



Bicester Historian

Issue: 20 April 2016

The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society

BLHS Anniversary

Bicester Local History Society was officially formed 30 years ago, in April 1986. Our Chairman, Bob Hessian, will be presenting a history of the society at this month's meeting, but for the cover of this commemorative edition of the newsletter I thought I'd collect together a few newspaper articles from the early days.

2nd April 1986: HISTORY SOCIETY IN ACTION - A Bicester Local History Society is now off the ground and members are busy working through the town's 1851 census.

An item in this column about the group a few weeks ago produced a response from readers and several joined up.

The group had begun as an offshoot from an earlier Workers' Educational Association course at Bicester Adult Education Centre. Enthusiasts from the course carried on their interest and have now formed themselves into the Bicester Local History Society with everything on a regular basis.

Mrs Jill Wishart, of Merton, one of the instigators of the group, told me the society was now affiliated to the Adult Education Centre and now meets on the first and the third Tuesday in the month at Bicester School.

The society has an open evening next week on Tuesday, April 8, at Bicester School, Queen's Avenue at 7:15pm. The curator of Banbury Museum, Sarah Gosling, will be a speaker at the open evening.

Mrs Wishart explained that they hoped the Bicester group would co-exist happily with the already long-

established and hard working Launton Historical Society.

Bicester members were extracting and transcribing details of the 1851 census as one of their first projects.

Further information about the society can be obtained from Mrs Wishart on Charlton-on-Otmoor 321.

27th March 1987: MUSEUM CAMPAIGN UNDER WAY AS TOWN LOOKS BACK IN TIME - Two hundred people have signed a petition calling for Bicester to have its own museum.

Signatures were collected when Bicester Local History Society staged an exhibition "Whatever happened to Bicester? — a look into the past" at the Methodist Hall on Saturday.

Society chairman Mrs Jill Wishart said: "The petition will help our campaign to get a feasibility study undertaken into Bicester having its own museum, possibly in the Bicester Town Council offices at The Garth."

She said the constant flow of people to the all-day exhibition proved that people in Bicester and district do care about the town, its history and what has been happening to it.

She said: "We have had young and old, newcomers and long established people coming to the exhibition."

She was pleased that, apart from the Town Mayor, Mr Douglas Spencer, the exhibition was supported with visits from other councillors including Barry Wood, Graham Forbes and Arthur Winter.

"I think they are all behind us in wanting a museum in Bicester," said Mrs Wishart.

Her words were echoed when Mr Spencer opened the exhibition and said he hoped the town would soon have a permanent place for exhibits to be seen by the general public.

Records, articles and other items of historical interest are at present scattered among private collections, history

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Dates For Your Diary

BLHS Anniversary Event

18th April - 7:30pm

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May Newsletter Submissions Deadline

29th April

Dressing Up The Past Talk

16th May - 7:30pm

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Jill and the Mayor, Douglas Spencer, at the 1987 exhibition

societies, the Oxford Records Office and the Oxfordshire County Museum at Woodstock.

The town council loaned the old town stocks that once stood in the Market Square for the exhibition and also several pre-enclosure maps of the town dated 1753.

The exhibition was supported by Launton Historical Society and the Portway Local History Group which covers the villages of Ardley, Fewcott and Somerton.

Stands were also taken by Oxford Archaeological Unit showing recent digs in and around the town; Bicester Public Library; Bicester Methodist Church; Messengers and the Bicester Advertiser.

Among individual contributors were Bob and Paula Hessian of Weston-on-the-Green with a collection of Coker family papers relating to Bicester House and "Dinah" a character from Weston; Allan Gwinnell with his history of Bicester railways; and old photographs from Michael Morgan.

The Launton society's stand showed their recent work in the village and

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the Portway group showed slides of buildings and locations of interest in Ardley, a study of education in Ardley and an old government war-time film relating to "dig for victory" campaigns centred on Somerton.

The Bicester society displayed their work on a 19th century census of the town.

