

# Bicester Historian

The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society

## Summer Fun for Everyone

It is surprising just how many groups, societies, guilds and organisations Bicester has had over the years. From the Methodist Sunday School to the Cottage Hospital's League of Friends, they've all played a part in shaping the society we have today. The following newspaper reports give a small glimpse of some of the lesser known ones, and what they liked to get up to in the summer.

**31st July 1858 - LONDON FRIENDLY INSTITUTION** - The Bicester Branch of this Society held their Annual Festival on Tuesday last. It took place on the Bowling Green, at the King's Head Inn. Twenty-eight members and friends sat down to an excellent dinner provided by the landlord, Mr W. Jones. Mr George Hewiett was chairman and Mr G. Armatage was vice-chairman. The Bicester Brass Band were present to add to the enjoyment of the holiday, by playing a selection of popular music during the intervals of songs and speeches.

**31st July 1858 - BICESTER BOWLING GREEN** - On Thursday evening last, the subscribers to the bowling green and their friends had a very pleasant picnic on their green. The Bicester Band were present and played a programme of dance music. Quadrilles, polkas and country dances followed in quick succession and were joined in by the ladies and gentlemen present, with great spirit. The whole entertainment passed off very pleasantly and was concluded at an early hour.

**28th July 1865 - CHURCH SUNDAY SCHOOL** - The children of this school had their annual tea and holiday on Wednesday last. Tea and cake had been plentifully provided, under the management of Mrs Watts and the lady teachers of the school.

The children had their tea in the schoolroom at four o'clock, and then walked in procession to Park Meadow. There they amused themselves in playing cricket, running for prizes and other outdoor games.

About 8 o'clock the school bell rang and the children assembled in the school yard, and after singing one of their favourite hymns, each scholar had a piece of cake on leaving the ground.



Another little known organisation, the King's Head Motorcycle Club - 1979

**13th August 1915 - SONS OF TEMPERANCE OUTING** - A party of cadets of the Bicester district of the Sons of Temperance journeyed to Oxford on Tuesday last for a day's outing, being under the charge of Brother I. Richardson.

They were met at Oxford station by Brother Brownjohn, who took them sight-seeing round places of interest and through several colleges, among them Christ Church, where they saw the large bell named "Big Tom". After tea some paid a visit to the picture palace, whilst others indulged in shopping and bathing.

**20th August 1915 - G.F.S** - The annual outing of the Girls Friendly Society was held on Thursday, in the grounds of Chesterton House, kindly lent for the occasion by Mr H. Tubb, when a very enjoyable time was spent.

**13th August 1965 - BICESTER HUNT PONY CLUB ANNUAL CAMP** - The Bicester and Warden Hill Hunt branch of the Pony Club held its annual camp between the 3rd and 10th of August at the house of the District Commissioner, Mrs B.G. Barnett, Swift House, Bicester.

Thirty-eight children were living under canvas for the week and a further 26 younger children attended every day. Tents were pitched in the gardens near Swift House and all the 64 ponies were turned out at night in the paddocks close by.

**20th August 1965 - GUIDES RETURN FROM CAMP IN ISLE OF IONA** - Sixteen of the 3rd Bicester RAF Guides Company, together with their Captain, Mrs D.M. Allen, have just returned from an exciting camping holiday on the Isle of Iona. They travelled to Oban by coach, and then by ferry to Iona, where they were guests of Mrs Troup, Local Association President.

The girls had a wonderful time exploring and climbing and visiting the Abbey of St Columba. They returned home via Loch Lomond and the Lake District.

- Matthew Hathaway

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### Dates For Your Diary

September Newsletter Submissions Deadline  
*4th September*

Southern Countryside Walk  
*6th September*

BLHS AGM  
*21st September*

Industrial Archaeology in Your Shed Talk  
*21st September - 7:30pm*  
see page 6

Old Priory Dig  
*26th September*

OFHS Family History Fair  
*3rd October*

# Marj's Memories The Sunday School Song

This month's memory is of a song we sang in the Bicester Methodist Sunday School. I'm almost sure it was composed by Sid Hedges. A very jazzy tune, but words that have stayed with me. Probably not word perfect as I don't have it written down.

