

The Railway Comes to Bicester

As work continues on upgrading the Oxford-Bicester line and re-establishing a link to London it's interesting to look back 164 years to when it all began.

Work on the Buckinghamshire Railway started in 1848 and the first section of the line, Islip to Bletchley, was opened on the 1st October 1850.

At Bletchley it linked to the mainline from London Euston and a temporary omnibus service completed the link from Islip to Oxford until the remainder of the line was opened on the 20th May 1851.

In the lead up to the grand opening in October a committee was formed to arrange the town's celebrations. £90 was raised through a public subscription and the railway company laid on a special train for the occasion.

At 9:30am on the 1st October an excursion train, carrying the committee and their friends, left Bicester to the cheers of the hundreds of people that crowded the station. They were welcomed into Islip station to the sound of 'See the Conquering Hero Comes' played by Adams' Oxford Brass Band. They stayed in Islip for lunch whilst the first ever passenger train left the station. Then they returned to Bicester, accompanied by the band who played a hearty tune on the way.

When the committee returned to Bicester at 1pm the poor people of the town were all assembled in the cricket field close to the station ready for their celebration dinner. 1000lbs of meat and 200 loaves were provided to feed the 900 men and women present and 800 cakes and 12 gallons of currant wine were provided for the 800 children. Mr Tubb and Mr Horn donated an additional £6 to the subscription so that the men who had built the railway could also enjoy the feast.

Then, at 3pm, the amusements began. These included donkey races, a jingling match, a running race, a sack race, a pudding eating contest, apple bobbing and a leg of mutton at the top of a greasy pole which no one managed to climb to.

The day ended with a great firework display in the Market Square in the evening. According to the Bicester Advertiser it had been "one of the happiest festivals that has



occurred within the memory of the oldest inhabitant of Bicester".

The railway was a great benefit to the town, but the following year, after the rest of the line to Oxford had opened, the people of Bicester came to realise just how dangerous it could also be.

On the 6th September 1851 a special excursion train laid on for the Great Exhibition left Euston Station carrying 200 passengers. At Bletchley the driver was told not to stop at Bicester but to carry on straight through to Oxford. However, no one told the Stationmaster at Bicester about this. Expecting the train to stop he had the points switched to move the train over to the platform.

When the train steamed through at full speed the points couldn't handle the force and the train was derailed. The first three coaches overturned and, being made largely of wood, smashed to pieces and the engine eventually came to rest about two feet from the Stationmaster's house.

It took three hours to rescue all the trapped passengers. Five people had been killed in the accident and Joseph Luckett, a cheesemonger from London, died from his injuries the following day.

An inquest was held on the 15th September at the King's Head Inn, where the bodies of the 6 victims had been kept in a makeshift morgue. The Stationmaster testified that, in his opinion, the train should've been able to safely, if uncomfortably, negotiate the points at speed. He suggested that some gravel or grit could've got between the points and stopped them engaging properly.

The inquest eventually ruled that a number of factors had come into play and the blame couldn't be traced to one particular fault. The jury decided that all trains should stop at Bicester until two tracks were installed for the full length of the line.

- Matthew Hathaway

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Dates For Your Diary

Lost Railways Talk
20th October - 7:30pm
see page 8

November Newsletter Submissions Deadline
31st October

Barrels, Barley & Beer Talk
17th November - 7:30pm
see page 8

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Adverts taken from Bicester
Church News 1971

AGM Report

The Annual General Meeting took place at the Clifton Centre on 15th September and was well attended. Bob Hessian chaired the meeting and ran through the main points from last year's AGM minutes. All agreed it was a correct record and there were no matters arising.

Bob then went on to give a joint chairman and secretary's report, highlighting the Society's achievements over the last year. Most notable have been the success of both our book, *Bicester Through Time*, and the 'Bygone Bicester' DVD. The book has sold so well that Amberley, the publishers, have approached us to write more.

Highlights of the year included the recent archaeological dig at the Old Priory, where part of a medieval floor tile and wall were discovered, the visit to Marlborough and the village and countryside walks - John Roberts was thanked for planning and leading the latter.

Bob spoke of us having taken part in last year's Christmas Tree Festival at St Edburg's Church,

which we would be doing again this year. Bob thanked all the members who had completed the recent questionnaire. He also thanked all the of the Committee for their work over the past year.