A competition run in conjunction with window displays in local shops was won by Stephanie Bailey, 10, of Blythe Place, King's End Farm, Bicester. She was presented with a copy of the recently published book "Bicester in Camera".

29th April 1988: TAKING ANOTHER LOOK AT BICESTER - Most of us know that the main Roman settlement in the Bicester area was at Alchester on the marshy land between the present day town and Wendlebury.

New evidence is now coming to light to show that what we regard as Bicester was a Roman settlement too, though possibly slightly later than Alchester.

When a leading local archaeologist Trevor Rowley, from the Oxford University Department of Extra Mural Studies, conducted a dig on the edge of Alchester, he concluded that the Romans moved from Alchester on the collapse of the settlement's drains to the higher ground of Bicester.

A local enthusiast Michael Holloway, of Merton Walk, Bicester, has unearthed, often with the help of a metal detector, some interesting finds from housing development land in the town.

The artefacts he has recovered have been authenticated by the Oxford Archaeology Unit and will be on show at the "Take Another Look at Bicester" exhibition in the Methodist Hall tomorrow (Saturday).

Mrs Jill Wishart, chairman of Bicester Local History Society, which is organising the exhibition, told me that there are other finds by Mr Holloway that are still being investigated.

Among the items to be displayed will be a collection of five iron socketed spear points. Apparently it is unusual for so many spear points to be found together in one place. They are often found at many Romano-British sites but the group is a notable find suggesting that they came from a blacksmith's hoard of scrap waiting to be re-used.

Another item is a suspension or harness chain for a horse with figure of eight links which were common in the Romano-British period. It has a bronze ring at one end.

More modern finds include a tiny pair of scissors dating from the 18th and 19th century of the kind often worn or hung by women from a belt, and half of a pair of small shears that might have been used in embroidery.

The Mayor of Bicester, Mr Graham Forbes will be opening the exhibition that runs from 10:30am to 4:30pm. It is a follow up to the first and highly successful show staged a year ago.

Special attractions will include a set of "Then and Now" photographs of Bicester by photographer Michael Morgan, the class of '39 from Bicester Grammar School, and work of evening classes on Bicester's 19th century census returns and fieldwork in local archaeology.

Exhibits will be staged by Oxford Family History Society, Oxford County Record Office, Oxford Archaeology Unit, Banbury Museum, Bicester Library, local schools, Launton, Portway (Ardley and Fewcott) and Bartons history groups or societies, and the Bicester Advertiser.

6th May 1988: BICESTER ON SHOW - Collections and research by individuals as well as by local history groups were celebrated at the "Take Another Look at Bicester" exhibition at the weekend.

One of the largest collections on view was staged by Mick and Pamela Ball of Blackthorn and their friend John Leach of London Road, Bicester. They displayed old bottles and jars from Bicester breweries, drink companies, wine merchants and other retailers.

They also showed a number of rare items like crockery from the Wesleyan Church and the Congregational Church, as well as souvenirs of old Bicester including a teapot.

"A lot of our finds have been dug up but others we have bought. The teapot with a scene of Bicester Market Place on it was found in Yorkshire and the owner brought it to us here" said Mrs Ball.

A display that caught many an admiring eye from fashion conscious women was staged by Tom Harris of Chapel Street, Bicester. He had rescued from oblivion the 19th century wedding and mourning dresses, complete with bonnets, of his grandmother Mrs Elizabeth Stuchfield, whose husband John was a saddler with a shop in Market Square (where solicitors Henman and Ballard are now).

"I got the dresses and a wooden box containing two more bonnets when my aunt Mrs Agnes Farthing died in Mere,



Jill and the Mayor, Graham Forbes, at the 1988 exhibition

Wiltshire, in 1965. The wedding dress is from about 1862 and the mourning dress about 1893" said Mr Harris.

Mrs Paula Hessian, of Weston-on-the-Green, showed her research on the life of William Goodson, who was the village constable in the last century and also the cordwainer or shoemaker. Mrs Hessian began delving into his life after a friend in the village, Mrs Winifred Fox, gave her one of Goodson's books, a men's companion giving advice on innumerable subjects from academic to every day life.