- Marjorie Dean MBE

Everybody wants to build a new world  
 Everybody wants to find a plan  
 Everybody wants to fight for freedom  
 And give a proper chance to every man  
 But somehow we have got into a muddle  
 We blame it on the other fellow's head  
 We think that he's the cause of all the trouble  
 But maybe we should ask ourselves instead

Why don't I change, there's room for improvement  
 Why don't I change and start up a movement?  
 No-one's always right on the way  
 Now our dreams have all gone astray  
 Why don't I change, stop grouching and grumbling?  
 Why don't I change and stop all this fumbling?  
 Then unite, for we all want to fight  
 To put the whole world right.



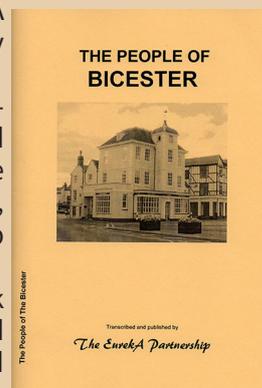
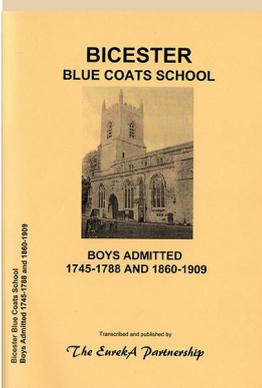
Bicester Methodist Sunday School - 1946 (image provided by Bicester Methodist Church, courtesy of Mary Brydon)

## Books of Interest

Two new titles about Bicester have been published by The Eureka Partnership, compiled from various records held at Oxfordshire History Centre at Cowley, and of interest to both family and local historians.

The first, entitled 'Bicester Blue Coats School: Boys Admitted 1745-1788 and 1860-1909' is a straightforward list of names. These are coded according to whether the boy has entered or left the school, or become a probationer. As this was a charity school for the poor boys of the town, who were clothed in 'blue coats,' boys from the same families crop up over the years.

'The People of Bicester' contains a mix of records from the Poll Book of 1754 through to Absent Voters in 1918, and includes Horses Charged to Duties in 1796 and the full list of those who emigrated to the United States in 1830, among others.



Both books could have been proof-read better - St. Edburg's is wrongly spelt St. Edberg's in the acknowledgements in both volumes, for example, and Blue Coat School should be singular - but both have been well researched and have the benefit of full indexes. They will certainly prove useful additions to the research material available. A copy of each has been added to the BLHS archive.

Copies can be purchased from the Eureka Partnership web site at <http://www.eurekpartnership.com/index.htm> or by post from The Eureka Partnership, 19A Station Road, Stoke Mandeville, Aylesbury, Bucks. HP22 5UL.

'Bicester Blue Coats School' costs £3.20 + £1.20 p&p and 'The People of Bicester' is £5 + £1.50 p&p.

- Gill King

## Out & About

The King's Sutton countryside walk went ahead as planned on the 26th July. However, as you can see from the photograph, the weather was slightly wet.

But even the torrential rain didn't dampen anyone's spirits and an enjoyable time was had by all.

And if that doesn't put you off then we still have the Souldern countryside walk planned for Sunday 6th September and it would be great to see you all there.

- Matthew Hathaway



## Roll of Honour

*These are the local men who died in the Great War, 100 years ago this month.*

**Rifleman Ernest Arthur Norton**, of Stratton Audley.

Died: 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1915      Aged: 25      Served in: King's Royal Rifle Corps

**Private William Hathaway**, of Oxford Road, Wendlebury.

Died: 6<sup>th</sup> August 1915      Aged: 17      Served in: Worcestershire Regiment

**Private Albert Frederick Inwood**, native of Chesterton.

Died: 6<sup>th</sup> August 1915      Aged: 28      Served in: Hampshire Regiment

**2nd Lieutenant Robert Menzies Mocatta**, of Beckley.

Died: 10<sup>th</sup> August 1915      Aged: 23      Served in: Royal Welsh Fusiliers

