lest the importance of the subject causes further recourse to “Parkinsonism” at certain levels of Government.

Various bodies are carrying out research into roads, traffic, accidents, the nature and causes of traffic accidents, etc. As a result, they have been instrumental in achieving results which have lessened the road toll. They produce data capable of analysis and application to local conditions, a means whereby we can draw local comparisons. Road Safety Committees are mainly concerned with the human aspects.

We have an active road safety committee in Bicester whose job is mainly that of disseminating propaganda, and of training. The Bicester Round Tablers, with the assistance of the Police, run our Children’s National Cycling Proficiency training. They have trained hundreds of children to date. This I consider to be a highly successful



enterprise. We have a Tufty club where the “under fives” get their first introduction to Road Safety. Much work is done by the Police and members of the Road Safety Committee in talks to school children, and bicycle inspections, etc. The Committee frequently focus attention of the public on to possible dangers and get excellent co-operation from engineers and surveyors.

There are various questions I must raise, however. How many children have not done proficiency training? How many cycles are unfit for the roads? How many parents fail to teach their children the rudiments of road safety? How much effect does our Road Safety Propaganda have? What proportion of drivers have adequate eyesight? How many motorcyclists in this area are let loose on the road without any form of training?

How do we cut down the toll on our roads? Some people say the answer is in more legislation, but after trying to study

the problem locally over two or three years, and the experience of a few months on the bench, I am convinced that what is really needed is a greater sense of responsibility all round.

Finally, how many road users might give a little more thought to making our roads safer by their exercising more care, consideration, courtesy, and cheerfulness. There is no doubt Road Safety depends on us all. What are you doing about it?

Disseminating propaganda by posters is a costly and uncertain medium, the use of the Press is, I think, more effective and the wider use of television is most effective. Periodic reviews of accident figures and their analysis help to draw attention to possible danger spots. Can our training efforts be extended?

The field which we have not yet ventured into is the RAC/ACU Motor Cycle training scheme. Here there is room for some volunteers to join our Committee in helping to see that youngsters get a “right start” on the road. Can we do more? Many people will insist that we are “flogging a dead horse” and that all is needed is common sense.

I firmly believe in responsibility of the individual. Ultimately we come back to the same point. All the training, propaganda, expenditure on roads, signs, etc. comes to have been the cause of an accident. How much better would be a little more thought, more responsibility, a constant look out for possible causes of accidents, whether on the road or wherever we are. Let us all resolve to try, and by our conduct, give, a little more thought to making the roads safer at this time of year.



Easter Gliding Meet a Washout

Written by Matthew Hathaway

A

life lesson for us all. When you've got an important event coming up, never tempt fate by hoping for good weather!



Chipmunks, like the one seen here, were commonly used at RAF Bicester to tow gliders (or sailplanes) into the air.

Busy RAF Gliding Easter at Bicester

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 13th April 1962

For members of the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association, all roads will lead to RAF Bicester tomorrow, when large numbers of pilots and their ground crews converge on the Station for ten days gliding, which will take them right through Easter. They will use the sailplanes and facilities of the RAF Windrushers Gliding Club and the gliding instruction centre now operating at Bicester.

From far and near, and probably including a few pilots from Germany and Gibraltar, the RAF flyers will be headed by Sergeant John Williamson who became British National Gliding Champion last year and is preparing to defend his championship, together with his Inter-Services individual title, at the 1962 National Championships being held this year at RAF Aston Down, Gloucestershire, from May 25th to June 11th.

Once again, Wing Commander D.K. Kempston, commanding officer at RAF Bicester, is throwing open his airfield and other facilities to further the cause of gliding. With so many visitors expected, such staff as will be on duty on the Station over the Easter break will find themselves busier than they might have been, with extra mouths to feed and persons to be accommodated.

The RAFGSA Spring Competition, as the gathering has been named, is an important occasion for the RAF pilots, especially the top-notch ones, for, largely on the basis of their achievements between April 14th and 23rd, the teams will be chosen to represent the Royal Air Force in Leagues 1 and 2 of the National Championships a month later. There will be much at stake at Aston Down. Sergeant Williamson will be striving to retain his national title, and to do so well that he must be picked for Great Britain's team for the World Championships in the Argentine next February. And the RAF are determined to retain the Inter-Services individual and team championships they won last year at Lasham, Hampshire. For the selectors,

nothing but the strongest team will do, and every pilot at Bicester will be out to secure a place.

At these RAFGSA meetings the sheer dedication to the sport of silent flight, with which all RAF gliding enthusiasts are imbued, is seen at its most intense. Everyone works, everyone who can fly. Officers, air-men, airwomen, wives and even the older children buckle to at a great variety of tasks ranging from tea-making to "tugging." In the latter job, the RAF Chipmunk pilots, who tow the gliders aloft, spend their days virtually doing "circuits and bumps," for no sooner have they lifted one sailplane into the air and become disengaged from it, than they are landing again ready to tow the next off.

Two of the busiest men at Bicester will be a couple of gliding pilots who, for that matter, are rarely anything else but busy, teaching newcomers to the sport to glide at the Bicester centre. They are Master Pilot Kenneth Poole, its officer in charge of gliding, and Sergeant A.N. "Andy" Gough, one of Britain's great aerobatic sailplane pilots, who is chief flying instructor. But they will not be expected to shoulder the whole burden of organisation alone. With them, lending their expert assistance on both the operational and administrative sides, will be the chairman and deputy chairman of the RAFGSA, Group Captains R.R. Goodbody, of Oxford, and N.W. Kearon, of Godalming, Surrey, who are always in the thick of any RAF gliding activities. A vital cog in the overall wheel at Bicester will be Squadron Leader Norman Meygothling, of the Windrushers GC, in whose hands, as chief operations officer, will be the responsibility for seeing that the long programme of daily flying tasks runs smoothly.

Everything is now ready for the start of the meeting, and many private prayers are being offered that it may be blessed with fine weather and plenty of thermals.

Weather Almost Wrecked RAF Gliding Meeting

Keen Army and Air Force Duel

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 27th April 1962

From the weather point of view, the eleven-day gliding meeting of the RAF Gliding and Soaring Association from April 14th to 23rd was almost a dismal failure for the 120 pilots, their crews, and visiting fliers who gathered at RAF Bicester. For all but two days (Easter Sunday and Monday), when a sudden outburst of glorious weather revived the spirits of the largest number of people ever to attend a RAFGSA meeting, the rain teemed down, temperatures resembled mid-winter, and unfriendly skies glowered at the 26 RAF, Army, Navy and civilian sailplanes assembled from clubs throughout Britain. Some flying was possible on the Tuesday and Thursday, but conditions precluded the tasks from being rated as true competition contests, and the variety of sailplanes remained earthbound in the hangar until Easter was all but over. To forget their disappointment, ground crews tinkered with their aircraft and pilots sat dejectedly around talking gliding and hoping against hope that each morrow might bring conditions conducive to more action and less talk.

Much hard work had gone into preparations for the meeting, designed primarily to give top ranking RAF pilots valuable practice for the stern contests to come in May at the British National Gliding Championships. The enthusiasm which makes all RAFGSA meetings so stimulating to participants and spectators alike, was there in everyone from the "tug" pilots to those doing even the smallest jobs, but by Easter Saturday there were those who were ready to "pack it in" and go home to the Easter eggs and the holiday with the kids that they had given up in the name of the sport they love. Then, with Easter day morning came sunshine, heat, blue skies, and thermals – not the big ones that pilots dream about, but thermals nevertheless.

Quickly the first real competition got underway, a 110 mile "out and return" race to

Netheravon, Wiltshire. On Easter Monday, though in rather less balmy conditions and with some turbulence aloft, a second contest took 25 sailplanes off on a run to Pershore, Worcestershire, and back. With the vari-coloured gliders scattered about it, and the busy Chipmunk tug aircraft buzzing about like hornets, the airfield presented a gay site.

At least eleven RAF gliding clubs were represented including the "Windrushers," "Moonrakers," "Bannerdown," "Wessex," "Fenlands," "East Midlands," "White Rose," "Chilterns," "East Anglian," "Red Hand," "Four Counties," "Clevelands," and other colourfully named clubs. Along with these were the Army Gliding Club, and representatives of the Navy Gliding and Soaring Association, from a club in far-off Northern Ireland. Top-ranking visiting pilots included the great Brigadier A. Deane-Drummond, ex-British champion and an international, and the noted civilian pilot, David Ince. Air Chief Marshall Sir Theodore McEvoy, Air Secretary and RAFGSA President was there, and Air Commodore G.J.C. Paul, the Association's founder in 1949, dropped in in his own tiny yellow aircraft, a veritable "bubble car" of the skies.

Besides the two competition events, a 50-mile race held to Duxford, Cambridgeshire, by 25 gliders was won by Wing Commander J.G. Croshaw (Wessex GC), the only pilot to complete the course, while Flight Lieutenant F.D. Cretny (Windrushers GC) won a distance event.

The two weekend contests developed into exciting duels between those two "knights of unpowered flight," Sergeant John Williamson, RAF, the British Champion who defends his crown in the National Championships in May, and Brigadier Deane-Drummond. Victory went to the soldier by a bare ten seconds over Williamson in the Netheravon race, and in the Pershore event

he won over Williamson again by a matter of a few minutes. The closeness of these contests seemed to augur well for some exciting aerial battles between these two final rival pilots in the "Nationals," and in the concurrent Inter-Services Championships.

And so, from the weather-marred meeting, the 120 enthusiasts were happily able to salvage two good days and returned home feeling that, after all, the meeting had achieved some of its aim. They were a remarkable collection of people who came to Bicester, the living truth that RAF gliding has truly become a sport for all in the Service. From five founder members and one glider in 1949, it has grown into an Association of some 2,250 members, over 100 aircraft, and 16 thriving clubs, from which to Bicester came technicians in many ground trades, pilots of the RAF's fastest fighters and greatest bombers, a medical officer, a police dog handler, operations and administrative clerks, a carpenter, a schools liaison officer, motor transport drivers and mechanics,

aircraft apprentices and many others, all of whom in various ways are dedicated to silent flight.

Once again, RAF Bicester, under Wing Commander D.K. Kempston, its CO, did its gliding visitors proud and sent them home loud in their praise of the catering arrangements alone. Most of them ate in the famous Airmen's Mess, winner more than once of the annual Jolliffe Trophy for the best airmen's mess in Britain, and there the cooks worked day and night to feed hungry gliding mouths, from breakfast time until the last retrieving crew came home at night, and often very late indeed. To the thanks voiced at the close of the meeting by Group Captain R.R. Goodbody, chairman of the RAFGSA, the gathering added its own thanks. It presented to the cooks a tangible expression of gratitude in the form of a scroll done in beautiful calligraphy by an officer, Flight Lieutenant B.B. Sharman, a master of the art, and copiously signed by the visitors.



Bicester in Motion

Our 2024 Calendar

Written by Sally James

Horses, cars, buses, trains, hand-carts and more all feature in our 2024 calendar, based on the theme of transport. A preview of the calendar's contents was given by the committee members involved in its production at our October meeting.

Sally James concentrated on the people featured in some of the old photographs.

Harry Hornsby – rural postman

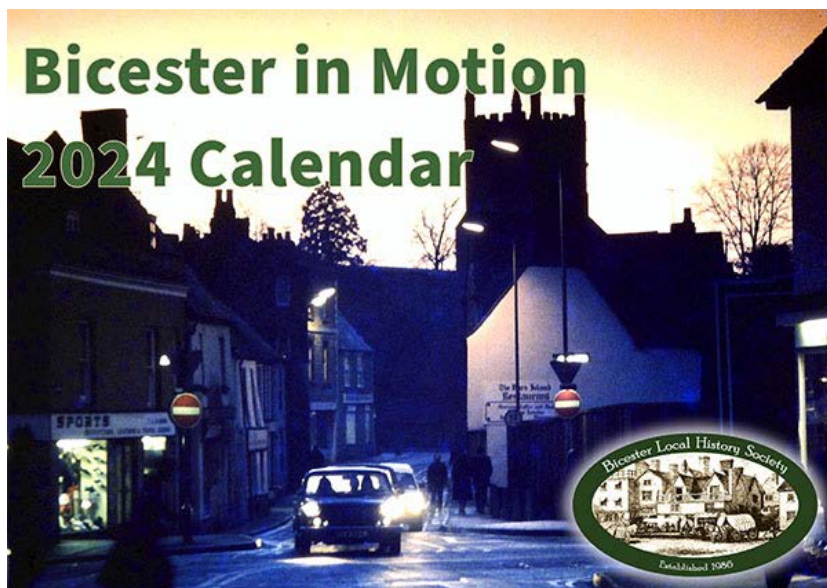


Pictured in about 1893, Harry Hornsby served Stratton Audley and Godington, later having Hethe and Fringford added to his workload.

His job was a hard one. He set out every day at 6am delivering, and collecting, letters and parcels from houses and sub-post offices on his round. He worked on Christmas Day and Good Friday.

Harry was a Bicester man, whose father was an agricultural labourer. He grew up in the poorer parts of town, such as Albert Terrace, Backway and St John's Street. The 1891 census shows him living in New Buildings with his wife and 2-year-old son.

He had to agree to fifty-seven rules as to his duties and conduct when he was appointed. These included not carrying parcels by their string, which doesn't seem like a heinous crime!; not being connected directly or indirectly to the ownership or management of a public house and several rules which meant that he was not permitted to publicly discuss his working conditions.