The distinction was made between the Society and those now working towards a museum in Bicester. Although much hard work had been done towards this from the founding of the Society, it has now been taken over by the Bicester Museum and Heritage Trust, who are to be congratulated on recently achieving charity status. And he hoped that we would be able to work with them in some capacity in the future.

Bob then moved on to our current projects, which are now being run in a more structured way. The possible preservation of the cholera stone was one project mentioned. The Dovecote, also, is an exciting challenge, as will be our future presence in the new library within the civic centre. We are also working on a buildings DVD and town trail and Matthew Hathaway will be renewing the

web site.

The members were then thanked for their continuing support before Sally James presented her financial report.

Sally ran through the balance sheet which had been circulated at the beginning of the meeting. Sales and royalties from our book and DVD have boosted our income this year, along with generous grants for specific projects including the forthcoming *Buildings and Bicester at War* DVDs. There were no plans to increase subscriptions.

Sally thanked John Roberts for his role in booking speakers for the monthly talks, Mick and Wendy Wall for running the raffle, and all who helped with chairs, refreshments, and in any other way.

The elections of the Committee and officers was the final point on the agenda. Bob Hessian (Chairman), Sally Dexter (Secretary) and Sally James (Treasurer) were all re-elected, along with the committee of Peter Crook, Matthew Hathaway, Gill King and John Roberts.

- Gill King

Archive Update



We have recently had two rugby union programmes donated from the 1991 and 1992 Provincial Insurance Cup Finals played at Twickenham, both between Bicester and Bradford Salem. We are very grateful as we have very little on the sporting history of our town and surrounding villages.

There has been a rich tradition in Bicester in such sports as bowls, football, tennis, running, snooker and

shooting, to name just a few. Outside the town, as well as the golf club at Chesterton, there is the show jumping at The Bicester and Finmere Show. To enable us to build up our sporting history archive, programmes, fixture cards, reports and photographs of any of these, or other local sporting events, of whatever level, would be very welcome, and much appreciated.

- Gill King

Brackley & Evenley Walks

On Sunday 31st August a group of members were treated to a guided historical walk of Brackley. Starting from St Peter's Church we were taken through the old town and down the High Street towards the Town Hall.

We heard about the alms houses at the top of Church Road and how they are still maintained and used as such. And about Winchester House School, founded in 1875 and relocated to Brackley in 1922, whose front door will only ever be opened when the Queen comes to visit!

In the Market Place we learnt about the Town Hall. Built in 1706 at a cost of £200 by the first Duke of Bridgewater, who sold it to the town for one shilling. The ground floor was originally open on all sides to allow for market stalls to trade there. The upstairs of the building was, and still is, used for council meetings and events.

On our way back to the church we stopped outside Magdalen College School. It was originally built in 1150 as a hospital by Robert le Bossu. Very little now remains



of the original hospital buildings and in 1484 the site was sold to Magdalen College in Oxford. They used the hospital buildings as a refuge for their students when there was plague in Oxford and it wasn't until they left in 1548 that Magdalen College Free school was established on the site.

To complement the Brackley walk John Roberts led a countryside walk around the villages of Evenley and Mixbury on Sunday 21st September. There were some very interesting sites along the way, including the remaining earthworks of Beaumont Castle at Mixbury which are believed to date back to about 1100 AD.

The weather remained fine and the cream tea, provided by the Red Lion in Evenley, was a suitable end to an excellent afternoon.

- Matthew Hathaway



Roll of Honour

These are the local men who died in the Great War, 100 years ago this month (and one from the last).

Private Albert Golder, of Upper Heyford.

Died: 16th September 1914 Aged: 28 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Corporal Walter George Andrews, of Bicester.

Died: 12th October 1914 Aged: 30 Served in: Bedfordshire Regiment

Lance Corporal Frank Fox, of Middleton Stoney.

Died: 21st October 1914 Aged: 21 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private Harry Price, of Oddington.

Died: 21st October 1914 Aged: 19 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private Leonard Rainbow, of Kirtlington.

Died: 21st October 1914 Aged: 18 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private Arthur Cecil Stonehill, of Blenheim Terrace, Bletchingdon.