The exhibition in the Methodist Hall on Saturday was staged by Bicester Local History Society as a follow-up to their first mounted a year ago. Between 500 and 600 people viewed the exhibits. The society covered its costs.

Town Mayor Mr Graham Forbes opened the exhibition and reiterated Bicester Town Council's intention of making space available for a small town museum within the renovated Garth House, Launton Road in the near future. Mr Forbes said he was so pleased that the exhibition was staged by local enthusiasts without local authority support.

Society chairman Mrs Jill Wishart said it was decided to hold a second exhibition as the first was so successful and there were many new exhibits on view.

The Bicester society showed its research into the 1851 and 1881 censuses of the town, Launton Historical Society displayed recent work including two booklets on the village, while the Portway group filled in the background on the threat of new housing development to an ancient site in Ardley.

The Bartons Local History Group had a show of early drawings and photographs that have been collected by Mr Graham Bradshaw of Middle Barton.

- Matthew Hathaway

5th April 1856 NEWS OF THE PEACE (Crimean War) - These glad tidings were received in Bicester with considerable demonstrations of joy. Soon after the arrival of the morning papers on Monday, containing the welcome intelligence, a large white banner, with the word "Peace" inscribed in conspicuous letters, was hoisted at E. Smith and Son's printing office, and was the means of spreading the news rapidly.

A brilliant tricolor, "red, white, and blue", at Messrs. Stevens's; a banner on the belfry at the Union House; and a Union Jack at Mr J. Wells's, afterwards made their appearance.

In the evening the Bicester Brass Band paraded the town. The boys, to their great delight, had a big bonfire on the market place; and the firing of guns, crackers, etc, was kept up till a late hour.

The following casualties occurred during the rejoicings of the evening: A young man named Thomas Mansell shot away the top of his forefinger in discharging a gun; and 10 or 12 panes of glass in the front windows of J.H. Parker Esq. were broken by the concussion produced by the firing.

On Tuesday the demonstrations were repeated in a similar manner, with the addition of a merry peal from the church bells; and an immense bonfire in Blind Lane attracted a large assemblage of juveniles.

10th April 1896 CONGREGATIONAL ANNIVERSARY - The 234th anniversary of the Bicester Congregational Church was celebrated on Good Friday. A public tea was held in the schoolroom at five o'clock followed by a service in the chapel at 6:30pm, which was conducted by the Rev. R. Campbell BA, of Brighton. There was a large attendance and sacred vocal and instrumental music

was rendered by the choir. A collection was taken at the conclusion in aid of chapel funds.

17th April 1936 EXCURSIONS FROM BICESTER — In addition to the half-day trip from Bicester to Paddington which frequently runs on Sundays and is booked for next Sunday particularly, the Great Western Railway announce a day excursion from Bicester to Paddington on Saturday, April 25th, leaving at 10:50am, at a fare of 6s 9d. The trip has been specially arranged for the convenience of spectators travelling to the Football Association cup final at Wembley, but the convenient times both forward and return are likely to attract a good number of other passengers from this area.

29th April 1976 BARRIERS AT RAIL CROSSING - New barriers at Bicester's level crossing on the London Road came into operation this week.



The four metal skirted barriers with warning lights on both sides of the crossing replace old gates, but will be operated from the nearby signal box.

But new half barriers at the Launton crossing on the same Oxford — Bletchley freight line will be automatic and operated by approaching trains. They will be in use from May 9th.

Already on the line near Wendlebury there is an automatic crossing to a farm with lights only.

Roll of Honour

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

Private Ronald Melville Judge, of Ardley.

Died: 5th April 1916 Aged: 22 Served in: Royal Warwickshire Regiment

Private Walter Scraggs, of Charlton-on-Otmoor.

Died: 6th April 1916 Aged: 18 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

2nd Lieutenant Alfred Holloway Truman, of Bicester.

Died: 6th April 1916 Aged: 19 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private John Walton, native of Weston-on-the-Green.