Market Hill Car Park

A small group of cars is parked in the centre of Market Hill, now Market Square, in 1956. Claremont House gave its name to the car park opened at its rear in the mid-1960s in response to the expansion of the town. The car park is located on what was grocers and wine & spirit merchants Finch's two-acre field.

Wendy Wall tells of her father starting work at Finch's when he left school, aged fourteen. Blending of whisky and of wine took place in the shop's cellars and, one day, as a joke, Wendy's dad was encouraged to taste the blends. Becoming rather pie-eyed, the task of closing the shop blinds at the day's end was beyond him and his pole went





Councillor John Hollis cutting the ribbon to open Claremont Car Park in 1965.

through the plate-glass window. He was sacked on the spot! (Although reinstated when his parents pleaded his case).

Milk Delivery



Margaret Townsend is seen delivering milk 'direct from the farm' during WW1.

Her father was William Townsend, a wheelwright and coachbuilder in Church Street from the 1870s to 1916.

Competitors included Harry Bourton, whose cows grazed a field between the Banbury and Buckingham Roads, accessed from Stable Road.

Walter Dagley from Dorset Dairies, Market Square operated from the 1930s to the 1950s. His son, Herbert, probably had the last horse-drawn milk float in the town.

Dairyman Walter Tuffrey started business in 1944 in the yard behind his home at 9 North Street, ultimately becoming the largest private milk delivery business in the district.

Matthew Hathaway shared some of his research.

Sheep Street Congestion



Traffic chaos in Sheep Street in the 1970s was exacerbated by on-street parking, a pedestrian crossing, bus stops, and the sheer volume of vehicles travelling the main Birmingham to London road.

Manorsfield Road was opened in 1976 as part of a scheme to bypass the town centre, but the remainder of the scheme (a link road between Chapel Street and London Road) was never completed, so Market Square remains part of the route. Pedestrianisation of Sheep Street was completed in 1994, despite concerns at the time over the impact on passing trade.

Charitable Coal Distribution



One of the many local acts of generosity in the late Victorian and Edwardian period was the gift of coal to the poorer residents of the town every winter. Funded largely by Mr Henry Tubb, this took place on December 23rd for many years. First reported in the Bicester Advertiser in 1886 as an "act of kindness, owing to the severity of the weather", when thirteen tons of coal were distributed. By 1896 the quantity had increased to seventeen tons, but by 1905, when this photo was taken, it had reduced to eleven tons. The distribution always took place on Market Square, under the supervision of Mr

R.J. Goble. The coal was supplied by Jonas Harris, whose horse and cart can be seen in the foreground.

King's Head Motorcycle Club



The 1970s saw a big increase in the number of people riding motorbikes, mopeds and scooters. Many related organisations started to form around this time. Some, like the Bicester Motorcycle Training Scheme, aimed to help new riders gain experience and learn road safety, while others were just enthusiasts out to enjoy themselves with like-minded people. The King's Head Motorcycle Club, seen here in Market Square at the start of one of their "fun runs" in 1979, was one such enthusiasts' group.

A Bicester Advertiser article published in May 1976 highlighted the dangers of untrained riders on the roads. Training courses initiated by Oxfordshire County Council in conjunction with the Oxford branch of the Honda Owners Club included practical sessions, Highway Code lessons, safety films and basic motorcycle maintenance.

The King's Head Club featured in the Bicester Advertiser later in 1979 after they had raised £40 to buy several bicycles for children at Evenley Hall children's home, as a Christmas gift "from one set of bikers to another."

Sheep Street Flooding



Many of Bicester's roads were notorious for flooding, particularly before the

invention of tarmac. After the road was properly surfaced, and drains added, things did improve, but as can be seen in this photo, taken in the 1920s, drains were still unable to cope with heavy snowmelt or particularly bad storms.

John Roberts shared his knowledge of the garage in King's End.

Parrott's Garage



William Spencer Parrott is standing outside his wheelwright shop and garage in around 1930. His father, George Parrott, had a wheelwright and carriage building works here as early as 1883. This was finally run solely as a garage around 1940 by William's son Ernest.

Carriage building and wheelwrighting was a thriving small industry in south-west Bicester in the early twentieth century.

Bob Hessian concluded our presentation.

The Old Fire Engine



Pictured is Bicester's first fire engine in Sheep Street for Empire Shopping Week, July 1931. The pump was built around 1750. Although it had its own wheels which enabled it to be moved around at the scene of a fire, it would be transported there on a horse and cart. The base held a reservoir of water, and the pump mechanism allowed it to pump water from external water sources.

In 2010 it was in a semi-derelict state and was restored to full working order by four members of Bicester Local History Society. At a local fire brigade open day in 2018, the 270-year-old pump was challenged to a contest with the brigade's portable water pump. Result? A draw!

Sirett's Cycle Works



Sirett's originally had premises in Causeway but moved to Market Square in 1901, when this picture was taken. The building is now known as Cromwell House. Cycling was a popular means of transport and there had been much experimentation in producing a bicycle powered by an engine. The photograph shows a Humber motor bicycle powered by a 217cc Werner engine mounted over the front wheel.

Slip Coach at Bicester North Station

In 1910 the GWR completed their link line between Princes Risborough and Aynho and opened Bicester North Station. "Slip Coaches" were used on this line until September 1960, allowing passengers to utilise the "non-stopping" express trains from Paddington to Birmingham to access the intermediary stations. The last coach was reserved for people wishing to access the stations between Bicester and Banbury. As the train neared Bicester, a guard in the coach would "slip" the coupling, thus releasing the coach from the main train which continued its



journey without any reduction of speed. The guard would then apply the brake and bring it to a standstill, where it was collected by a local engine for its onward journey.

Taylor's Coach Outside Preece's in 1956

Up until the 1960s, most people, especially those who lived in the outlying villages, relied heavily on public transport to either get them to work or for shopping. Taylor's Coaches business operated from premises in Banbury Road. The firm had a number of single-decker coaches often utilised for excursions to London theatres. This double-decker bus served the MOD camps at Arccott and Ambrosden.



At time of publication the calendar is available from Coles Books, priced at £8.

1960s Traffic Management

Written by Matthew Hathaway

As cars became more commonplace in the post-war boom of the 1950s and 60s, Bicester's town centre gradually became unable to handle the volume of traffic it had to deal with. Sheep Street was then a major through route and, even after the opening of Queen's Avenue, the town's medieval street pattern still formed a bottleneck that had to be dealt with.

This collection of articles from 1962 and 63 show how things began to be sorted out, and where the seeds of future developments were sewn.

Bicester's Traffic Problem

County Council's Proposals

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 16th February 1962

At the meeting of the General Purposes Committee of Bicester Urban Council on Monday, a letter was read from the County Surveyor, Mr K. Summerfield, in reply to the Council's enquiries as to the County Highway Authority's proposals with regard to improvements in traffic problems in the town. The letter was as follows:

"Apart from the realignment of the trunk road in the Market Square, there are no proposals for carrying out any major highway improvements in Bicester in the immediate future.

As regards the Sheep Street and St John's Street junction, it has occurred to me that your Council might be prepared to investigate the possibility of providing a footpath from the end of the short cul-de-sac road leading off St John's Street, through a yard to join Sheep Street by way of an existing archway a short distance south of the junction.

At present there is little prospect of being able to carry out an improvement of the junction itself, but we shall be erecting new traffic signs there later this year."

Members expressed concern at the danger existing at the corner of Sheep Street, particularly with regard to prams which had to go out onto the road, because of the narrow footpath. The suggestion of the County Council was not agreed upon, and Councillor Clifton suggested that the footpath to the left of the road from Sheep Street might be widened, at the expense of the footpath on the other side, and both footpaths would then be of practically equal width, without narrowing the road.

It was agreed to approach the Minister of Transport on the matter and request that, as this was a trunk road, something should be done to overcome the danger at present existing.

Bottleneck at Bicester to go at Last

Plan for Compulsory Purchase Order

In an attempt to clear a major traffic bottleneck at Bicester at the south end of Sheep Street, the Ministry of Transport has decided to go ahead with plans for a compulsory purchase order of properties which greatly restrict the width of the A41 trunk road where London Road joins Sheep Street.

The properties, 41 and 43 Market Square, consist of a wide three-storey building used as a draper's and outfitter's shop, to which is attached a dwelling house and wool shop formerly known as the Covent Garden Fruit Store. The properties are separated from the main lines of shopping and business premises by the pavement on one side and on the other side by the trunk road, which is greatly reduced in width at this point. Traffic jams at "The Narrows", or "The Gut", as the reduced width of the trunk road is known at this point, are numerous. Heavy goods vehicles with wide loads have great difficulty in getting through – the wool shop bears many visible scars of this; in recent years a number of vehicles have ploughed through the front shop window of the wool shop and the side window has been damaged even more often.

Although there have been a number of discussions over the years on methods to overcome the traffic hazards at The Narrows, the first positive step to alleviate the problem was taken at

a meeting of the Oxfordshire County Council in July 1960. A report of the Highways Committee presented at the meeting stated that the committee understood that the properties which jutted out into the trunk road were up for sale.

"Your committee have informed the Ministry of Transport as it would seem to be a favourable opportunity to purchase and demolish these buildings which cause considerable restriction to the flow of traffic," the report added.

At a meeting of the County Council last month it was further reported that the Ministry had decided to make a compulsory purchase order in respect of these properties. Official notice of the Ministry's intention will be given soon and there will be a time limit for the lodging of objections to the proposed order.

If there are no snags to the Ministry's proposal, a requisition order to take effect during the late summer is expected to be made and the County Council will go ahead immediately with the demolition work. It is proposed to provide two lanes of traffic at this point, separated by a car parking bay in the centre, and there will be a one-way flow of traffic in each direction. The car park, which will be designed so as not to interfere with the traffic flow, will accommodate about 40 cars.

The Acquisition of Land

Compulsory Purchase Order 196

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 30th March 1962

Public notice is hereby given that the Minister of Transport, in exercise of his powers under the Highways Act 1959, and the Acquisition of Land Act 1946, has prepared a draft compulsory purchase order entitled "The London-Aylesbury-Warwick-Birmingham Trunk Road (County of Oxford) Compulsory Purchase (No.) Order. 196" which he proposes to make, authorising him to purchase compulsorily for the purpose of the improvement of the said Trunk Road in the Parish of St Edburg, Bicester, in the County of Oxford the land described in the schedule hereto.

Copies of the draft order and of the relevant plan have been deposited at the Divisional Surveyor's Office, Clay Pits, Bicester, and at the

Ministry of Transport, St Christopher House (Room G14), Southwark Street, London SE1, and may be seen at all reasonable hours.

Any objection to the order must be made in writing and addressed to the Minister of Transport before the 21st April 1962, and should state the grounds of objection, quoting the reference TRL 35/31/10 (CPO).

C.H. Wykes

An Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Transport.

Schedule

In the Parish of St Edburg, Bicester. 215 sq. yds. shop and storage space of No's 41 and 42 Market Square, Bicester. 91 sq. yds. shop, storage space and living accommodation of No 43 Market Square, Bicester.

Bicester By-Pass “Not Yet” Says Minister

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 31st August 1962

There is little possibility of a Bicester by-pass within the next few years – this was revealed at the Bicester Urban Council meeting on Tuesday evening in a letter from the Ministry of Transport.

The letter told councillors that the Minister recognised the need for a by-pass, but it would be quite likely to cost over £250,000 and there were many similar cases under review. The Minister had not enough funds at his disposal to deal with all such cases at once, and thus there had to be a system of priority. This took into account the amount

of traffic carried by the road, the number of accidents upon it in recent years, and its importance in linking large cities.

“With this in mind,” said the letter, “Bicester cannot be yet included in the building programme. The need will be examined again later, but it would not be wise to hold out high hopes of early action.”

Something was, however, being done to ease the traffic flow through the centre of the town, the letter concluded. This presumably is the planned demolition of Hedges shop between Sheep Street and London Road.

Bicester Draper’s Last Sale

Demolition for Road Widening

It was a sad day for Bicester on Thursday week as customers crowded into his drapery and outfitters shop at 41 and 42 Market Square for the last time. It was the last day of trading for Bicester’s shop which juts out into a busy trunk road. In the sale to end all previous sales, goods were not wrapped after purchase and the usual assistants were replaced by an auctioneer.

The occasion was the auction of the stock-in-trade, shop fittings and furniture of W. Hedges and Son. The two-storey property with an attached house and former wool shop has been acquired by compulsory purchase order by the Ministry of Transport for a road improvement scheme.

For over a century and a half the properties have been used for various trading purposes although the premises were not so large originally. They are separated from

the main body of shops by a footpath on one side and the A41 trunk road linking Sheep Street with London Road on the other. The shops protrude so far into the trunk road however that Sheep Street and London Road are joined by a narrow stretch of road known as The Narrows, and by some as The Gut.

The properties are now to be demolished and road improvements carried out, and the County Council propose to provide two lanes of traffic at this point, separated by a car parking bay in the centre; and there will be a one-way flow of traffic in each direction. The demolition and reconstruction of the road at this point will be a sizeable job because of the amount of traffic carried on the trunk road, the size of the properties, and the large cellars underneath the buildings.