Died: 21st October 1914 Aged: 22 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private Nathaniel Bagnall, of Mill Street, Islip.

Died: 24th October 1914 Aged: 19 Served in: Grenadier Guards

Private Oliver Horwood, of Newton Purcell.

Died: 29th October 1914 Aged: 20 Served in: Scots Guards

Private Edgar Golder, of Victoria Road, Bicester.

Died: 31st October 1914 Aged: 31 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry



Marj's Memories

I don't know if anyone saw in the papers about Bill Adams, a D-Day Veteran; he went to Portsmouth recently for the anniversary and Princess Anne spoke to him. He is a friend of mine and some years ago I made a booklet of a poem that he had composed on the turn of the millennium. A lovely man, brought up in Tackley, served in the army all through WW2, but all his adult life was in Bicester. A British Legion Member and, I think, Standard Bearer in past years. He will be 90 at the end of October and I thought it would be a good time for his poem to be heard again.

- Marjorie Dean MBE

The Old and the New

I used to walk in the village
When the roads were rough and narrow
No cars or fumes, only the pony and trap
And an old man wheeling his barrow

Everyone up at the crack of dawn
The baker, the bread he would bring;
A herd of cows on the way to be milked
And the blackbird, he would sing

Women wore dresses below the knee
They looked like an 'evening gown';
Children played with tops in the street
Without fear of being knocked down

No-one worked on a Sunday
They went to church instead;
Had a bath in the old tin tub;
The Bible was always read

Now a new century is near
We all look back with pride
To a country that's won two wars
And tyrants cannot hide

Learn to love one another
Take tea out on the lawn –
Welcome the new Millennium
And the birth of a bright new dawn.

- Bill Adams (January 2000)



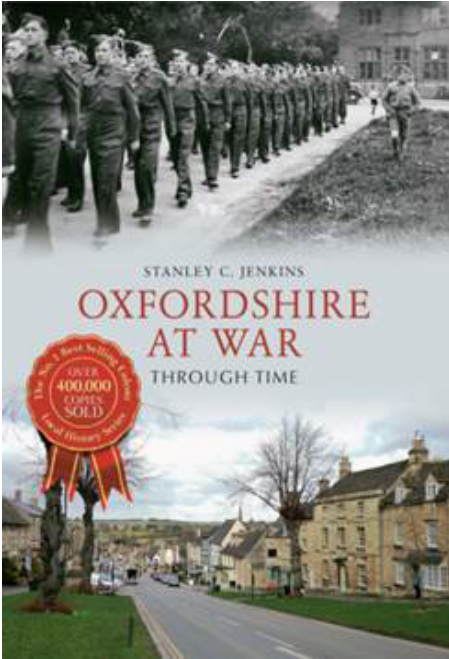
Where Are We?

Congratulations to everyone who identified last month's location. It was, of course, St Edburg's Hall, London Road. But can you identify this month's location from the following details? As before, it's within the BLHS area and is mentioned in one of this month's articles. We'll let you know the answer in next month's edition.



Book Review

Amberley, the publishers of BLHS's book 'Bicester Through Time', have recently published another volume in this series, 'Oxfordshire At War Through Time'. This is a history of the wars that people from our county have been involved in, from the Viking Wars through to World War Two. It includes Medieval Warfare, The Civil Wars, The French Wars, The



Boar War, World War Two and, of course, World War One, which we are particularly focussing on at the moment. Unfortunately our area doesn't really feature, although the postscript does mention the Army Depot at Bicester, but it is of interest regarding our county and the wars themselves. Blenheim, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxford and Witney are all included. Although the format is different to their normal old and new comparisons it retains its usual high standard of production. The author, Stanley C. Jenkins, has written several other titles in the series.