Died: 9th April 1916 Aged: 21 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private Arthur Allen, of Upper Heyford.

Died: 13th April 1916 Aged: 27 Served in: Royal Fusiliers

Private Herbert Harris, of Cottisford.

Died: 25th April 1916 Aged: 23 Served in: Royal Engineers

Private Edwin Timms, of Cottisford.

Died: 26th April 1916 Aged: 36 Served in: Canadian Infantry



Village History Fringford

The parish of Fringford is bounded on the east by the Roman road that linked Alchester with Towcester, on the south by a brook that joins the River Bure, on the north by a brook that forms a tributary of the Great Ouse, and on the west by field boundaries. Fringford village is in the north of the parish, surrounded on two sides by a bend in the tributary of the Great Ouse.

At the southern edge of the parish, beside the tributary of the River Bure, there may have been a Roman villa. The site is only about 200 yards west of the Roman road. It is now occupied by Fringford Lodge.

Fringford's toponym is derived from an Old English tribal or family name Ferring and the ford that formed the only crossing-point of the narrow stream that flows around the village. An earlier form of the name would have been Ferringas-ford.

After the Norman conquest of England in 1066, William of Normandy gave his half-brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, manors that included Fringford. Later the Crown deposed Odo and granted the manor of Fringford to Baron William de Arsic of Cogges.

By the early part of the 12th century William's son Baron

Manasses Arsic had built a stone church. It was dedicated to Saint Michael and All Angels and granted to the Benedictine Priory founded at Cogges by Baron William.

The west tower of the church has three bells. Robert Atton, of Buckingham, cast the second bell in 1617. Richard III Chandler, of Drayton Parslow, cast the treble and tenor bells in 1702. The church also has a Sanctus bell that Robert I Wells, of Aldbourne, Wiltshire, cast in about 1780.

In 1815 Henry Dawson Roundell was appointed Rector. He is described as "possessed of ample means and genial temperament". He started letting parts of the parish glebe as allotments for labourers in the parish and, throughout his incumbency, he promoted the restoration of the church.

The north aisle was rebuilt in 1905 and the roof was restored in 1909.

Fringford in the 19th century is associated with Flora Thompson's Lark Rise to Candleford trilogy, in which Fringford is the model for Candleford Green. In 1844 the Oxford Chronicle noted "there aren't enough dwellings to shelter the poor". The 1851 census shows a population of 357 and during this time the parish had only a



The village water pump, with its thatched roof

few good farm-houses. However, the population grew and in 1871 reached 479, its highest number until the 1990s.

Fringford then had five blacksmiths, three carpenters, three sawyers, three brickmakers, a stonemason, a shoemaker, three decorators, a carrier, a coal haulier, two bakers, two grocers and a butcher. Also two grooms, two footmen, six gardeners and a coachman from Fringford were employed at Shelswell House, Tusmore Park and Swift House.

Mains electricity was not supplied until after the Second World War and mains water didn't arrive until 1960.

- Matthew Hathaway

Marj's Memories The Radcliffe Infirmary

If you go by bus to Oxford as you approach St Giles, on the right hand side is a church, a childhood memory still comes back to me of getting off the bus and walking through the churchyard to the old Radcliffe Infirmary. Like a good many of us who lived in Bicester years ago it will be remembered for being our hospital. I first went there when I was 5 years old, during the war, for an emergency operation. How the procedures in hospitals have changed! I remember: the hospital had a distinct clean smell, possibly disinfectant; being anaesthetised with an ether rag; nurses in well pressed uniforms putting a little glass tube under your tongue to take your temperature; a Matron in blue who appeared to be the "boss" of it all; and a Lady Almoner who was always available to help solve any problems.

I spent 2 weeks in the Radcliffe Infirmary in Woodstock Road and, instead of going home I went for

6 weeks to the big house, Goslings, at Stratton Audley (where the stables are). The house had been taken over for the war effort and was used for wounded soldiers, except for one room at the top, where I stayed along with several older girls, some very poorly.