Hedges Block seen at various stages of the demolition.





St John's Street, at the junction with Sheep Street (above), and London Road, at the junction with Launton Road (below), were both proposed for widening in 1963 to improve traffic flow through the town centre. Both would eventually get widened during the 1970s.



Plan to Remove Bottlenecks at Bicester

Trunk Road Improvements

Published in the Oxford Times, 12th April 1963

A plan giving details of proposed major trunk road improvement schemes at Bicester, which will iron out existing road traffic bottlenecks, was considered at a meeting of Bicester Urban District Council's General Purposes Committee on Monday. The plan, prepared by the County Surveyor, Mr K. Summerfield, indicates, with two exceptions, that the proposals are tentative at this stage. The exceptions are the improvements now being carried out at Market Hill, which joins London Road with Sheep Street, and proposals for the widening of St John's Street, connecting Sheep Street with Queen's Avenue.

The recent demolition of shop premises on Market Hill which restricted the flow of traffic between Sheep Street and London Road, will, when present roadworks have been completed, relieve one traffic problem only to create another. The speed up in the traffic flow at this point, for vehicles proceeding towards Aylesbury, will create a danger at the Launton Road junction where the road narrows considerably due to the non-alignment of the road.

To overcome this difficulty it is proposed to widen the carriageway and to push the road back some 15 to 20 feet, which will mean the eventual demolition of a number of properties near the Launton Road junction.

At the tail end of this trunk road, where Sheep Street joins North Street, it is proposed to widen North Street by demolishing a number of old properties on the north side, or the right hand side proceeding from the roundabout towards Sheep Street. At the moment this road, because of its narrowness, is a one-way street; and the demolition of properties along practically its whole length will open up this road to two-way traffic.

It is also proposed to widen the roadway near the roundabout at the top end of North Street, where it joins with the Oxford, Banbury and Buckingham trunk roads,

to give a much improved turning area for vehicles.

These three projects are the long-term proposals in the County Surveyor's plan.

He also suggests the widening of St John's Street to provide an increased road width and footpaths near its junction with Sheep Street. This matter has been the subject of correspondence between Bicester Council and Mr John Hay, the local Member of Parliament, who has taken the matter up with the Minister of Transport.

A scheme for the widening of this road, which will involve the demolition of derelict properties, is expected to follow the roadworks now in hand at Market Hill. Details of this improvement have already been submitted to the Minister for his approval.

A major work now in hand is the scheme for improvements at Market Hill. Following the demolition of the shop properties, a new view of the Sheep Street skyline was opened up looking from London Road. Although the view has improved, the traffic congestion at this point will remain until the present roadworks are completed. Huge cellars under the old properties have yet to be filled in before the road can be built up to provide two-way traffic at this spot.

The existing narrow road running past the Midland Mart offices will be retained as a service road and there will then be a raised area separating this road from the new trunk road, which will be wide enough to allow for limited parking on the east side.

The road improvement scheme now underway, and the St John's Street scheme, which is expected to follow, will improve traffic conditions and make the other improvement schemes even more necessary. The tentative proposals may be changed, and it is unlikely that they will take place anyway for some years, but they may coincide with the proposals for a by-pass linking the Aylesbury Road with the Oxford Road, which has been included in the Bicester Town map which covers a planning period up to 1971.

Bicester's Second Railway

Written by Matthew Hathaway

The railways first came to Bicester in 1850 with the opening of the London & North-Western line from Oxford to Bletchley (later to continue on to Cambridge). It would then be another 60 years before the town gained its second rail connection, when the Great Western Railway opened their new, more direct, line from London to Birmingham and gave us Bicester North Station. But, as the following articles show, unlike the first station, the second one opened with very little fanfare and immediately got straight down to business.

Completion of the New Line to London

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 1st April 1910

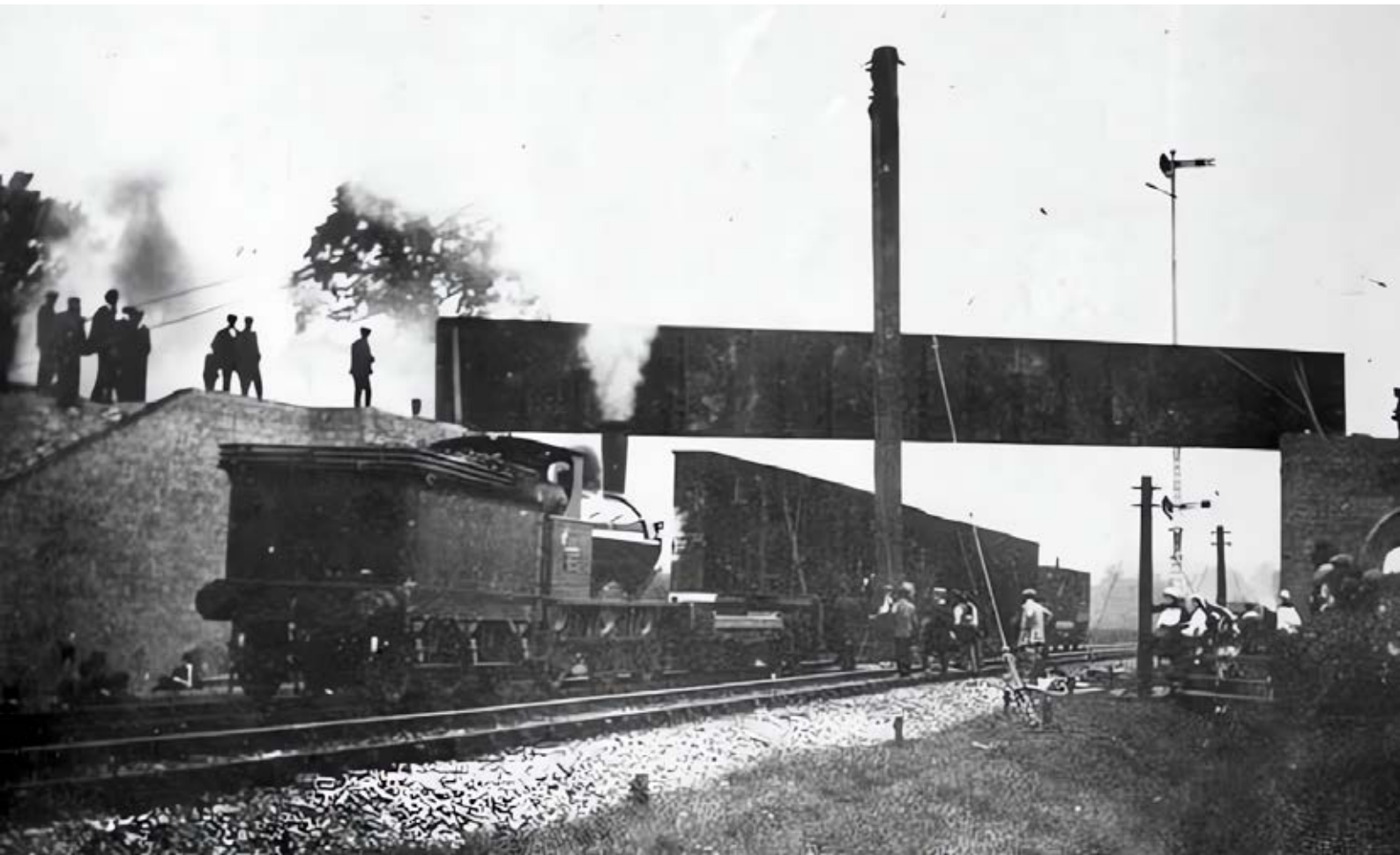
On Tuesday afternoon the last rail was laid in the new Aynho–Ashendon line to London, and the three years' work of construction was brought to an end. Trains can now run, and in a few days will be running by the direct route from Bicester to London.

The work of construction has been very heavy, far more so than the country over which the new line was to run suggested to the mind of an ordinary person not looking at it with the eye of an engineer. But Messrs Scott and Middleton and their subcontractors have completed their work without serious hindrance, and during the last few months the progress has been rapid.

The last section of the line to be laid was that at the end where the new line joins the

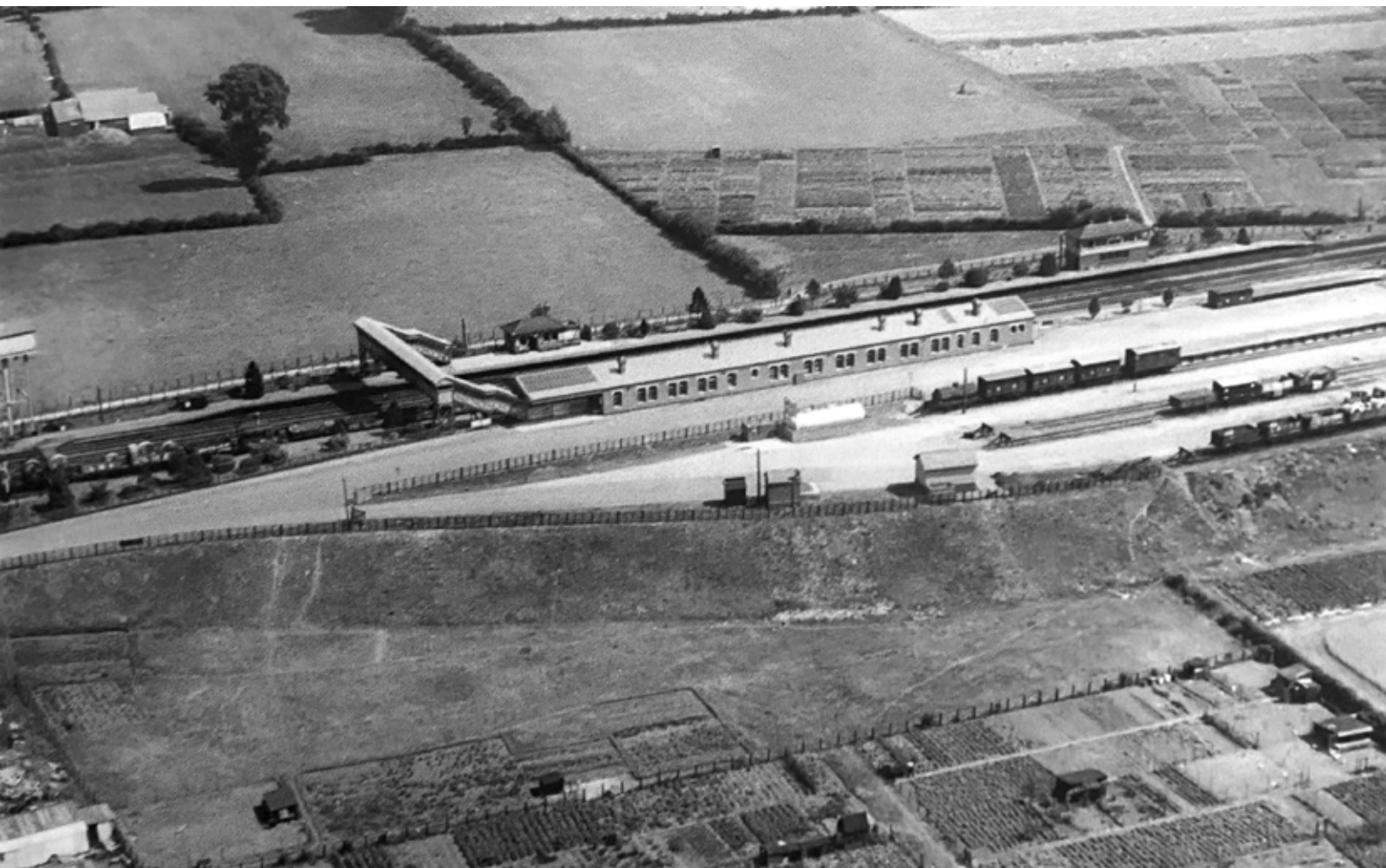
existing one at Aynho Station, close to Nell Bridge Farm, where a complete transformation of the scene has taken place, for the flying junction which carries the new down line over the present main line gives the appearance of three pairs of lines joining at this spot.

By the end of this week the contractors' men will have cleared off, and the Great Western Company will have taken over the line as a running concern, and on Monday next goods traffic will commence over the line. Some six goods trains a day will commence to run next week, and traffic will be gradually increased during the ensuing three months. By July 1st the initial passenger service will be inaugurated.



Above: Building the bridge to carry the GWR line over the Oxford-Cambridge line.

Below: Bicester North station and goods yard.



Two Hours to Birmingham

Published in the Bicester Herald, 1st July 1910

Today the Great Western Railway Company will commence the running of passenger trains over their new shortened route between London and Birmingham.

For the last few weeks good trains have been travelling over the track to “settle” it, for a new railway, solidly though it may be built, is always liable to “give” a little at certain points.

The directors state that they have no intention of entering on a railway “war” with the London and North-Western between London and Birmingham, but one can hardly imagine that the opportunity of speeding the trains beyond their present limits will be entirely abandoned. Under the old conditions the situation stood thus: The London and North-Western route, running by way of Rugby and Coventry, is 113 miles long; the old Great Western route, by way of Reading, Didcot, and Oxford, measured 129 miles. London and North-Western trains covered the distance in two hours, with four trains each way per day. The quickest Great Western non-stop express has, up to the present time, required two hours and twenty minutes to do the journey.