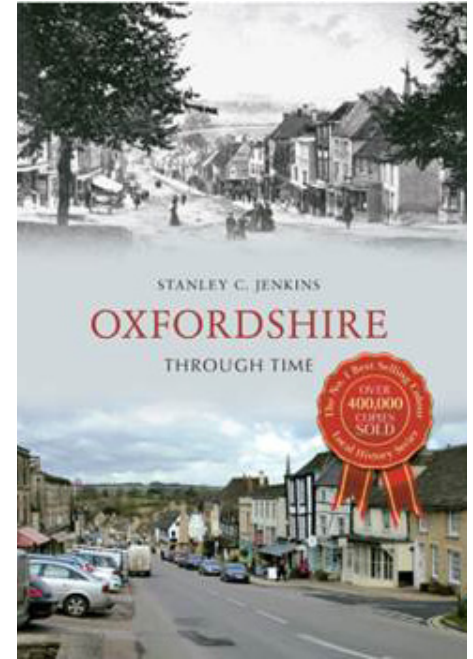
ISBN 9781445619460.

One of Stanley Jenkins' books published last year, 'Oxfordshire Through Time', does include a section on Bicester, as well as Caversfield and Lower Heyford. The photos featured for Bicester are of Sheep Street (highlighting the old Post Office/Penny Black),

Church Street and King's End. For Caversfield he focuses on St. Lawrence's Church and the Commonwealth War Graves there, and Lower Heyford is represented by the railway station and canal.

ISBN 9781445617077.

As with our book, these are good quality and recommended. Both retail at £14.99.



Old Priory Dig

On Saturday 6th September an enthusiastic group of Society members became amateur archaeologists for the day and helped Rob Parkinson to dig up his garden at the Old Priory.

A medieval pathway runs from Priory Lane, along the back of the house, across the garden and off towards Old Place Yard. It was thought that this would be the



best area to concentrate on so, as our previous excavation had been in the area behind the house, this time we decided to look at areas either side of the house.

One excavation was dug at the Priory Lane end of the house to try and find the surface of the old farmyard. Unfortunately, apart from some relatively modern disturbance, nothing was discovered so the site was recorded and closed down.

The second excavation was considerably more successful. An area was chosen in the garden, next to the path, where the ground was uneven.



After digging down through the modern layers we eventually unearthed, amongst other things, a fragment of patterned floor tile, which seems to match one of the known Priory tile designs, and some stonework which may still be in place. The second trench was left open and Rob hopes to continue the investigation in due course.

- Matthew Hathaway

An Interview with Mark Lawrence



Can you please tell us a bit about yourself?

I am the Local Studies Manager at Oxfordshire History Centre. A Bicester resident of over 20 years standing, I have three children for whom Bicester has always been home, and they have been the perfect way to put down solid roots and genuinely feel a part of this local community.

I was born in Bristol and was brought up just over the city boundary in Filton, the home of the supersonic aircraft Concorde – I well remember, as a pre-schooler playing in the garden, the roar of Rolls Royce aero engines being tested a couple of miles away. Our family was fairly immersed in the life of the local parish church and, in the early 1970s, I joined a church choir which at its peak had 23 boys and instilled in me a love of sacred music, alongside the ready supply of rock and pop of the period (and I still have the LPs to prove it!).

For my secondary education I was lucky enough to attend Bristol's Cathedral School. The trend for teaching new-fangled humanities courses in the 1970s meant that, instead of the traditional History, Geography and RE, we were the guinea-pigs for a new course called simply "Mankind". It was a roaring success as far as I was concerned, as we investigated modules focused around the themes "Who am I?", "Where am I?", etc., allowing us to dabble with basics of genealogy, origins of surnames, and of course local history.

Do you have a particular interest in any aspect of local history?

I had a school friend whose Dad was the photographer in 1978 for a huge new tome, Bristol: an architectural history, and he gave me two boxes of fantastic black and white prints from the book.

As a result I decided, aged 14, with just a pocket camera, to embark on a geeky project to photograph new and changing buildings around the city centre. This grew over the subsequent 30 years to a photographic survey of changes to the built fabric of the city which now amounts to many thousands of images.

Using Christmas and birthday money, I also started buying books of old photos on Bristol – a man called Reece Winstone self-published his first book in 1963 and eventually produced 38 volumes, all of which I bought! My apparent attempt to rival Bristol Central Library with my personal collection of local history books on the city ended only recently when I ran out of space to store the 2000 volumes and the time to read the backlog of titles!

Any other interests in Bicester?