**Private Henry (Harry) Gibbard**, of Islip. Native of Noke.

Died: 11<sup>th</sup> August 1915      Aged: 30      Served in: Hampshire Regiment

**Lance Corporal William John Alldridge**, of Bicester.

Died: 13<sup>th</sup> August 1915      Aged: 25      Served in: East Anglian Regiment

**Rifleman Francis John Hiron**, native of Bicester.

Died: 16<sup>th</sup> August 1915      Aged: 26      Served in: Rifle Brigade

**Sergeant Richard George Thorpe**, of Stratton Audley.

Died: 17<sup>th</sup> August 1915      Aged: 22      Served in: Royal Welsh Fusiliers

**Private Thomas Beck Brown**, of Launton. Native of Boarstall, Bucks.

Died: 21<sup>st</sup> August 1915      Aged: 22      Served in: Royal Buckinghamshire Hussars

**Private Alfred Waring**, native of Fringford.

Died: 21<sup>st</sup> August 1915      Aged: 38      Served in: Royal Buckinghamshire Hussars

**Major Henry George Watkin**, of Hethe.

Died: 21<sup>st</sup> August 1915      Aged: 41      Served in: Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars



# Bygone Bicester

(Taken from the Bicester Advertiser & Mid-Oxon Chronicle)

## 4th August 1865

RIFLE CONTEST AT THAME — On Monday evening, in consequence of a challenge sent by the Bicester Corps to compete with the Thame Corps, the representatives of the former, 12 in number, including the ensign, with their scorer and marker, and accompanied by their brass band, (a novelty on such occasions) drove up to the Spread Eagle Hotel, to the tune of “Slap, bang, here we are again.”

The style in which the Bicester Corps entered Thame, in their drag and carriage, together with the newness of their uniform, and the novelty of being accompanied by their band, caused quite a sensation.

A first-class cold luncheon was provided by the worthy host, Mr C. Simmons, to which the Bicester men sat down. At the conclusion the assembly call was sounded, and the competitors of both corps, headed by the band, playing a lively quick-step, marched to the Thame butt, where the contest took place, the conditions being 13 members on each side, five rounds at each. It resulted in favour of the Thame Corps, with a score of 359 to Bicester's 242.

Private H. Webster scored on behalf of the Thame side, and Sergeant Horsley, of Oxford, for Bicester. The Drill Sergeants of each corps were the markers.

The weather was very unfavourable for shooting; the rain coming down in torrents while the match was on, washing the colour from the targets, and rendering them very indistinct. Refreshments were rather scarce at the range, a bucket of water and a cup being all that could be obtained for some time. Eventually a bottle of whisky was added thereto, and the riflemen were enabled to keep the wet out some more.

After the contest a splendid dinner, to which about 50 sat down, was provided at the Spread Eagle. With appetites whetted by the weather the guests did ample justice to the good cheer. After a round of songs and toasts, the Bicester Riflemen bade adieu to their Thame brethren and, once more waking up the old town with the strains of the band, started on their homeward journey.

## 6th August 1915

MILITARY AT BICESTER — Under Lieutenant-Colonel Stockton, of Banbury, a contingent of about 500 men of the 3rd/4th Battalion of the Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry arrived in the town on Monday morning. The men, who were headed by their bugle band, marched from Oxford, arriving at Bicester at noon.

Altogether about 160 tents are erected in the Rookery Field, together with a kitchen, a field bakery and ovens, and a special kitchen range for officers. The requirements in the way of drainage and water supply have been attended to by the Bicester Urban District Council. Mr W. Malins has undertaken the sanitary arrangements.

In the evening the town is quite enlivened by the presence of several hundred soldiers on the streets. The Wesleyan Church has kindly placed at the disposal of

the men Wesley Hall, where reading matter, games and writing materials are provided. The Hall was opened on Thursday (yesterday) evening for the first time. Smoking is allowed.

The Congregational Church has given over their schoolroom for the use of the men every evening. The Liberty Hall Recreation Club have reduced their subscription for soldiers to 6d. a quarter. The room is open every evening, billiards being charged for at the rate of 4d. per game of half-an-hour. Refreshments are supplied at small cost.