By the new route, however, the Great Western is in better position than it's old and formidable rival to attack the Midland capital and the country further north and north-west of the Midlands. A few illustrations will suffice to show what the shortening of the route means. On the London and North-Western Railway, Leamington is 97 miles distant from London; the old and the new Great Western routes are respectively 165 and 87 miles; Birmingham - L&NWR 113 miles; GWR 129 and 110.5 miles; Wolverhampton - L&NWR 125 miles; GWR 141 and 123 miles; Shrewsbury - L&NWR 163 miles; GWR 171 and 153 miles.

The immense saving of mileage has been accomplished by abandoning the great loop through Reading, Didcot, and Oxford, and cutting straight across country in a north-westerly direction to Banbury. This

has only been accomplished by arrangement with the Great Central Railway, who are on practically equal terms with the Great Western on the section between Northolt and Ashendon Junction.

There remained the section between Ashendon and Aynho, a little distance south of Banbury. The contract for this was entered into as long ago as 1906, and since then a small army of over 1,000 men have been engaged on cuttings, tunnels, embankments, and brick viaducts. Most of the work has been through clay, and the whole amount of that removed, with certain quantities of rock, amount to 3,000,000 cubic yards.

There are five new stations - at Ludgershall, Blackthorn, Bicester (with special accommodation for hunting folk), Ardley, and Aynho Park.

The effect of the new line will be in the first place to open up a tract of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire which has hitherto been without direct railway communication with London. Secondly, it will, as we have shown, shorten the Great Western route to the North by 18.5 miles, a fact that will be clearly seen in the timing of the service of trains which begins on July 1st. Birmingham is placed nearer London than on the famous London and North-Western line, and beyond that point the Great Western services to South Staffordshire, Shropshire, Cheshire, and North Wales will be greatly accelerated.

Both companies disclaim any idea of racing, but it is impossible to believe that the running on either route will remain at its present limit. It has been reduced to less than half the original time since the original tracks were laid down, and with the magnificent track on both routes, and the more powerful engines and substantial coaches, there is no reason why in a few years we should not be travelling from London to Birmingham, or vice versa in 90 minutes. This is a possibility that will force itself into realisation by the needs and demands of the travelling public.



The Opening of the New GWR Main Line

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 1st July 1910

The first of the passenger trains of the new main line section of the Great Western Railway started to run today without any opening formalities. The train started from Paddington at 5:45am, arriving at Princes Risborough at 7:30am. Here commenced what is known as the motor service, which calls at all stations to Banbury.

Bicester was reached by the first train of this service at 7:51am, and there was a large number of people at the station to witness its arrival. Some walked out to Blackthorn to take a ride in the first train, whilst at Bicester there was keen competition to secure the first ticket issued at the new station, passengers arriving on the platform at least an

hour before the train was due. The majority of these booked to Ardley and returned by the train arriving back at Bicester at 8:39am.

At present Bicester does not benefit in the least by the new train service, except by the opening up of a new district, but we understand that the timetable will be subject to considerable revision in the near future. The new station is now open for the receipt and dispatch of goods, whilst a bus meets all trains from the King's Arms Hotel.

The official in charge of the station is Mr E.P. James, from the Divisional Superintendent's Office, Paddington, whilst the new section of the line is under the control of Mr J. Dunster, the Divisional Superintendent.



“Wings for Victory”

Presentation of Plaques

Published in the *Bicester Advertiser*, 12th November 1943

The presentation ceremony of Plaques and Certificates of Honour, in connection with Bicester and Ploughley “Wings for Victory” Week, was held on Saturday last in the Wesley Hall (by kind permission) at 3pm. Owing to the unavoidable absence of Lord Bicester, President of the Week, the chair was taken by Major L.G. Moir, Chairman of the Local Savings Committee, supported by Mr J.N. Davis (local hon. sec.), Mr Harding (War Savings Dept.), etc. Squadron-Leader Newberry, of the Bicester RAF, represented Wing-Commander Cree, who was also unable to be present.

At 2:30pm the Band of the RAF played selections on the Market Square, and then proceeded to the Wesley Hall for the presentation. The Hall was well filled with representatives from the villages, members of both Councils, Village Group Secretaries and friends.

In his opening speech, Major Moir congratulated the villages on their splendid effort, and stressed the need for more and continued small savings. He apologised for the absence of Lord Bicester and of Wing-Commander Cree, who were unable to be present that day. He had, however, been fortunate in obtaining the services of Squadron-Leader Newberry, whom he then introduced.

Squadron-Leader Newberry said before presenting the plaques and certificates of honour he would like to congratulate the area for the remarkable achievement of raising £189,000 for “Wings for Victory” Week. It was a very good effort, and showed what could be done if people really tried to do their best. “If we are going to continue to bomb the Germans we need to continue war savings,” he said. “We know we are going to win, but we want to get it over as quickly as possible, and this can only be done by every man and woman saving as much as possible.” Squadron-Leader Newberry said he should personally like to thank Mr Hudson for the tremendous amount of work he put in during the “Wings for Victory” Week. As far as the Air Force was concerned, if people kept saving and provided the aircraft, the RAF would do the rest for them.

In receiving the plaque, Mr T. Hudson said it was not time to relax in war savings. Those people who had been wise in saving caused no headache to the

organisers, and yet there were many people who were not yet saving. As a rule a chairman of a council had varied duties, some pleasant and others unpleasant. Everything, however, had been extremely pleasant during his term of office, and not the least had been the result of the “Wings for Victory” Week. He was sure the plaque would be much appreciated by the Council, and would be given a conspicuous position in the Council Chambers.

Dr White expressed the gratitude of the Rural District Council and said the villages had done so well that they all deserved plaques.

Certificates of honour were then presented by the Squadron-Leader to Major Moir (chairman of the War Savings Committee) and the representatives of all the villages.

Major Moir referred to the raising of the standard of war savings campaign. In handing over the log books, he said we did not realise what the Air Force did, and then proceeded to relate the figures given by the Air Minister. Accepting the log books, Squadron-Leader Newberry explained the proceedings in connection with them. A complete diary of the four bombers would be handed back to the area.

In announcing the figures for the several villages, Major Moir referred to Fritwell’s contribution of £12,656, which represented £25 per head of the population.

Mr Dunhill thanked everyone connected with “Wings for Victory” Week, especially the RAF, where every station had helped. No doubt some of the personnel would have preferred to go bombing than to make speeches. The original target aimed at was £150,000, but as that would not be divided by four it was made into £160,000. The amount of £189,136 equalled £10 1s. 5d. per head of the population. The feature of the week was that the investments from the small savings was, for the first time, larger than the long-term security investments. Special thanks were due to the Bank and Post Office officials, particularly in the rural areas. Mr Dunhill then appealed for continued saving, and the group movement, stating that in the area there were 14,750 not linked up with group saving.

Roll of Honour

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

Flying Officer Thomas Haswell Hall, of Somerton.

Died: 22nd November 1943 Aged: 31 Served in: Royal Air Force

Aircraftman Francis Jesse Wing, of Islip.

Died: 29th November 1943 Aged: 21 Served in: Royal Air Force



Parking Problems Aplenty

Written by Matthew Hathaway

It seems that parking in the town centre has been a problem for as long as there have been cars on the roads. But in 1965 the Council were finally able to do something substantial to ease the situation, in the form of the new car park behind Claremont House. It also, conveniently, gave them the opportunity to build some new public conveniences to replace the underground ones on Sheep Street that they were desperate to close down.

Central Car Park for Bicester

Layout Will Cost About £17,000

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 5th February 1965

The Housing and Development Committee of Bicester Urban District Council approved, in principle, the car park plan for the Claremont House area on Monday. The Engineer and Surveyor, Mr D. Stanley, said he designed the plan after consultations with the Police, County Highways, and County Planning. It will accommodate about 140 cars and the layout will cost about £17,000. It will be a large paved area with a separate entrance and exit in Victoria Road, with a pedestrian access to Market Hill. He said the plan will now be submitted to the Ministry.

The parking area will be separated by a central division, on which street lights will be erected. Public conveniences will be built at the end of the car park, and this may mean that the one in Sheep Street will be demolished.

Whether the car park ought to provide free parking was the question raised by Councillor I. Goble. Councillor J. Hollis felt the whole question of car parking in the town should be discussed. He suggested that the car park ought to be free and that parking in certain places in the town should be charged for.

The members accepted the Engineer's plan and will recommend its acceptance to the Council.

Mr Stanley added that negotiations were in progress about Claremont House and they were approaching the time of year when the property market started to move again.



Market Square & The Causeway, Bicester

Parking areas in Market Square and Sheep Street would often get filled up with people parking all day whilst they were at work, making parking a problem for any shoppers.

Gas Board Interest

*Published in the Bicester Advertiser,
26th February 1965*

Bicester's new car park, which will be built behind Claremont House, the layout costing about £17,000, should not receive any objections on the final plan from County Planning, according to Mr Stanley, the Engineer and Surveyor of Bicester Council. Claremont House will become a very valuable site, with high selling potential.

Southern Gas Board representatives paid particular interest in the building during their visit last weekend. A site for a showroom?





*Above: Parking in Sheep Street became an increasing problem throughout the 1950s and 60s.
Below: Councillor John Hollis officially opening the new car park behind Claremont House.*



Plan to Ease Parking Problem

“All Day Street Parkers” Asked to Co-operate

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 17th December 1965

The Claremont Car Park allowing space for 150 cars will mean free parking until the Council have agreed in the New Year on a schedule of charges. As an interim measure, Police Inspector Ronald Gosling asked the Council to approve “no parking” measures in Sheep Street (one side) from Grimsleys to the Handy Stores, to allow broader vision for the cars to re-enter Sheep Street after leaving the new car park via Bell Lane. He also asked for “no parking” in Launton Road, Victoria Road, Manchester Terrace, Newport Terrace, Bath Terrace, up to the junction at the rear entrance of Ashmore’s.

In response to suggestions from Councillor I. Goble, the Council will ask the Inspector to reduce the amount of no parking proposed on either side of the Sheep Street junction of Bell Lane.

It was felt that if the “all day parkers” co-operated and used the car park, it would leave the streets free for shoppers to park

freely.

The Clerk, Mr R.W. Bainton, said the County Council traffic survey will be published in May or June 1966, and the RAC will “plaster the town” with direction signs to the Claremont car park.

Councillor M. O’Brien referred to the difficulties in parking near the two doctors’ surgeries in Bell Lane. It was wrong to allow cars to park around that corner. They have got to be given access to the bays.

Councillor Hollis said it was a most unsatisfactory state of affairs. He could not see what should be done, short of those people being public spirited and taking the signs down. It was a pity the surgeries were allowed to be there with no provisions for off street car parking.

The Council will make representations to the County Council concerning the dangers at the corner which will be accentuated by the extra traffic using the car park.



Slimming Down British Railways

Written by Matthew Hathaway

Anyone who knows anything about the history of rail travel in Britain has heard of Dr Beeching, who, during his time as chairman of British Railways in the early 1960s, became a household name for his report *The Reshaping of British Railways*, commonly referred to as *The Beeching Report*. This report prompted far-reaching changes in the country's railway network, popularly known as the Beeching Axe.

Bicester suffered under the axe twice. The already reduced services to Bicester North were cut down even further later on, but the biggest blow to hit the town was the ending of services on the Oxford-Cambridge line, which included closing Bicester London Road Station. However, as these articles show, the town didn't give up without a fight.

RAIL CLOSURE

**Bicester Labour Party and
Bicester and District Trades Council**

Notice has now been given that passenger services between Oxford, Bletchley, Bedford and Cambridge are being withdrawn. You are about to lose a most important transport and social amenity. Your help in averting this stupid and unjustified hardship is urgently needed. You have the right to protest if you are a user of this railway, and in doing so will help to swell the torrent of opposition needed to save this most essential transport link.

NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT

All written objections should be immediately sent to :

**Transport Users Consultative Committee,
44 Friar Gate,
DERBY.**

Think Again Dr Beeching!

Strong Objections to Line Closure

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, January 1964

On Friday night, as hundreds of people crowded into the Methodist Hall, the feeling of resentment against the proposal to withdraw the London Road passenger services was keenly felt. When all the seating accommodation was taken up, people stood in every available space in the room, anxious to voice their protest against the withdrawal. The town's support of Bicester Council's efforts to save the line was heart-warming. Representatives of many organisations were present. Strongly represented was the Ploughley Rural District Council, Bicester Garrison, Bicester Chamber of Commerce, Bicester Trades Council, and Parish Councils from the area. It was estimated that over 350 people were present and each one was there, not out of curiosity, but to object personally to the senseless proposal to withdraw the railway services from a fast growing town.

Councillor I. Goble, Chairman of Bicester Urban District Council, who presided at the meeting, said the Council received a petition signed by 135 regular users of the Oxford-Bicester line. There was also evidence of a considerable body of objectors. He added that the Council were very concerned about the possible closure.

Councillor Gerald Banks, of Bicester Urban District Council, referred to the development of Bicester. He said the population of Bicester is at present about 6,000, but this will be doubled in the next 5 or 6 years. Within ten years it will be even more.

The only alternative transport is by bus, and this is 50 percent dearer. It takes almost twice as long to get to Oxford by bus, even on the direct route.

Councillor Banks referred to the hardships people would suffer because they could not visit relatives in hospital, or children could not get to school. Because a housewife could not get a pram on a bus may not seem of vital importance, but this was possible on a train service.