I am a member of the Catholic community of the Immaculate Conception parish in Bicester, and have been a keen follower of others' research into the history of St. Edburg's Church, Bicester Priory, and both Catholic and Anglican history of the town. The excavations in the recent past for Proctor's Yard and the Catholic Church car park have provided unrivalled opportunities to understand Bicester's ecclesiastical past. It was a privilege to be involved in the requiem mass in 2011 to re-bury the Saxon skeletons in the new memorial garden at the Immaculate Conception.

I joined the small chamber choir, Akeman Voices, in 2003 which has provided the opportunity to explore a huge range of sacred and secular music and to sing in some beautiful church settings around north Oxfordshire.

What attracted you to library and archive work?

Bristol Cathedral School was next door neighbour to the city's Central Library, an Edwardian gem of a building, designed by Charles Holden of Arts and Crafts fame. It was a convenient refuge for doing homework in the lunch-hour, and was a mesmerising storehouse spread over 3 public floors, with basement stacks below that. I explored its local history and genealogy collections and, over my teenage years, got to know one of the reference librarians who sparked my interest to such an extent that I ended up taking a degree in Library Studies at Loughborough University in the 1980s.

I had barely graduated when I stumbled across an advert for a junior professional

(local studies) librarian wanted by Devon County Council, to work at a brand new library and record office it was building in Barnstaple, to serve the district of North Devon. I put six years of youthful energy into that job and was lucky enough to meet my future wife while I was there.

Far away in Oxford, the recently created Centre for Oxfordshire Studies wanted a new Senior Librarian, to which post I was appointed in 1992. This was at the height of the trend for archives, libraries and museums to work more closely together, and it was exciting to be involved in this project to provide a city centre window into the county's local and family history resources, and to work with the highly respected Dr Malcolm Graham.

It was a huge challenge to merge with the Oxfordshire Record Office and move the Central Library to Cowley. What were the biggest problems with that?

In 2010 we were faced with merging the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies and Oxfordshire Record Office to help the County Council avoid a looming black hole in the funding available for library and heritage services. In a painful but necessary process, we identified duplicate book stock, digital sources and other material which could stay behind in the Central Library to form the basis of an introductory Local & Family service which would survive in a more generalist library. The principle was that the new Central Library service should be able to satisfy 80% of customers 80% of the time; those delving deeper and needing to use unique resources would be referred onto the new History Centre at Cowley. The biggest physical challenge was that every last Oxfordshire Studies box, crate and cabinet had to be squeezed out through the funnel of the Central Library's goods lift - not the easiest task, and a couple of microfilm cabinets were slightly warped in the process, but good packing meant we didn't break a single glass-plate negative.

You are now based in the beautiful old church of St Luke's. What are the advantages and disadvantages of that?

The inclusion of Oxfordshire Health Archives in the merger provided the funds necessary to further convert St Luke's Church to accommodate the additional collections of both Oxfordshire Studies and Health Archives. So now History Centre users enjoy access to the full range of historic

health archives including records of both hospital administration and patients, previously only accessible one day per week at the Warneford Hospital.

Occupying St Luke's Church, we do have pronounced feeling of association with the local history of Cowley, with its massive 20th century expansion around the motor industry. In 2013 we took part in the Morris Motors centenary celebrations, including a display of items from our collections and a visit from Britain's last surviving Vintage Mobile Cinema.

The physical structure of the church does bring regular challenges in building maintenance, and staff are primed always to check for leaks after severe weather. The limited footprint of the site generates regular customer comments about car parking capacity, and our geographical location out of the city centre also means we cannot generate anything like the footfall of the Central Library at Westgate. We are increasingly trying to use Oxfordshire's branch library network as a "front door" to the History Centre, encouraging users to take the step from local enquiry in their town or village library to making a journey to see us in Cowley, but we have a lot more to do in this vein to promote our service, and I know that access to Cowley is difficult for some people.



Are there any other plans for improvements?

December 2014 sees the complete refurbishment of our Reception area (including the cafe) which is looking tired after 13 years' use, and the following financial year will see the replacement of our air conditioning system – which doesn't only keep you warm in the public Searchroom but also keeps the

strongrooms cool and dry 24/7. Previous users of our Searchroom will know how insufficient the high ceiling lighting is, especially in the winter months so, after several abortive attempts to kick-start improvements through our property and facilities department, we are now in the midst of fitting low-tech portable desk lamps ourselves. We also hope to tag along with a government-funded project to create many new free WiFi hotspots across Oxford City – one of which is planned for our Reception area.