It was a happy time and my mother and other family members regularly cycled from Bicester to see me. One day the Duchess of Gloucester visited in full uniform wearing a forage cap and talked to me at my bedside. When I was stronger I was taken into the grounds and I fed a little lamb with a bottle. I don't remember seeing any soldiers.

On return home my bedroom seemed lonely - I could hear the steam trains going along the line adjacent to Bucknell Road and I tried hard to sing a song that they didn't know, but they always kept in time. I was too young to know about rhythm!

- Marjorie Dean MBE

Bygone Bicester 1986 (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

2nd April 1986 NEW BICESTER 'SHIP' COMES INTO VIEW - Surprising as it may seem, there is yet another "ship" that carries the name of Bicester.

When I was at the commissioning by the Royal Navy of the new and third HMS Bicester at Portsmouth Dockyard recently, another Bicester hove into view.

Sea Cadets with "TS Bicester" on their hat bands were distributing copies of the order of service.

Apparently a Sea Cadet unit in North London was given the name HMS Bicester many years ago.

The unit of Willesden and Paddington youths meets in premises off the Kilburn Road, London, and has done quite well in the Sea Cadet world.

And the late Lord Bicester visited them for one of their celebratory nights.

A photo of the unit with Lord Bicester was presented to Lieut Cdr Mike Kooner, captain of the new HMS Bicester, after the commissioning ceremony.

Incidentally, the commissioning was an inter-Service occasion as the British Army and American Air Force from Upper Heyford were also represented as well as the Navy.

Brig Paul Symes, commander of Bicester Garrison, presented Lieut Cdr Kooner with a plaque of the Garrison/Depot coat of arms.

And he had also arranged for the music for the commissioning to be played by the Royal Army Ordnance Corps band from Black-down camp. The 16 Battalion of the RAOC is the Army unit involved at the Depot.

9th April 1986 GARTH: PUBLIC VIEWS SOUGHT - Controversial plans for a £500,000 civic centre in Bicester have been abandoned but the project is far from dead.

Townpeople are being asked to come up with their own ideas for a new civic centre.

The project initially accepted by town councillors faced two hurdles. One was getting permission from the Government to borrow the money to build the centre. The other was that public opinion was against the centre being built on any part of Garth Park in Launton Road, the only formal public park in the town.

The Government refused loan sanction permission for the current financial year. And because there were indications that there would be more Government restrictions on public borrowing, town councillors began thinking of an alternative site and funding.

As forecast in the Bicester Advertiser, one of the most favourable options was to use council-owned land on the southern side of the Oxford - Bletchley railway line.

This area is earmarked for housing under the Bicester Town Plan and includes two fields owned by the council. Money from the sale of part of that land could help finance the civic centre which could be sited on the rest of the land.

At the town council's policy committee on Monday night councillors accepted this idea as a probability.

Councillors repeated that they thought a civic centre was still a paramount need for the town and that they were right to pursue the idea, despite criticism.

Councillors agreed to ask the public for alternative proposals for a civic centre. Viable suggestions would be costed and compared.

The council's civic centre working party wants to place

its conclusions before the policy committee within six months.

Mr Graham Forbes told the policy committee that opposition to the original plans had been orchestrated by some people for party political motives. And he hoped that people would act constructively rather than destructively with their ideas for an alternative project.

16th April 1986 GLEE AT SUNDAY TRADING FLOP - News that there is to be no Sunday trading free-for-all sparked a mixed reaction in Oxfordshire.

Small shopkeepers and churchmen breathed a sigh of relief after 68 Tory MPs defied a three-line whip in the Commons on Monday night to throw out the Shops Bill which would have opened the floodgates for business on Sundays.

The Rev James Kyle, Methodist minister in Bicester, whose church raised a 200-signature "Keep Sunday Special" petition, said he was delighted at the result.

"The Sunday trading laws do need tidying up but this could have been done without the free-for-all that was being offered, so perhaps it is better to stay as we are," said Mr Kyle.

The defeat of the Shops Bill may spell difficulties for district councils who have to enforce no-trading regulations.