Mr Banks referred to the ridiculous bus services which serve the nearby villages. After two in the afternoon there was no bus service in or out of some villages. There were 61 train services per week: 10 per day and 11 on Saturdays. But there were 4 services per day on the direct bus route, with 2 on Sundays, making a total of 26 per week. The closure of the line would be bound to cause a lot of hardship.

Councillor J. Leach, Chairman of the Housing and Development Committee of Bicester Urban District Council, said a big point in the Council's campaign to attract industry was the excellent rail services. Bicester was ideally situated midway between London and Birmingham, and to attract industry it was vital that the rail service be maintained.

Councillor H.W. Dines, Vice-Chairman of Ploughley Rural District Council, said the line was used by nearly 1 million passengers per year and the income from passenger traffic was £90,000. The proposal to withdraw these services was a piece of bait flying and the public objections to the closure will throttle any ideas of closing the line.

Colonel A.R. Clifford, on behalf of Bicester Garrison, who attended the meeting with volunteers representing all the units said, "We feel very strongly over the closing down of this line, because it will have an adverse effect on our community life."

He spoke of the hardships which would arise, especially for soldiers and civilians on weekend leave. At Bicester Garrison there are 2,000 servicemen, 500 service families, over 4,000 civilians, and the numbers continue to grow. Bicester Garrison is now the central distribution centre for Her Majesty's services.

Mr A.J. Evans, Chairman of Bicester Chamber of Commerce, said the passengers using the line over the past four years have steadily increased. He referred to the traffic problems which would arise when all commuters travelled to Oxford by road. He wondered how the already heavily burdened parking problems in Oxford would fare with the extra influx of cars. He also referred to the bus service and questioned the difficulty of obtaining bus crews. Mr Evans suggested that the problems connected with the extra road traffic because of the withdrawal of the rail service should be taken up with Mr Marples.

Mr Austin, Chairman of the Bicester and District Trades Council said they were also very concerned about the proposal. He said people in Launton would be unable to get to work and 37 students there would be unable to attend technical college.

Other speakers were Councillor Teal, member of Ploughley R.D.C. and Chairman of Arncott Parish Council; Councillor G.R. Keeyes, Vice-Chairman of the Mid-Oxon Planning Committee and member of the Ploughley R.D.C.; Major Morse, representing Launton Parish Council, also a member of Ploughley R.D.C.; Councillor H.W. Mears, Ploughley R.D.C.; Councillor W.G. Bayley, County Councillor; Councillor E.A. Clifton, Bicester U.D.C.; Mr Gregory, Secretary of the Bicester and District Trades Council; and various members of the public. Mr Allan Brookes also spoke about an organisation set up in Oxford to serve the interests of public transport users in the area.

It was unanimously agreed to protest strongly to British Railways and to Mr Marples. The service is vital to the life of the town and district and the proposed withdrawal would cause hardship to its inhabitants.

Passenger Service to End

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 16th July 1965

The Minister of Transport gave his consent on Wednesday to the British Railways' request for the withdrawal of railway passenger services between Oxford-Bletchley-Bedford and Cambridge. The news comes as a great shock to the many individuals, organisations and local councils who objected to the closure.

The date of the withdrawal of the passenger service from Islip and Bicester (London Road) has not been fixed. The decision of the Ministry is subject to arrangements being made for the provision of revised and extra bus services.

The villages near Bicester that will not have a passenger rail service are: Claydon, Marsh Gibbon, Poundon, Launton and Islip.

In a letter to the British Railways Board the Ministry of Transport says:

"The Minister has considered the reports of the Consultative Committee and all other factors relevant to the closure. He accepts the Committee's view that hardship would, in the main, be alleviated by improvements in the existing bus services and by the provision of the additional bus services proposed. The Minister has also considered the plans for future development in the area, but has concluded that these would not be prejudiced by closure. He has therefore decided to give his consent to the closure, subject to the conditions which require

the provision of the revised and additional bus services to which the Consultative Committee referred."

The closure will not take place until all necessary arrangements have been made to ensure that bus services are available to the public upon the closure taking place.

Of the list of revised services published, only the following relate to this area:

A limited stop service taking approximately 120 minutes between Fenny Stratford and Oxford, serving Bletchley, Swanbourne, Winslow, Claydon, Poundon and Launton at the following approximate starting times:

Fenny Stratford – Oxford; Monday – Saturday, 6:45am, 5:15pm.

Oxford – Fenny Stratford; Monday – Saturday, 6:35am, 5:25pm.

A service taking approximately 130 minutes between Fenny Stratford and Oxford, serving Bletchley, Swanbourne, Winslow, Claydon, Poundon, Launton and Bicester at the following approximate starting times:

Fenny Stratford – Oxford; Monday – Saturday, 9:50am, 12:35pm, 2:50pm, 8:20pm.

Oxford – Fenny Stratford; Monday – Saturday, 10:50am, 12:25pm, 3:50pm, 8:25pm.



End of Bicester's Fight to Keep Oxford Rail Link

Published in the Oxford Times, 16th July 1965

A two-year fight to keep open Bicester's passenger rail link with Oxford ended on Wednesday with the official announcement of the proposed closure of the Oxford-Bletchley line.

The announcement means that passenger services will soon be withdrawn from Islip, Bicester (London Road), Launton, and Marsh Gibbon stations. But the Minister's consent to the closure is conditional on the provision of revised and extra bus services. Twenty other stations between Oxford and Cambridge will also be closed when the service ends.

The Minister's decision is based on reports by the Transport Users Consultative Committee for East Anglia and the Midlands on the numerous objections to the proposed closure. But he accepts that hardship will be alleviated by improved bus services. Plans for the future development in the areas affected have also been considered by the Minister. He has decided that these would not be prejudiced by the closure of the Oxford-Cambridge train service.

Bus companies, including the City of Oxford Motor Services, have already had discussions with British Railways about additional services, said a spokesman for the Oxford bus company this week. "We appreciate that the additional services will have to be available before the train service ends so that there will not be any time lag between the closing down of one form of transport and another coming into operation," said the spokesman.

Mr R.G. Roberts, traffic manager for the Oxford bus company, said that now the decision had been taken by the Minister, the company would have negotiations with British Railways "to get down to the details."

"Normally on this sort of thing additional buses would run at comparable times to the trains. But usually when the bus services are put on they are used by only a fraction of the people said to have been using the train. We would be very happy if the figures quoted at objections became bus passengers," he added.

Mr Roberts said that the company would now consider the possibility of operating a joint service with United Counties between Oxford and Cambridge.

Mr J. Leach, chairman of Bicester Urban Council's Housing and Development Committee,

said on Thursday that the announcement had come as a bombshell.

"I am appalled at this decision, particularly in view of the fact we are considering early development and the fact we hope to expand our population to 30,000," he said. "The decision is extremely disappointing and a retrograde step. We were under the impression that our earlier protests had been of some avail and it has come as a shock to know this decision was announced without warning being received by the council."

The chairman of the council, Mr John Hollis, said that the council's emergency committee had decided to write to the Minister of Transport, Mr Tom Fraser, expressing the council's deep concern. "I can't see any bus service offering comparable service between Bicester and Oxford so far as speed and costs are concerned. In view of the demand for the service, between Bicester and Oxford, I should have thought it would be reasonable to expect British Railways to provide a rail car service."

"A meeting of the council will be held to see whether any further action can be taken. We must now be extra vigilant to see we don't lose our other rail service from Bicester North to Paddington."

Mr A.J. Evans, chairman of Bicester and District Chamber of Commerce, said the closure announcement had come as a shock and a surprise. "My own opinion is that this is a foolish time to close, particularly when there is so much talk of expansion in this area," he said.

Bicester's fight to keep open the line started early in 1963 when the council wrote to the Transport Commission for information on the future of the two Bicester railway stations. The council subsequently enlisted the help of Mr John Hay, MP for the division, and set up a sub-committee, on which Ploughley R.D.C. was also represented, to sift complaints of hardship and prepare a case.

A public meeting was also called at Bicester in January 1964, at which a resolution was passed protesting strongly at the present closure, and in July an inquiry into the closure was held at Bletchley.

Adequate Bus Service

How? When? Bicester Council Asks

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 23rd July 1965

The Minister of Transport's approval of the closure of the Oxford–Cambridge railway passenger services, which will mean withdrawal of the services from London Road Station and other stations in the district, has met with unanimous protests. At a special meeting of Bicester Urban District Council on Monday the Council decided on a plan of action. They are determined that the Minister's statement regarding adequate bus services will be adhered to.

The Council will also approach the City of Oxford bus services to enquire how they propose to run an adequate country service when the Oxford City services are not properly maintained through shortage of crews and other difficulties. Local organisations and neighbouring councils will also be approached.

The Highway Department of the Oxfordshire County Council will be asked what are their plans for the Bicester–Oxford road, in view of the extra traffic which will be placed on it in consequence of the closure. Oxford City Council will also be asked about the additional cars which will have to be parked in an already congested area.

The Chairman of the Council, Councillor J. Hollis, said an emergency meeting was called as soon as the Minister's decision was known. A protest was sent to the Minister and a copy to Mr John Hay, MP. It was pointed out that the development plan for Bicester had altered since the inquiry into the closure.

Councillor J. Leach said they read complaints about the Oxford bus service every night. He asked if the company were capable of putting on a service to the country and could they be assured of a sufficient service. He said the soldiers at the Bicester Garrison would also suffer because of the closure of

the railway.

He added, "Who is going to decide what an adequate bus service is?"

Councillor Hollis said they should not sit quietly until they are satisfied. He said, "the people won't be prepared to sit on a bus for an hour and pay through the nose for it." He said the public should come forward and tell them their reactions to the proposals.

Councillor A.C. McLean said that the Planning Officer told them what a wonderful place Bicester was going to be. He wondered how people were going to travel to and from Oxford. They should bring strong representations to bear from all bodies in the town in order to get the decision reversed. He said, "the viability of the line has not been proven."

Councillor Hollis said they were not allowed to ask anything on the question of finance at the enquiry.

Councillor Goble said the Oxford–Bicester road was already overloaded, until there was a dual carriageway there was no point in putting on extra buses. "A diesel car service to Oxford would not be difficult to run, it would still be a 20 minute run to Oxford instead of one hour on the bus."

Councillor Hollis said it was possible the town would also lose Bicester North railway station. The Minister will be asked to enlighten the council on this to help them consider the whole matter. The Council will approach Banbury Council to enlist their support.

Councillor M. O'Brien endorsed previous statements and asked the Council to confront the Oxford City Bus Company: "Since the Oxford Bus Company cannot provide buses, even in the city, how do they propose to maintain an adequate country bus service."

Plan for Local Train Service

Bicester to Oxford, if Economical

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 6th August 1965

Since the Minister of Transport gave his consent for the withdrawal of the Oxford-Cambridge passenger railway services a deluge of protests have followed. But the first constructive step to be taken to provide a service between Bicester and Oxford is by the railwaymen themselves.

Mr W.E. Crocum, local area manager of British Railways, said this week: "The Divisional Manager, Mr F.D. Pattison, is investigating the possibility of using idle stock at Oxford to form a service between there and London Road Station, Bicester."

He said the cost of such a service will have to be fully investigated. The times of the service will have to suit the demand. If the service can be arranged, British Railways will also have to be assured that the service will not require extra men.

Bicester London Road Station is used by 50,000 people every year, according to the latest census.

The idea is to utilise the stock which normally is pushed into sidings at Oxford and to continue the journey on to Bicester. This is one point which will impress British Railways, as the proposed service will not require the purchase of additional stock.

Mr Crocum said the proposal would be quite feasible and the possibility of its implementation will depend on the outcome of the enquiries regarding cost.

The venture will undoubtedly get the blessing of Bicester Council because, despite attempts to save the University Line, it is inevitable that the service between Oxford and Cambridge will be withdrawn.

The Divisional Manager of British Railways took up the investigation of a link service between Bicester and Oxford from points raised during a discussion on the fate of the line by Mr Crocum, local area manager, and Mr Harvey, Assistant Divisional Manager.

Withdrawal of the University Line a Retrograde Step

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 20th August 1965

Bicester Urban District Council will ask Mr John Hay, MP to meet them to discuss the Minister of Transport's decision in agreeing to the withdrawal of the Oxford-Cambridge passenger railway service. They also decided to send a protest letter to the Minister of Transport, asking him to reconsider his decision.

Councillor John Hollis, Chairman of Bicester Council said it was a retrograde step to replace a 20 minute train service with a 40 minute bus service. It was nonsense to suggest that any bus operator could put on an adequate service when one considered the length of the journey to Oxford. People would not patronise the buses on longer journeys, it was putting more traffic on already overcrowded roads.

The line between Bicester and Oxford could pay. Councillor Hollis referred to the

competition between operators in the early days of railway and bus services. This step was just handing one monopoly over to another.

Councillor I. Goble said the line had to remain open anyway for the depot. He said "if this Council could take over the line, they could run it at a profit."

Councillor Hollis said he had a word with Mr Hay when he was in Bicester recently. Councillor Hollis suggested that they should get some assistance in getting a reasonable road pattern in view of the extra traffic which will be placed on the roads.

Mr R.W. Bainton, Clerk of the Council, said they had 14 individual letters in response to an advertisement for public responses to the withdrawal. Among them were the complaints that invalid cars and carriages could not be carried on buses.