Service-wise we have several digitisation projects making slow but steady progress: Picture Oxon is our new online catalogue for our photographic collections, and Oxfordshire Family History Society aims to put images of our already-digitised parish registers online by 2016. Meanwhile the digitised 1910 District Valuation records and maps will become freely available online within the year, and the 1840s tithe maps will soon be more easily accessed via big screens in our Searchroom.

For those researching family history, there are representatives from Oxfordshire Family History Society on hand on regular days. This must be a great help?

Having the extra capacity of an expert volunteer who can sit down and coach a beginner is a huge help to us, especially at peak times. OFHS volunteers can bring a fluency and in-depth knowledge, arising out of a critical approach to their own family history research. This is a valuable supplement to History Centre staff knowledge, where our focus is more on the collections we hold rather than family history technique; nevertheless we have all acquired a good deal of experience in family history resources and their potential for answering particular questions.

Furthermore we have access to the OFHS's generous range of countywide indexes to records such as parish registers or census returns which can be such a time-saver to searchers, and are often of better quality than those provided by national online providers.

The local history collections must be huge. How much material do you hold in your stacks?

We have five strongrooms, filling three floors of the St Luke's church building. These occupy the area and volume of the original nave of the church, while the public searchroom occupies the chancel and east end – regulars will by now be used to having the carved figures of saints looking down over them. The material we store runs to 8000 metres

of archive holdings, plus 1500 metres of local studies holdings brought up from Westgate in 2011 to form today's History Centre, plus even more in outstores!

What are the most used items?

It's hard to single out one source, but statistically you have to say that wills and parish registers of baptisms, marriages, etc., are the most popular archive sources, largely because of their usefulness in constructing a family tree. The Quarter Sessions records, encompassing civil government and the lower criminal courts from the 17th to 19th centuries, are probably the next most popular, and include such jewels as the parish inclosure maps and the calendars of prisoners at Oxford Gaol. Among the printed collections, photographs, newspapers and Ordnance Survey maps attract the greatest attention. Even now, after a certain amount of indexing, local newspapers remain one of the greatest untapped sources of local history.

Perhaps the most interesting application of our large scale (detailed) Ordnance Survey maps has been to plot arrival and departure points for pigeon racing!

How would you encourage our members to come and use the Centre?

The forthcoming construction of a new Bicester Library in the Pioneer Square development will include a display by Oxfordshire History Centre which aims to spark the interest of more library users in local and family history, and to entice them to make a visit to see us. BLHS member or not, expert or beginner, History Centre staff are here to help you navigate your way through our collections and get the best out of your visit. We know that people have to make a purposeful visit to see us in Cowley, so we do encourage you to make good use of the staff while you're there! To plan your visit, you can always email us first to get a quick answer to what range of sources might best fit your research.

Our website now has detailed guides to our collections, from Ordnance Survey maps to school registers, and early printed engravings to town planning records. Our online catalogues may help you pinpoint the material you need, but remember that we also have many card catalogues which are only available at the Centre.

Website:

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshirehistory

Online catalogue:

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/heritagesearch

Photographic collections website:

www.pictureoxon.org.uk

Talks Update

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

Monday 20th October

This month Muriel Pilkington talks to us about the **Lost Railways of Oxfordshire**. An investigation into the beginnings of the railways in the UK; the development of the Oxfordshire

rail network; the heyday of the railways in the county and how and why they declined. All illustrated with a large collection of photographs and maps.

Monday 17th November

This time Martin Way takes us through **Barrels, Barley & Beer**. A potted look at the “mystery of brewing”, with reference to local breweries. Covering the brewing

of beer, from the hops to the cooper's craft, and the unique tools of the trade.

Monday 15th December

To round off the year Bob Hessian tells us about the **History of Bicester Pubs and their Names**. The Bowling Green, The Poleaxe and The Windmill - just some of the 40 plus pubs that Bicester has had over the years.