Mr George Mills, Cherwell's chief environmental health officer, said he expected the council would be under pressure to continue its policy of prosecuting shops that persisted in opening illegally on Sundays.

23rd April 1986 PEACE PEOPLE VENT ANGER AT HEYFORD BASE - An American flag was burnt as hundreds of protestors gathered at the Upper Heyford airbase over the weekend.

On Saturday, more than 100 people took part in the "Snowball Campaign" demonstration that was planned long before the F-111s from the base bombed Libya.

Several dozen people cut wire strands in the perimeter fence with steel hacksaw blades. Two women were arrested but later released with a caution.

On Sunday more than 500 peace campaigners staged a protest at the base against the attack on Libya, and a crowd of CND supporters from the Midlands staged a sit-in outside the main gates, burning an American flag.

Demonstrators on Saturday had expected mass arrests, but Thames Valley police officers merely confiscated blades used to cut the fence.

Police superintendent Tim Hawkins explained: "We were obviously trying to prevent damage to the fence. My officers were just using common sense."

Demonstrators were told that they could reclaim their blades from Banbury police station if they wanted to.

One demonstrator Mrs Marilyn Norvell of Didcot Peace Group, who arrived with a hacksaw and blade in her jacket pocket, said: "I am disappointed. It is still criminal damage but the police are not arresting us, which is the aim of the campaign so we can have an opportunity of putting our case in court."

Half a dozen protesters got into the base but were escorted back to the public road.

Meanwhile, protestors on Sunday at the base claim

they were snubbed when letters demanding the removal of nuclear bases from Britain were received by a junior officer, not the Base Commander.



County councillor Eva Barnes took armfuls of flowers and letters into the base. She said "It's appalling. I feel snubbed for the people of Oxfordshire who have come here in such numbers I feel squadron leader Paul Halfter could have found time to talk to a representative of his own country."

Thames Valley police looked on as a group of CND supporters from the Midlands sat outside the main gates, blocking traffic. They also burnt an American flag.

Protestors — ranging from babies in prams to pensioners — left peacefully, leaving flowers and crosses symbolic of the Libyans who died in the American raid.

Five women peace protestors appeared before a special court at Banbury yesterday charged with damaging two planes at the American Airforce Base at Upper Heyford on Monday.

Katrina Howse, Juley Howard, Gaelle Rous, Carol James and Lorna Richardson, all of the peace camp, Greenham Common, were remanded in custody for eight days. Bail was refused.

30th April 1986 BRAIN OF BICESTER - Arncott Academicals, runners-up in the Brain of Bicester quiz last year made no mistake on Monday night, winning the team title by a clear margin from Launton's "The French Connection".

Arncott, fielding exactly the same four players as for last year's final, made their experience tell and led almost

from the start. Although The French Connection chased them gamely, Arncott emerged clear winners.

The teams were — Arncott: Ian Smith (team capt), Alan Griffin, Ann Wildman and Dick Hope; The French Connection: Martin Evans (team capt), Charles Hughes, Bert Evans and Pat Tucker.

The four finalists still in contention for the top prize — The Brain of Bicester 1986 — were Ray Noble, Jim Hutson, Yvonne Dixon and Ian Smith.

During the eight rounds of increasingly difficult questions, Jim Hutson took a clear lead early on. But, as so often happens in the individual matches, his advantage was being chipped away and Ian Smith began to overhaul him. Scoring the maximum bonus points in the final round clinched the championship for Ian, who becomes this year's Brain of Bicester.



Although the Team Champions and the Individual Champion changed from last year, history did repeat itself in one way. The captain of the winning team also became the individual champion, in exactly the same way that Graham Neal did in 1985.

Quiz organiser and questionmaster Ged Mead presented the trophies to all the prizewinners and also presented a shield to scorer Alan Cowlshaw.

A collection between some of the teams and regular attendees led to the surprise presentation of flowers to Pauline Mead, and a Royal Worcester gift to Ged.

With Ged and Pauline leaving the area this year, it is hoped that someone will step in as organiser for the 1987 Quiz.