Local MP on Proposed Rail Closure

Letter to Urban Council Suggests Ray of Hope!

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 1st October 1965

The proposal to close the Bletchley–Oxford passenger line was discussed again by the Bicester Urban Council on Tuesday, at their monthly meeting, a letter being received from Mr John Hay, the local MP, in reply to representations made to him.

Mr Hay said in his letter that since the Minister of Transport's decision not to intervene in the matter was final, subject only to the conditions which he imposed relating to the provision of alternative bus services, he did not believe that it was legally possible for him to change course now, even if he wished. "You will be aware," wrote Mr Hay "of the doctrine of *functus officio* and the Minister is now in that position. The only people who could do anything are the railways themselves, and quite evidently they do not wish to forgo the substantial saving they automatically get from the withdrawal of these services."

Mr Hay realised that the decision of closure was unpalatable to the town, but he advised waiting to see how the situation developed, particularly with regard to the provision of the alternative bus service, then review the matter again, say in six months time, after the train services had been

withdrawn. Then, if need be, if genuine hardship was being caused on a widespread scale, approach the railways again. Fortunately the line was not being closed and the track recovered, for that would make it impossible for services to be restored at some later date if the situation required it.

Councillor Ian Goble remarked that Mr Hay could give no other advice. He moved that Council receive his letter and thank him for his interest and advice.

Councillor Leach: "With our hope that the Minister of Transport will recover from the *functus officio!*"

Councillor M. O'Brien still felt something should be done to save a twenty minutes service to Oxford. It was impossible to do the journey by road in anywhere near that time.

Councillor Goble: "The roads are so choked now it would be impossible to introduce any time schedule."

It was suggested that, as the bus timetables were in course of preparation, it would be as well to await the issue of them to consider any proposals for alternative services, consequent upon the rail closure. This was agreed to, the timetables to be considered by the General Purposes Committee.



Rural Councils Object to Proposed Bus Services

Inadequate to Replace Train Service

*Published in the Bicester Advertiser,
22nd October 1965*

Objections have been lodged with the Traffic Commissioners to the proposed bus services to replace the passenger train services on the Oxford to Cambridge line, which are being withdrawn next January.

A condition of the closure of the line is the provision of alternative bus services. At a meeting of Ploughley Rural District Council on Friday, the Clerk, Mr Wilfrid Wigney, said the objection related to services proposed by the City of Oxford Motor Services Ltd and the United Counties Omnibus Co Ltd. The Council objection, he said, was on the grounds that the services would be inadequate to provide accommodation for the people currently using the train service between Bicester and Oxford.

Other grounds of objections were that the bus services would not cater for the residents of Islip, and that the provision of additional services would be at the expense of existing services; and there was no guarantee the bus companies would be able to meet the demand arising from the future population increase at Bicester.



“No” Say British Rail

*Published in the Bicester Advertiser,
22nd October 1965*

At the Bicester Trades Council meeting on Tuesday last, the Secretary, Mr Gregory, reported receiving a letter from British Rail turning down a suggestion by the Trades Council that the railways should use stock resting at Oxford to keep the line open to passenger services between Bicester and Oxford.

Bygone Bicester

All articles taken from the Bicester Advertiser

Naming of Streets and Numbering of Houses

8th April 1910

At Monday's Urban District Council meeting the Clerk reported of a meeting of the Highways Committee on March 11th, when an inspection of the town was made, and it was recommended that the streets be named and the houses numbered in accordance with the scheme set out by the committee. The report was of a somewhat lengthy character, but briefly the whole of the streets will retain their present names, but Sheep Street will end at the Crockwell turn, and the committee asked that the portion of the town to the north of this should be renamed. Market Hill and Market Place the committee recommended should be abolished, and the whole called Market

Square. It was further recommended that arms should be erected on the lamp post on the Market Square indicating the way to Banbury, Buckingham, Brackley and Aylesbury.

Mr French proposed the adoption of the report, which Mr J.W. Grimsley seconded, and it was unanimously agreed to.

It was decided that the part of the town now known as New Buildings should be renamed North Street, to commence beyond the Crockwell turning. The surveyor was directed to obtain the prices of name-plates and numbers, and submit them to a future meeting of the Council.

Chose Wrong Place to Clean Van

2nd March 1962

Mr William Greenwood, a butcher employed by Crowther's of the Causeway, Bicester, pleaded "not guilty" at Bicester Magistrates' Court on Monday, to a charge of permitting a van to wait in the Causeway, on the evening of January 15th.

Giving evidence, Mr W. Catlin, of 8 Causeway, said he came out of his office, opposite to Crowther's shop, when he saw a van parked there which was being washed by Greenwood, whom he knew to be the driver. The van, he stated, had remained in the Causeway for over an hour, and he reported the fact to PC Watts who went to the Causeway and instructed Greenwood to remove it.

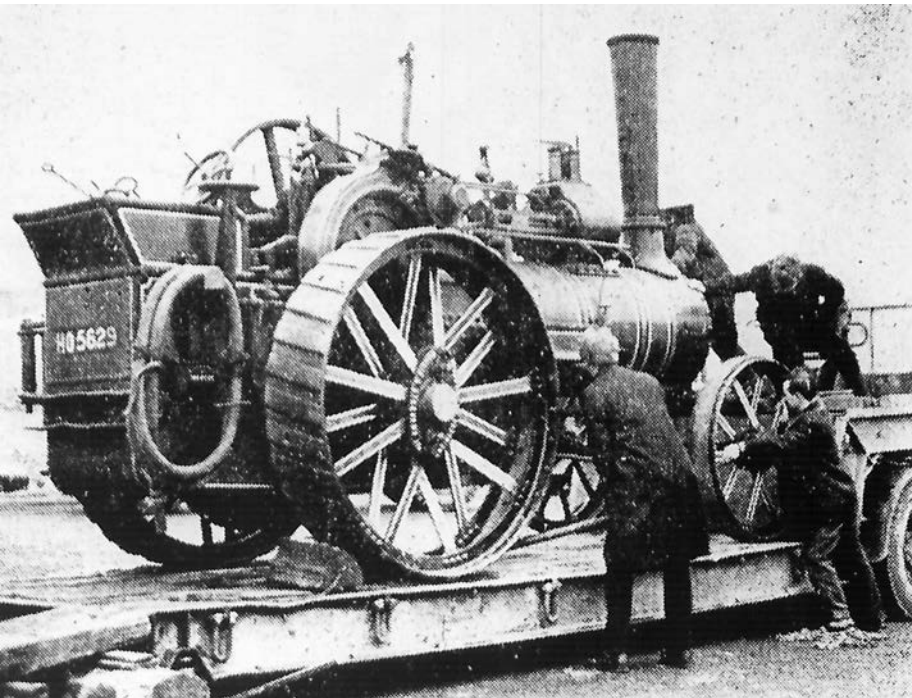
In the witness box the defendant said that he had had flu and was unable to wash the van on the Sunday prior to January 15th. He had endeavoured to clean the van at a local garage, but was unable to do so, and there was nowhere else lighted well enough to enable him to clean the van, other than outside the shop. It had, he said, taken him only fifteen minutes, and during that time only three vehicles had passed.

In finding the case proved, Mr J. Ancil, Chairman, referred to the fact that traffic signs are placed in roads for a purpose, and that Greenwood knew perfectly well what he was doing. A fine of £1 was imposed, together with witnesses expenses of 10s.

Pram Race Successful Despite Wintry Conditions

Cheque for £175 Donated to Charity

23rd April 1965



The fourth annual Pram Race, held in Bicester on Easter Monday, drew a large crowd despite the wintry conditions. It was the weatherman's nightmare of wind, hail, rain, snow and a little sunshine. Organised by the Bicester Round Table to raise money for various charities, the effort culminated in the presentation of two cheques – £150 to the British Empire Cancer Campaign, and £25 to the local Sea Scouts.

Twenty-three entries lined up in the Cattle Market for the 'Le Mans' type start to the race, which hurtled on through the town with the "pushers" and "babies" changing places at various points. Before the change-over the "babe" drinks the half pint of beer, in a reclining position.

A Marsh Gibbon team won the race this year under the name of A.W. Jones. T. Weedon's "White Lion" entrant was second. The best dressed entry was "Ray and King (Builders) Ltd," and a special prize went to the Civil Defence team, which was under the leadership of J. Goggin.

Before the race started, a 1916 Wallis and Stevens traction engine, owned by Ted Evans and Bob Long, of Bicester, led the contestants in a parade through the town. The traction engine, "Progress", was purchased by Ted and Bob only a few months ago and cost them about £400. This parade was their first official function with her.

Colonel J.P. Haslam started the race, and also judged the competition for the best dressed couple.

Chairman of the Bicester Round Table, Mr M. Liddington, was in attendance, and was also host to Councillor Michael O'Brien, Chairman of Bicester Council.

Colonel Haslam presented the nine gallon barrel of beer to the winning Marsh Gibbon team, and a pipkin of beer to the White Lion team, who were second. Monetary prizes presented were donated to Round Table Charities by the winning contestants.

Music was supplied by the local beat group, "The Apollos."

Loyal GWR Staff

6th October 1911

Each member of the staff at the Bicester station, all of whom remained loyal during the recent strike, have received the following card of acknowledgement:

It has given great satisfaction to the Directors and myself to know that, during the disturbances which interfered with the services on August 18th and 19th, the large majority of the staff of the Great Western Railway maintained their fidelity to the Company, and I am happy to learn that you were included among those loyal and trustworthy servants. It affords me much gratification to convey to you this expression of appreciation.

Yours faithfully, James C. Inglis.

Accidental Death Verdict on Heyford Pilot

Killed After Perfect Landing

Observer's Lucky Escape

1st October 1937

Another RAF Heyford pilot lost his life as the result of an air crash at Evenley, Brackley, yesterday week. He was Pilot-Officer Malcolm Patrick Alexander Craig-Mooney, aged 20, of No. 57 Squadron, stationed at Upper Heyford, and the machine involved was a Hawker Hind bomber. The observer, A/C William McGeehan, had a most fortunate escape and was only slightly injured. McGeehan gave a graphic description of his experience at the subsequent inquest.

It appears that the machine was returning from a cross-country flight, and when over Brackley the pilot lost his bearings. In circling round several times to find where he was he used up the fuel and had to make a forced landing. Pilot Officer Craig-Mooney made a perfect landing, but unfortunately the field was too small, and before he could stop the machine it had run into a wood on the far side. A tree struck part of the main plane which pinned the pilot's head back on to the cockpit, and he was killed instantaneously.

This fatality follows closely upon that of about a month ago, when Pilot-Sergeant Postlethwaite and A/C Barber, both of 18 Squadron, RAF Upper Heyford, lost their lives when their Hawker Hind machine crashed at Cottisford.



The Inquest

Mr E.C. Fortescue, of Banbury, Coroner for the Northern Division of the County, conducted the inquest proceedings at the RAF Station, Heyford, on Friday evening, and sat with a jury, composed of the following: Messrs Charles Golder (foreman), Albert Golder, E. Hedges, J. Mills, A. Grantham, E. Buswell, W. Slatter and A. Lockett. Superintendent Norris and Inspector Smith, of the Northants Police, were present.

Flight-Lieutenant R.H. Tripp, medical officer at Heyford, gave evidence of identification, and said Pilot-Officer Craig-Mooney was 20 years old, and his home was at Plymouth. He entered the RAF in January 1935. At 5:15pm on Thursday witness received information of the crash, and on arrival at the scene found deceased still in the cockpit dead. The top main plane was under his chin and he had a fractured base of the skull and facial injuries, caused by the main plane forcing his head back violently on the cockpit. Death must have been instantaneous.

Pilot-Officer G.M. Wyatt produced the authorisation book, showing the record of flying hours. Deceased took off in a Hawker Hind machine at 1:45pm on Thursday, the flight being scheduled for 2 1/2 hours. He should have been back at 4:15pm. Witness said he had always found Craig-Mooney a competent pilot, and added that deceased



had had 2 1/2 years' experience of flying, without accident as far as he knew.

Sergeant-Pilot J.R. Moir said he took the particular machine up on the Friday previous to the fatality for 1 1/4 hours, and it behaved perfectly. Since then it had been kept in the hangar until deceased used it.

A/C Gammon said he carried out the usual inspection routine of the plane at 8am on the Thursday, and found everything satisfactory. He saw P/O Craig-Mooney test the engine before taking off with A/C McGeehan as observer.

A/C 2. William McGeehan, observer of the ill-fated machine, said he was present with A/C Gammon when it was inspected and found in order. He took off with P/O Craig-Mooney at approximately 1:45pm and they went on a cross-country flight to Peterborough and York. The machine behaved perfectly, and they were in the air all the time. At 3:40pm they were over Northampton, and deceased asked witness the time; and being told he indicated he was making a straight course for home. When over Brackley it was apparent that the pilot had lost his bearings, as he circled around two or three times over Brackley and Towcester to see where he was. By that time his fuel had practically run out. "It was then 4:15pm," said witness, "and we were due home. This meant a forced landing, and the officer looked out for a suitable place." With the engine running, witness said, the plane came down, the pilot making a perfect landing in a field just outside Brackley, but it was not quite long enough and the machine ran along the ground into a small wood on the far side. "I was knocked out," continued A/C McGeehan, "and when I came round I saw that deceased was jammed in the cockpit by the top main plane, which had been struck by a tree. I was unable to free the officer, who I saw was dead, so I went for help." Witness added that the pilot tried every means of stopping the machine, but could not avoid running into the wood. It was actually 4:55pm when they came down. Witness was unhurt save for a slight injury to his knee.