## 20th August 1965

SEWER RATS INVADE BICESTER HOUSES - A Bicester council tenant said last weekend that for the past four months she and the people in the house next door had nearly been driven mad by the sounds of scraping, running and squealing rats in the cavities of the walls of their houses. It was so bad that the children were afraid to go to bed on their own.

The tenant, Mrs H.C. Timms, of 71 Bucknell Road, Bicester, said they had made three holes in her larder. She claimed that if action was taken when she reported it the situation might not have been as bad as it is.

She said that Mrs Marriott, who lived next door at 69 Bucknell Road, had the same trouble. Their dog was upset by the noise so much that he tore up a new floor covering.

Bicester Public Health Inspector, Mr Peter Birch, said the original complaint received from Mrs Timms was on May 24th and an inspection was carried out that day. She thought the noise was made by mice.

The inspection was carried out by Mr H. Neal, who had made frequent visits to the houses since then. Bait was put down on the first visit but it was not taken. Mrs Timms was told that the floorboards should be taken up but “she said to leave it alone for a bit.”

Mr. Birch said another complaint was made by Mrs Timms on August 6th and he issued fresh instructions. The floorboards were lifted on August 10th and evidence of rats was found.

Various tests were carried out and eventually excavations revealed that an outside sewer pipe had been broken when contractors were working on the property. The work was not properly completed and the contractors left a hole in the wall of the houses. So the sewer rats were free and were also provided with an entrance to the wall cavities.

Mr Birch said the holes in the houses made by the rats were sealed and bait was laid in various places. He said it was impossible for the rats to get into the houses from the wall cavities and the contractors responsible were being called back on Wednesday to replace the broken sewer pipe and to make good the damage.

Ministry officials were also in Bicester this week to investigate the problem.

## AGM Announcement

This year's Annual General Meeting will take place on Monday 21st September, just before Bill King's talk on **Industrial Archaeology in Your Shed, Garage or Attic**. Any items for the agenda or nominations of committee members need to be submitted to the Chairman, Bob Hessian, by Monday 7th September.

The first item of business will be to approve the minutes of last year's AGM. For those of you that are interested, those minutes are available on the website:

<http://www.blhs.org.uk/index.php?page=annual-general-meeting>

- Matthew Hathaway

# Autumn Dig Announcement

We have arranged to repeat last year's successful archaeological investigation in the gardens of the Old Priory, Priory Lane, on the 26th September this year.

Those of you who took part last year will remember that we found part of an old wall leading away from the

existing path. This year we plan to follow the wall along and hopefully find some evidence to show what it was for.

Specific details for the day will be announced in September's edition of the newsletter.

## Village History Bletchingdon

The Domesday Book records that in 1086 Robert D'Oyly held a manor of eight hides at Bletchingdon and his tenant was a man named Gilbert. Gilbert was an ancestor of Roger d'Amory, who was Lord of the Manor of Bletchingdon until he died in prison in 1322.

In about 1139 Robert d'Amory gave 50 acres at Bletchingdon to Godstow Abbey and Walter Pery also gave them one yardland and 10 acres. Godstow retained this estate until it surrendered all its property to the Crown at the Dissolution in 1539.

By 1187 Ralph d'Amory granted two virgates at Bletchingdon to Osney Abbey. In the 13th century other benefactors gave lands at Bletchingdon to the abbey, and in 1291 they were assessed as part of its Hampton Gay estate.

In 1622 Bletchingdon's common lands – about 500 acres of arable land and about 600 acres of heath – were enclosed by agreement between the Lord of the Manor, the Rector and the tenants. This is the earliest recorded instance of enclosure in Oxfordshire by common consent and it predates, by more than a century, the first use of an enclosure act in Oxfordshire, which was at Mixbury in 1729.

The village was originally built

around three sides of a triangular green, but the houses on the north side were pulled down when Bletchingdon Park was extended. The present house at Bletchingdon Park is a Palladian country house that was designed by James Lewis and built in 1782 for Arthur Annesley, 5th Earl of Anglesey. It was built to replace Bletchingdon's medieval manor house, which itself had been rebuilt by Sir Thomas Coghill in about 1630. The medieval house was fortified and garrisoned by 200 Royalist troops in the Civil War before being surrendered to Parliamentary troops in 1645. John Coghill sold it to Viscount Valentia, the ancestor of Arthur Annesley, in 1716.