Children and War Talk

Our AGM, on Monday 15th September was followed with a talk by Liz Woolley on ‘Children And War’

Liz gave us an excellent presentation on a fascinating subject. The talk was developed in association with the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Trust, who had an exhibition on the theme at the County Museum in Woodstock.

She began with the announcement of war having been declared at 11.15 a.m. on Sunday, 3 September 1939 and the reaction of fear, excitement and relief that it had finally come. Luckily Oxfordshire escaped heavy bombing, and the county was considered a safe haven for evacuees.

Children were all fitted with gas masks that looked like Mickey Mouse which had to be replaced as the children grew out of them.

Liz showed a number of entries from school log books showing the difference the war made to day to day lives, including the practices of going to the air raid shelters. A special game called ‘Vacuation’ was designed for the children to play in the shelters.

Children collected shrapnel and unexploded ammunition and two children took a mortar bomb



home to show their mother, not realising the danger.

Many of the children also undertook war work during the school holidays, especially in agriculture, and some were taking gardening lessons. They sometimes missed school because they were potato picking. The girls were knitting, and boy scouts and girl guides were involved in recycling paper, rubber, tins, bottles, bones and books. Other children worked as runners for the police.

Evacuees, refugees and prisoners of war came to the area. There were three waves of evacuation. The first was on 1st September 1939 when 1.5 million children were moved to the countryside in three days. There was a second in 1940 in response to the fall of France and again in March 1944 when flying bombs

threatened London and the South East.

Many evacuees were housed happily with families and settled in well, but others had a miserable time where they were unwanted. Some were billeted in hostels for ‘unbilletable’ children where regimes were very harsh. There was an unbilleted hostel in Bicester, and a stigma attached to being there.

When the war ended, schools were closed for two days of national holiday. Some evacuees found it hard to return home and took a long time to settle. One evacuee, who had picked up a broad Oxfordshire accent, said his parents could no longer understand a word he said!

Liz ended by speaking briefly about the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum, and inviting us to go and visit.

- Gill King

Bygone Bicester

2nd October 1914

Col. Ranking, the War Office representative in charge of the military hospitals in this country, visited St. Edburg's Hall and gave instructions for certain work to be carried out at once in view of the probability of the building being required as a hospital for war wounded. The best thanks of the Society in this district are due to Mr. George Layton, who has most generously given the use of a villa and

grounds opposite St. Edburg's Hall, as an annexe to the Hospital.

16th October 1964

Bicester Ladies' Outer Circle held a jumble sale in the Congregational Schoolroom and raised £29. The money was used to provide Christmas fare for aged Bicester residents. The competition for a basket of fruit was won by Mrs. Bourton.

Naval Disaster

This year marks 75 years since the start of World War Two and this month is the 75th anniversary of the deaths of our first casualties in that conflict.

Charles Phipps, of Marsh Gibbon, and Peter Rouse, of Hardwick, were both serving on HMS Royal Oak when she was torpedoed and sunk by a German U boat. Charles was an 18 year old Able Seaman. Peter was a Boy and just 16 years old. He was the 3rd youngest of 14 children born to William and Lucy Rouse.

The Royal Oak, a 600 foot long 29,000 ton Dreadnought battleship, was the last battleship built at Devonport Dockyard in Plymouth and had been in service since the First World War. She served at Jutland in World War One when her 40,000 horse-power engines could achieve speeds in excess of 20 knots, but by 1939

she had difficulty keeping up with the more modern ships and was posted to the north east corner of Scapa Flow to provide anti-aircraft cover.

Shortly after midnight on 14th October 1939, German U boat U-47 navigated through an undefended gap in Kirk Sound and into the natural harbour of Scapa Flow. Fortunately all ships but the Royal Oak had left just a few days before.

U-47 fired her first salvo of torpedoes and scored a minor hit on Royal Oak's bow. But the second salvo scored three perfect hits amidships. Royal Oak listed heavily to starboard as explosions ripped her open, seawater



rushed in and balls of ignited cordite raced through the ship incinerating most of the crew. Within ten minutes she turned over and sank.

As skillfully as he had entered, Gunther Prien, commander of U-47, left Scapa Flow and returned to Germany for a heroes welcome. The war was just six weeks old and Britain had already suffered a major loss. 833 men died in the attack that day.

- Matthew Hathaway

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