Ralph B. Gibson, of Brackley, said he was in the back garden of his house at about 4:45pm and saw an aeroplane coming up from behind the LMS railway station. From a low altitude, it climbed, finally making a circle round Brackley. Completing the circle, its engine throttled out, and the machine commenced to glide down in a westerly direction, finally turning as if a landing ground was being sought. "I went to the front of the house to watch," said witness, "and I saw the plane make a turn to the left and as it touched the ground it bounced up and down and carried on into a hedge, then into a wood. When I saw the tail of the machine go up I knew it had crashed." Mr Buckley added that he went to the police station and reported the accident and accompanied the police officer to the scene. Previous to coming down the machine was being flown perfectly and gave no indication to witness that anything was wrong.

PS Norman, of Brackley, disposed to visiting the scene of the accident, which, he said, had occurred in a field on the Evenley Hall Estate.

A/C McGeehan, recalled, said the visibility during the flight was good.

Flight-Sergeant Davies said he examined the machine after the crash and found the gravity tanks empty. He had that morning inspected the main tank, which was empty, also the pipelines, in which there was no petrol at all. The first wheel marks in the field were about 65 yards from the wood and he had the impression that deceased landed with his brakes on, but it was impossible to tell a day after the crash whether the brakes were on or off.

The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental Death."

Full RAF honours were accorded at the funeral of P/O Craig-Mooney at the Roman Catholic Church, Hethe, on Monday morning, the station band heading the procession of NCO's and men of the deceased's own squadron. A number of his fellow officers were also present. The Rev. Father Kavanagh officiated.

Unknown Man Decapitated at Blackthorn Station

17th November 1911

On Tuesday morning the trunk and leg of a man were found on the GWR line near to Blackthorn station. A search along the line resulted in the man's head being found 66 yards away, and the other leg 176 yards away.

The man was seen in the vicinity of the station at different periods of Monday afternoon, but the last seen of him was at 4:30 on Monday evening. From that time nine trains had passed the station till the body was found, at the following times: 5:14, the 12:55 from Birkenhead; 5:27, the 4:24 rail motor from Banbury; 5:38, the 4:15 from Wolverhampton; 6:30, the 5:47 rail motor from Banbury; 6:59, the 9:35 from Birmingham; 9:18, the 8:53 from Banbury; 10:12, horse special from Birkenhead; 10:28, the 8:40 from Bordesley; and 12:23, the 11:10 from Banbury.

The description of the man will be found in the evidence given by PC Jones at the inquest, which was held in the waiting room at Blackthorn station on Wednesday afternoon, by Mr A.H. Franklin (Coroner for Mid-Oxon). Inspector Mills represented the Great Western Railway Company.

The jury was composed of the following: Messrs A.E.S. Hepworth (foreman), Albert E. Phipps, William Croxton, Charles Jones, William Parker, Charles Wilkins, Albert Austin, Albert Gardener, Henry Shaw, Charles Cox, John Leach, and Richard Knaptton.

The jury viewed the body, which was lying in the goods shed, after which the following evidence was taken:

Percy Smith deposed that he was a porter in the employee of the Great Western Railway at Blackthorn Station. The previous morning (Tuesday), at 7:45, he received a communication from the driver and conductor of the 7:17 rail motor from Princes Risborough. In consequence he went along the line towards Princes Risborough. On the up metals, clear of the road, just beyond the girder bridge (6 miles 20 chains), he found the trunk and one leg of the body the jury had just viewed. The body was lying on the bank, clear of the four-foot way. He at once reported the matter to Mr Burtenshaw, stationmaster at Bicester. Witness afterwards communicated with the police at Blackthorn. Accompanied by PC Jones, he went further along the line, and found the head at 6 miles 17 chains. The other leg was found in the four-foot way at 6 miles 12 chains. Witness had not seen the man before. Witness was at the station all day on Monday. In his opinion, witness thought the man must have laid down and put his head on the rails, judging by the distance the head was from the body and the way it was out.

By a juryman – Witness did not think the man was walking towards the station and was knocked down.

Frederick Walker deposed that he was a road labourer

and lived at Piddington. Witness had seen the body the jury had viewed. He saw the man under the new girder bridge at Blackthorn station. He spoke to him about half-past twelve. The man was on the road. The man went up to Blackthorn, and witness again saw the man at the same place at a quarter to three. The man went up the road a little way out of witness' sight. He came back again in a quarter of an hour, and then went towards Blackthorn. The man said to witness in the afternoon "You're busy," and witness replied "Yes." That was all the conversation that passed between them. The deceased was sober.

Frederick Winfield deposed that he was a farmer and lived at Blackthorn. Witness had seen the body the jury had viewed. He saw the man opposite where witness lived at Blackthorn, on Monday, about a quarter to one. Witness bought two dog collars (produced) from the deceased. There was no name on the collars. The man did not say who he was, but stated that he had come from Watford that morning. Witness had never seen the man before. Witness saw the man when he left the Rose and Crown Inn, Blackthorn, about an hour and a half after witness had bought the collars. Witness was not close enough to the man to speak to him. When he was dealing with the man witness thought that the man was done up, and seemed a little strange. The man was very clean and respectable.

By a juryman – The man did not say anything about having been out of employment. He did not mention work.

By the foreman – He did not say how he came from Watford.

Maria Green said she kept the Rose and Crown Inn at Blackthorn. She had seen the body and recognised it as the man who came to her house on Monday. The man came about half past one, and she served him with a pint and a half of ale and a pennyworth of bread, and a half-ounce of tobacco. Deceased was in the house about an hour, leaving at half-past two. Deceased said nothing about himself; he simply asked for the refreshments. About half-past four the man passed the house again. On the first occasion he came towards the station, but on the second occasion he was going the other way. Witness noticed nothing strange about the deceased, who looked like an ordinary working man.

John Charles Burtenshaw deposed that he was stationmaster at Bicester. The fact that a body had been found on the line was reported to him the previous morning by the witness Smith. Since then witness had been in telegraphic communication with the engine depots at Paddington, Aylesbury, Banbury, and Wolverhampton. All the engines which passed over the line that evening had been examined, and no trace of

blood had been found. Inquiries had also been made of the drivers. Between 4:30 on Monday evening and 7 o'clock on Tuesday morning, there would be several trains passing along, and enquiries had been made as to all those trains. Witness knew nothing of the man.

By the foreman – A fair number of the trains would be expresses, goods and passengers.

George Sidney Jones deposed that he was a police-constable stationed at Blackthorn. The previous morning witness was called by the porter Smith, and took charge of the trunk and one leg of the deceased, and afterwards found the head and the other leg. Witness had searched the body and the clothes, and found nothing to show who the man was. There was no letter or pocket book. Witness had made inquiries around, and had failed to obtain any evidence of the identity of the man.

Witness then gave a description of the man and clothes. He said the man looked to be between fifty and sixty years of age. From his appearance he should think the man's occupation was that of a navy. His height was 5ft 2in or 5ft 3in. He was rather stout-built; his hair was turning grey. The injuries to the face prevented any further description. The man had dark brown corduroy trousers, dark brown corduroy waistcoat, and blue jacket, a soft felt hat, and a heavy pair of boots in good condition, grey socks, a striped cotton shirt, and a new

pair of braces. Witness found a pipe, a box of matches, tobacco, handkerchief, and a rule. No money was found on the deceased. The rule was broken when witness found it.

The Coroner asked Superintendent Allmond, if the inquest was adjourned, was there any possibility of identifying the man? It was impossible to obtain a photograph. Superintendent Allmond said all he could do was to get the clothing gazetted. There was no reason why the inquest should be adjourned.

The Coroner stated that so far the police had not been able to bring forward any evidence to prove identification. If they adjourned the inquest, he did not think they would be likely to be successful in identifying the man, as no photograph could be taken. They had heard the evidence of the witnesses and regarded the movements of the man on Monday, but unfortunately all trace of him was lost from 4:30 on Monday evening, till the body was found between seven and eight on Tuesday morning. They had the opinion of the witness Smith, which was borne out by Inspector Mills, that the man must have placed his head upon the line. If the evidence was not sufficiently clear they could return a verdict that the man was found on the line decapitated.

The jury, after some deliberation, returned a verdict that the man was found decapitated on the line.

Prize Flower Gardens at GWR Stations

Bletchinglydon's Fine Achievement

5th November 1937

The list of awards for the best kept gardens at the stations in Birmingham Traffic Division of the Great Western Railway has now been announced by the Company. The general standard had been well maintained, and the fact that no fewer than 44 stations have been eligible for prizes, shows the personal pride which the station masters and staff take in the appearance of their stations. This is naturally increased by the friendly competitive spirit engendered by the Company's scheme of monetary awards and diplomas.

At the head of the list comes Stratford-on-Avon, who received the "special" prize for the whole area. The spring show of wall flowers and tulips at the station was considered very attractive, and the summer display of red geraniums, lobelias and marguerites was appropriate for the year, and in addition hanging flower baskets added to the welcome which visitors from overseas received on arriving at Shakespeare's town.

Bletchinglydon and Yardley Wood shared the "First" class; the former had an abundance of spring flowers, the embankment and approach rockeries, as well as the flower beds on the platform, being thickly stocked to give mass bloom. Considerable additional work after

the spring flower display had ended resulted in a very fine show of delphinium, asters, tiger lilies, lupins, etc. A feature of Yardley Wood were polyanthus and wallflowers, followed by a show of begonias, stocks, petunias, lobelias, etc. Smethwick Junction and Aynho came in the "second" class.

In spite of the difficulties of rearing gardens in the black country, Smethwick Junction staff made a valiant effort which resulted into large borders being filled with a varied assortment of plants in addition to a terraced border covered in bloom.

Aynho had a particularly good show in the summer time, with well filled flower beds covering quite a considerable area.

The "Third" class prizes go to Wednesbury, Hatton, and Hapworth, and the "Fourth" to Dudley, Cropredy, Swan Village, and Acock's Green.

A further series of prizes is being awarded to Kings Sutton, Brill and Ludgershall, Heyford, Ardley, Daisy Bank, Oldbury and Langley Green, Blowers Green, Henley-in-Arden, and Fritwell and Somerton; and in the case of Stourbridge Junction, an award has been made for hanging baskets of flowers, which during the summer months has for some years been a feature.

The Level Crossing on the Railway

5th December 1902

Owing to the indisposition of the chairman, the monthly meeting of the Bicester Urban Council was held at Alchester House. Those present were Messrs G. Walsh (chairman), J.W. Grimsley (vice-chairman), J.W. Evans, T. Grimsley, C.M. Hendriks, H.C. Jagger, J.F. Jones, D. Neal, and W.H. Piggott; with the clerk (Mr E.F. Tanner), and the surveyor (Mr E.F. Willson).

Amongst other matters being dealt with, the following letter was received from the General Manager of the L. and N.W. Railway:

The secretary handed to me your letter of the 13th ultimo, upon the subject of the level crossing in London Road, Bicester, and I have since had the matter under inquiry. The crossing in question is one which, as you are aware, was constructed by the company under Parliamentary powers, and ample means have been

provided for its safe and efficient working. While, on inquiry, I am unable to find that the detentions either to foot passengers or vehicles are, or have been, of an exceptional character. The signalmen who have charge of the gates are fully impressed with the importance of avoiding such detentions, as far as in the nature of things is possible, and I am assured that they do their best in this respect.

To construct an under-bridge in lieu of the level crossing at this place would involve a very heavy outlay, and I feel quite sure that there are no grounds upon which the company could be asked to undertake the expenditure; but, if the local authorities are desirous of having the charge made, and are willing to meet the cost, the company would be prepared to offer all the facilities in their power towards bringing about such a result.

The Bicester Hunt

29th December 1911

A three-and-a-half mile point in twenty-three minutes over one of the finest counties in England was enjoyed by Bicester followers on Saturday last. It emanated from Double Hedge, at Fenny Compton, and, racing past Marston Doles and Ledbrooke. The hounds had got close to their fox when, under Radbourne, an interfering collie dog spoilt the fun. Another sterling hunt of ninety minutes began at Boddington Hill. Running well between the two Boddington villages, hounds sank the vale below Byfield Reservoir, crossed the river and railway to Aston-le-Walls, went on by Red Hill, through Warden Hill Covert to Farndon, and then turned under Eydon and past Trafford House to finish close to Chipping Warden. It was a fine day's sport.

On Tuesday, in wretched weather, a large crowd followed the Bicester Hounds from the meet at Bicester Market Square to Graven Hill Wood. Finding there, the hounds ran across Merton Bottoms and past Ambrosden village to Blackthorn Hill, but short of Launton the scent failed. Rain fell incessantly when a fox from Arcott Little Wood was pursued past Boarstall Decoy Pond, and thence over the summit of Muswell Hill to Boarstall village, where they lost. Starting afresh from White Cross Green in the water-logged valley below, the hounds hunted around Astley Bridge before they turned back to finish close by Arcott Wood.