Remembering The Old Star

Another event in 1986 was the 50th anniversary of The Star pub, in Bucknell Road. The landlord at the time, Bill Hollis, submitted a piece to the Bicester Advertiser to try and establish the exact date that the pub moved from its original location in Crockwell. This in turn led to an interview with Esme Timms and some research by her brother, Brian Clifton. Both now members of BLHS.

19th February 1986 PUB'S 50TH BIRTHDAY LACKS AN EXACT DATE - Regulars of The Star in Bucknell Road, Bicester, have something to celebrate this year as the pub chalks up its 50th anniversary.

While it is known the pub opened its doors in 1936, landlord Bill Hollis (pictured) is trying to find out the exact date.

"People who have lived round here a long time say it was when the weather was fine, but we would like to track down the day. Perhaps readers of the Bicester Advertiser can help us," said Mr Hollis.



The Star replaced the original Star pub that stood next to what is now Allington's cycle store at the top end of Sheep Street.

It was tucked in on the corner of what is St John's Street. After it closed as a pub it was a private house

for a long time and once the home of town and district councillor, Mr Graham Forbes. The family, headed by Mr Harry Forbes, lived there for a few years before going to Malaya.

“The old bar was our front room” recalled Graham.

The original Star was demolished to make room for Franklin’s Yard car park.

12th March 1986 RECALLING LIFE AT THE OLD STAR - My story, a few weeks ago, about the 50th anniversary of the Star pub in Bucknell Road, Bicester, created considerable interest among readers.

Mrs Esme Timms of Longfields, Bicester, brought in this old photograph taken in the 1930s of the old Star pub at the top end of Sheep Street.



It shows her father, Alfred Clifton, outside the pub which stood next door to what is now Allington’s Property Shop and Cycle Store.

“All the building in the photograph was the pub. There was a big yard at the back and you can see where the entrance was on the right-hand side. After the pub on the right, but not in the photo, was Mrs Godfrey’s sweet and general shop” said Mrs Timms.

Mrs Timms’ father, best known as Harry, was the last landlord of the Star and the first landlord of the new Star in Bucknell Road.

“I was born at the old Star. It was a rambling old house and I remember the attics very clearly. Apples were stored in boxes and the attics smelt of straw and apples” said Mrs Timms.

The pub had a large yard and an old garage with a loft above and access meant a tricky climb up a wooden ladder.

The 1930’s were quite hard for the majority of working people though Mr Clifton achieved his ambition of becoming a publican.

“I suppose we appeared a bit better off financially and therefore kids shouted ‘beer bottles’ at my sister and myself, as if to hurt our feelings and bring us down a peg or two” said Mrs Timms.

Bicester was typical of the rural towns in England at that time and local families seemed to be related to each other in some way. Houses in the main were small and basic, two up and two down with outside sheds which provided lavatories and somewhere to store coal or anything else.

“At the pub we never seemed to have meals at the same time any one day, as they had to fit in with opening times and many weary travellers were given lodgings for the night” recalled Mrs Timms.

The street now known as St John’s Street was part of

the old town called Crockwell, pronounced “Crockull” by locals.

Next door to the pub was Mrs Godfrey who had converted her front parlour into a shop (no need for planning permission in those days). From her shop could be purchased groceries, paraffin, cotton, cabbages — you name it, she sold it.

Further down was Jimmy Hines (chimney sweep), Charlie Palmer (rabbits) and Mrs Bourton (homemade sweets) whose gobstoppers must surely have taken some of the blame for tooth decay.

“This area is now Franklin’s Yard car park and for any newcomers it must be hard to visualise what it was like” said Mrs Timms.

In the summer of 1936 she recalled the family moved to the new Star in Bucknell Road, known as the Stoneburge estate and the Highfields area of the town. There is a Stoneburge Crescent off Bucknell Road.

“September 1939 brought the Second World War but we were not really aware of its implications. Air raid shelters were built in gardens and school playing fields. Army nissan nuts sprang up in the surrounding fields, which are now Barry Avenue and Graham Road” said Mrs Timms.