The estate remained in the Valentia family until 1948, when Lord Valentia sold it to the Hon. William Astor who, in turn, sold it in 1953 to the Hon. Robin Cayzer, later Baron Rotherwick. In 1990 it was bought by Dateline entrepreneur John Patterson who then sold it on and moved to Chesterton Manor.

In 1993 Dr. Michael Peagram, a chemicals industrialist and philanthropist, bought the estate and had the house historically restored. But in 2012 the 22,600-square-foot house went on the market again, this time for £20 million.

The parish church of Saint Giles includes



View looking south along the west side of the village green.

traces of Norman architecture. Its Early English Gothic chancel was built in the 13th century. Charles Buckeridge designed the north aisle, which was added in 1869. Then the church was heavily restored to Buckeridge's designs in 1878.

The west tower has a ring of six bells. Robert and William Cor, of Aldbourne, Wiltshire, cast the tenor bell in 1710. Edward Hemins, of Bicester, cast the second bell in 1738. Matthew Bagley, of Chacombe, Northamptonshire, cast the fifth bell in 1774. James Barwell, of Birmingham, cast the third and fourth bells in 1877. And the Whitechapel Bell Foundry cast the treble bell in 1998. The church has a Sanctus bell, also cast by James Barwell in 1877.

The parish of Bletchingdon also includes the hamlet of Enslow, just over 1 mile west of the village. In 1788 the Oxford Canal reached Enslow, bringing much cheaper coal from the English Midlands to the area. And in 1845, when the Oxford and Rugby Railway was built through Enslow, Bletchingdon railway station was built there. British Railways later closed the station in 1964.

- Matthew Hathaway



A present day view of the same cottages shown above, from the opposite end

## Talks Update

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

### Monday 21st September

Bill King's talk about **Industrial Archaeology in your Shed, Garage or Attic** shows us how artefacts reveal, over a timescale of thousands of years, the development of culture and society through the use of materials and technologies.

### Monday 19th October

Stephen Barker tells us about **Oxfordshire on the Home Front 1914-18**. Explaining the impact of the First World War on the county. Focusing on many aspects, from fundraising to munitions production and the influx of Belgian refugees.

### Monday 16th November

John Leighfield explains the development of maps from Gough to Google in his talk: **Putting Bicester on the Map**. Covering all the key stages and people from the first Oxfordshire map by Christopher Saxton in 1574 to the present day.

## Tin Helmets and Gas Masks Talk

Although focussing on the Home Front in World War II, Martin Way started his talk by mentioning the Home Front in WW1, when the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry Corps (F.A.N.Y.) offered their services and expertise to the War Office. However, British military opinion was still that the Front was no place for a woman: *"There are enough nurses to attend to the Army. Amateurs will be neither wanted nor welcomed, either as soldiers or nurses."* A chance meeting on a train by one of the FANY organisers with a Belgian minister lead them to be utilised by the Belgian army as soon as war broke out. But it was not until 1916 when the British accepted their presence on the Front.

Gas had been used in WW1, and

at the beginning of WW2 there was great concern that it might be used on civilians. Martin brought along various examples of the masks that were distributed to both adults and children.

Teaching civilian defence techniques was important. Wills Cigarettes quickly brought out a set of cigarette cards depicting various subjects as to how the public could respond or learn.



But the war brought on shortages, hence rationing of food, clothes, petrol and sweets, creating a national culture

of ingenuity, austerity and making-do. We were reminded that recycling is not a new phenomenon but was a necessity during the war. The dark colours of the King George VI definitive stamps, introduced in 1937 were reduced to a much paler colour during 1941-42 in order to save on the production of expensive coloured printing inks.



Even the old green pound note had its colour changed to blue to reduce the use of the more expensive green dye - and a metal strip was inserted into the paper to help combat German counterfeiting.

- Bob Hessian

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