The Bicester Hounds from Edgcote New Covert on Wednesday ran fast alongside the Great Central Railway, bearing from Culworth village to Sulgrave, but the fox,

being headed off, turned back to Culworth, where the hounds were beaten. At Thorpe Mandeville Mr Wallace's old covert held a good fox, which lead hounds through Danes Moor to and through Culworth Meres, past Trafford House, alongside the brook to Farndon. He then turned up the hillside across Eydon Park over the brook, swinging under Culworth village, where he was lost. A nice hunt followed from Red Hill, past Byfield Windmill, into the delectable country around Aston-le-Walls.

Fog was threatening, but eventually cleared yesterday, when the Bicester Hounds drew Cheersley Furze blank. A tree-haunting rascal was dislodged on Payne's Farm, and the hounds ran him merrily through Gipsy Bottoms, along the valley below Ashendon, to be beaten at Howe Wood. A merry burst from the Hangings finished at Pollicott, but blood was claimed at Chinkwell Wood. The hounds ran fast past Akeman Street with a fox found in Wotton New Wood, and driving through Ham Wood screamed after their fox to Grendon Wood, from which they drove over Quainton Lane into Charndon, where fresh foxes mixed up matters.



Father Christmas 1962

Style

Written by Matthew Hathaway

Bicester Round Table have been touring the town and local villages with Father Christmas to raise money for charity at Christmas time for many years. 1962 was no exception, but back then, it seems, he also used to set up shop in Market Square and let the children come to him.

Father Christmas Coming to Bicester

Bicester Round Table Charity Fund

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 14th December 1962

Father Christmas will be coming to Bicester Friday next, 21st December and will drive in his sleigh, drawn by two reindeer, from Sheep Street to his igloo in the Market Square, near the Christmas tree. He will be there all day and will welcome all the children in Bicester and the surrounding area to meet him.

He will also be in attendance on Saturday 22nd, from 10am until 1pm. After lunch he will be in Sheep Street with his sleigh and if you cannot come on Friday please look him up on Saturday.

Monday will be a busy day for him again and if he's not in his igloo his sleigh will be either in Sheep Street or one of the villages. We can't expect to keep him solely for Bicester, but don't miss him.

This year we are raffling a gent's or lady's wrist watch, and if you have not got your tickets yet any Tabler will willingly sell you some, or you can obtain them when you visit the igloo or sleigh.

On Monday night, Christmas Eve, we are holding a carol service around the tree and a hearty invitation is extended to all to come and sing with us. Mr Joe Leach, Chairman of Bicester Urban District Council, has kindly consented to attend and will make the draw for the watch.

To all readers, we ask for your support to make Bicester a bright and happy place at Christmas.

Cheers for Father Christmas

Published in the Oxford Times, 28th December 1962

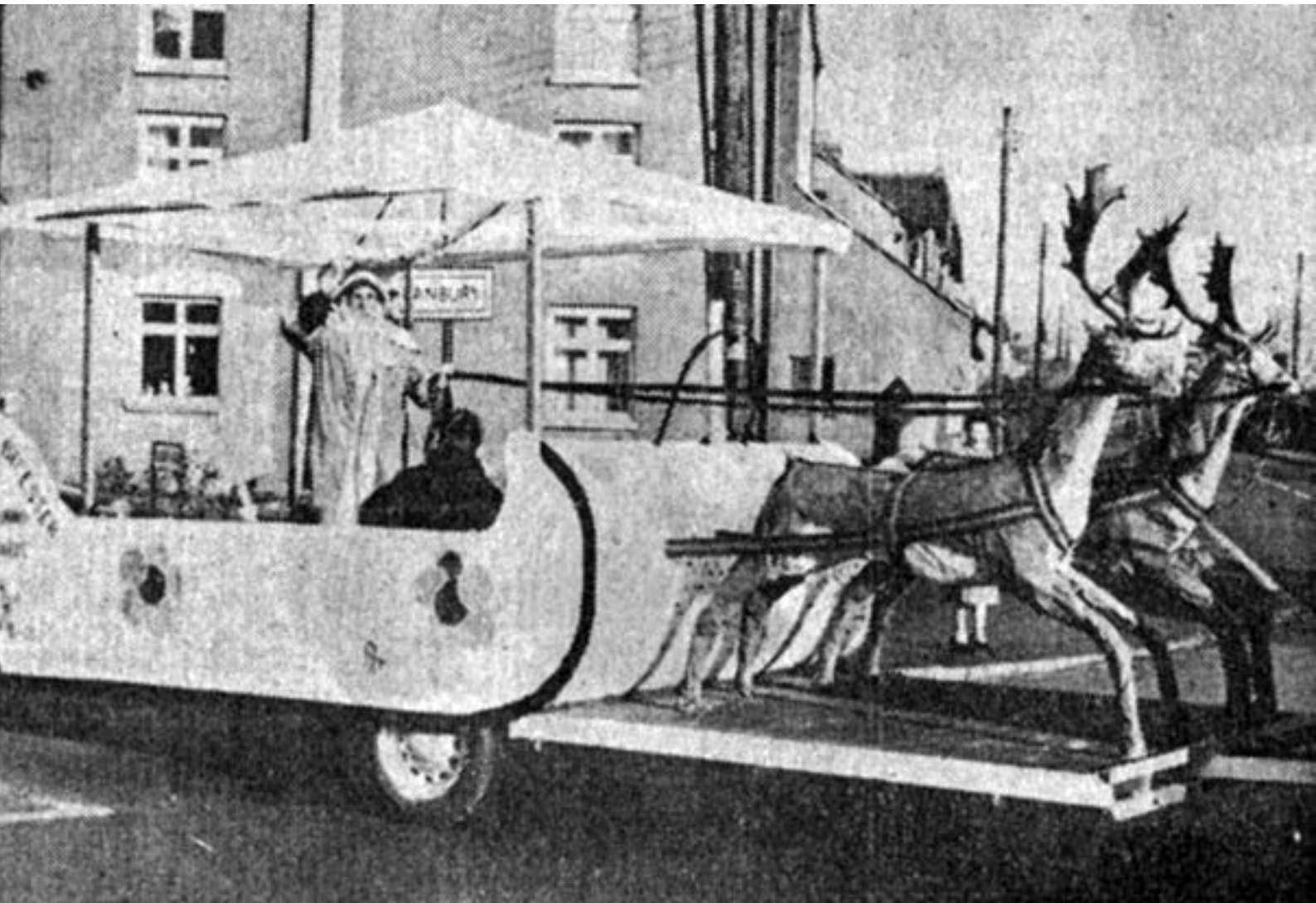
Father Christmas, complete with reindeer and sleigh, drove through Bicester on Friday 21st and made his way to an igloo on the Market Square, cheered by a long queue of children.

Over 1,000 of the children visited the igloo during the day.

The show was the Bicester Round Table's Christmas effort to raise funds for charity. The sleigh and two life-size reindeer complete with antlers were mounted on a trailer drawn by a Land Rover.

On Saturday, Father Christmas and his sleigh visited a number of nearby villages, and the Round Table concluded their effort on Christmas Eve with carols round an illuminated Christmas tree near the igloo.

On Christmas Eve and Christmas Day members of the Round Table distributed a number of hampers to needy families and also visited children's homes.



Father Christmas Arrives

Bicester Round Tabler's Version

Published in the Bicester Advertiser, 28th December 1962

Father Christmas arrived in Bicester last Friday morning 1962 style when his reindeer sleigh was drawn into the Market Square by a Land Rover. Hundreds of expectant, cheering children lined the pavements to greet him.

First in the queue to receive his present was Master Richard Catlin. Very soon the spirit of Christmas enveloped the Market Square with the sound of Christmas carols. The eagerness and laughter of young children filled the Square as they waited to see Father Christmas in his igloo.

The igloo is situated in the Market Square, near the Christmas tree. Bicester Urban District Council kindly gave permission to the Round Table to erect it for their yearly effort in collecting funds for various charities.

The igloo is the "dream-child" of members of the Round Table, who designed and made it. Preparations for the igloo and sleigh started back in the summer months, when Round Table members came up against the first snag – no antlers. In October the sleigh

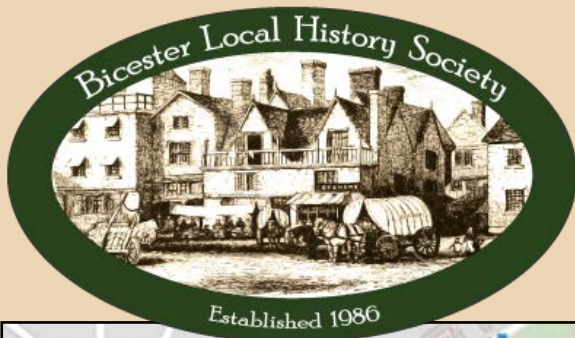
was showing signs of completion, but still no antlers.

Nevertheless, Father Christmas, reindeer (with antlers) and sleigh arrived in Bicester to the delight of hundreds of children, thanks to the worthy efforts of Bicester Round Table.

For seeing Father Christmas in his mystical igloo, the entrance fee was 6d. upwards, and each child received a gift. The thousands of gifts were also the work of Round Table members. The number of children's gifts sold was 2,756.

On Saturday Father Christmas left his igloo. He visited Sheep Street and then toured the surrounding villages.

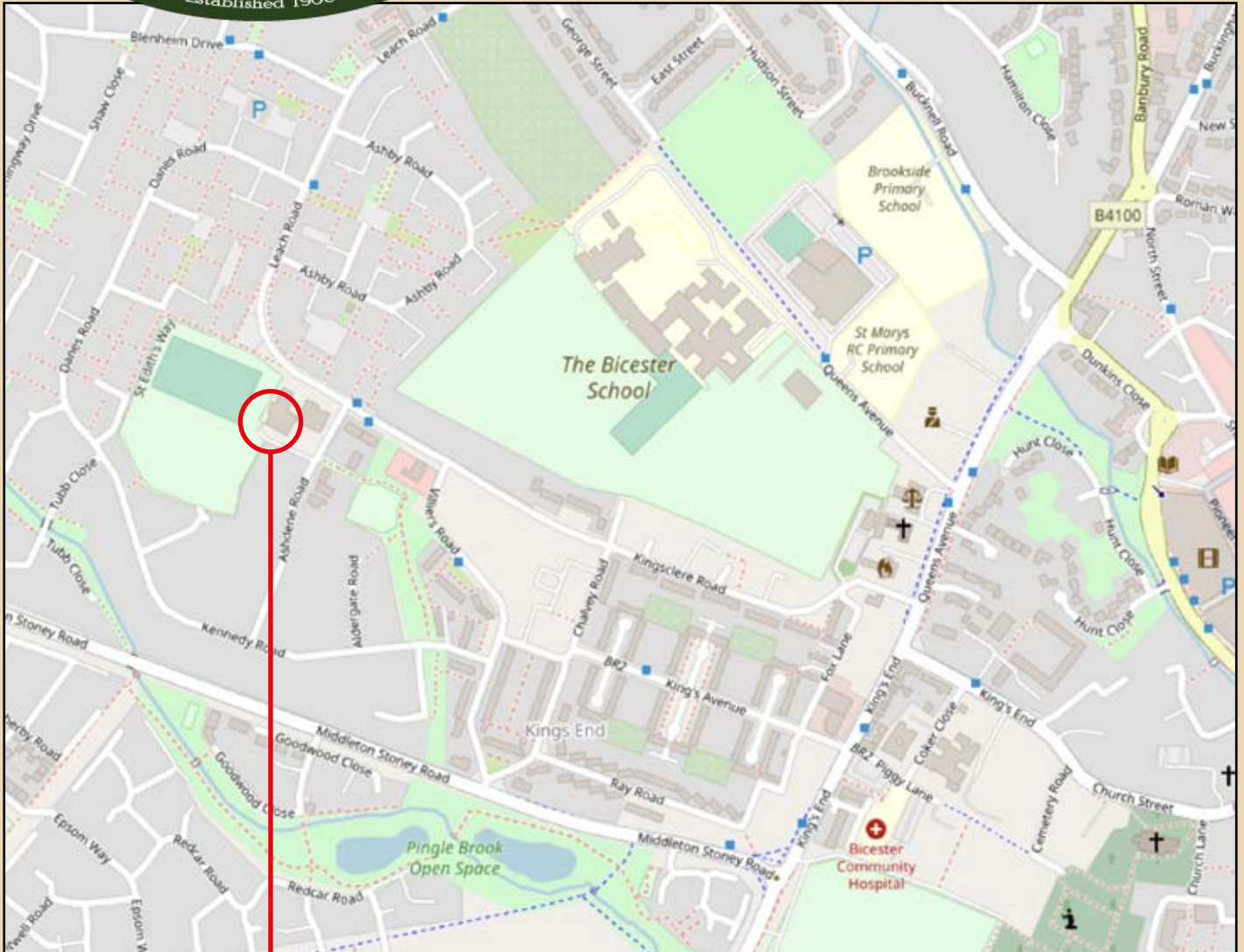
The Christmas spirit had really caught on by Christmas Eve night when a number of people gathered in the Square for a carol service around the Christmas tree. Councillor J. Leach, Chairman of the Bicester Urban District Council, presided over the Round Table raffle for a watch. The winner was Mr S.H. Liddington.



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.

Annual membership fees (at time of printing) are £13 for individuals and £20 for joint memberships.



Our monthly meetings are held at:

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OX26 2BH

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