Everything was now rationed, including beer and spirits, and the pubs only opened two or three times a week. “Don’t you know there is a war on” was an expression used to cover a multitude of things.

In 1944 the Bicester area was bursting at the seams with servicemen and women of all nationalities and there were dances, or local “hops”, every night somewhere with either a proper dance band or a record player.

Her father, along with other men, volunteered to be Air Raid Wardens and suitably equipped would turn out whenever the sirens sounded.

Harry Clifton was landlord of the new Star until 1947 and the family moved to Emlyn House in Sheep Street, now the home of Nash’s bakery and Rumbelows.

“My father died in 1953, Coronation year and the year I married” said Mrs Timms.

Her younger brother, Mr Brian Clifton, lives in Fortescue Drive, Chesterton, and is researching the story of the new Star. From microfilm of the Bicester Advertiser at the library in Oxford he has found the licence for the new Star was transferred by magistrates in March 1936.

24th April 1936 REMOVAL OF THE “STAR INN”

— At the Oxford County Licensing Committee on Wednesday, Mr. H.F. Galpin, of Oxford, on behalf of Messrs. Halls Oxford Brewery, applied for confirmation of the grant by the Bicester magistrates of the removal of the licence of “The Star” at Bicester to new premises on the Bicester—Bucknell road. The present house, he explained, was in the middle of Bicester, in an area subject to road-widening schemes and clearance of slum areas. The population of the district were being removed to the neighbourhood of the new premises.

The Committee confirmed the grant, subject to the applicant satisfying the local authority as to the means of ingress and egress, as required by the Restriction of Ribbon Development Act, and the highway authority in regard to the position of the new building in relation to the roadway.

Talks Update

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

Monday 18th April

This will be a social event for members to celebrate the Society's 30th anniversary. It will include a talk by Bob Hessian on the history of the Society.

Monday 16th May

We learn about **Dressing Up the Past** from Ellie Reid as she talks about the craze for pageants which swept Edwardian England. What was the origin of the craze and how, in 1907, did Oxford get involved?

Monday 20th June

Deborah Hayter tells us about the **Lost Villages of Oxfordshire**. There are over 120 in the county, but why? We look beyond the obvious explanations at the life and death of deserted villages and the research into their decline.

Votes for Women Talk

The background to the fight for women's suffrage includes the unexpected information that women in countries such as France, Sweden, Corsica and Sierra Leone had the right to vote during the 18th century. In 1756, in the USA, Lydia Taft cast her late husband's vote. However, these rights were subsequently abolished and the real origins of the movement for votes for women lay in the French Revolution.

Mary Wollstonecraft, the well-known English writer, philosopher and advocate of women's rights, observed the French Revolution and published her important work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792.

In 1881, women of the Isle of Man became the first British women to vote. Other examples include New Zealand (1893) and Australia (1902), but Great Britain lagged behind

these developments.

The Representation of the People Act (1832) extended the vote for men, but since it referred specifically to 'male persons' those women who had the right to vote prior to 1832, due to property ownership, were disenfranchised. It has been argued that it was the inclusion of the word 'male', providing the first explicit statutory bar to women voting, which provided a source of resentment from which, in time, the women's suffrage movement grew.

As campaigning continued apace a number of important groups emerged. In Oxfordshire the Central & South of England Society established groups in Oxford, Banbury and Woodstock. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) was formed in 1896. Members were known as suffragists and brought pressure on the government through lawful

and peaceful methods. In contrast, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded in 1903, took a more militant stance under the control of Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters. These were the suffragettes whose motto was 'Deeds not Words'.

7th February 1907 was hugely significant as 3000 women gathered in London to march through the city. Organised by the NUWSS, this was the first demonstration of woman from all classes. The Mud March, as it became known due to the wet conditions, helped make large suffrage processions a key feature of the British suffrage movement and put suffragists in the public eye.

But it was not until the Equal Franchise Act of 1928 that women over 21 years were able to vote and women finally achieved the same voting rights as men.

- Sally James

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