

Priority Site Still at Risk

Proposals to build on the Old Place Yard site will go before the CDC Planning Committee on Thursday 19th May.

Irrespective of reports from some of their own and the County advisors, CDC seems hell-bent on pushing the application through. This is what happened on the Bryan House site where, in the rush to develop the site, the archaeology was not properly evaluated before planning permission was granted.

BLHS, along with others, have asked that a full archaeological study be carried out before any building work is carried out.

Recent excavations that took place a few weeks ago have uncovered substantial walls of what is thought to be part of the church, cloister and possible chapter house.

On the Bryan House site a full test piece excavation was carried out by the developers before construction began, but this was after the planning application had been accepted, so there was no way of forcing the developers to alter their design to suit the archaeology. Consequently the structures found were then damaged or destroyed by the subsequent building works.

The lead archaeologist on the Bryan House site, Paul Riccoboni, has



Part of the Bryan House site excavations

submitted his comments to the Planning Committee voicing the same concerns and objections as BLHS, English Heritage, the local residents and the County Archaeological Service.

On a related note:

Whilst visiting the Museum Resource Centre at Standlake I was fortunate to be informed of a recent find uncovered by a metal detectorist near Mixbury and brought to the Centre for further study and validation.

It is a complete cast copper alloy vesical seal matrix of medieval date. It is a personal seal and the image in the centre of the matrix shows a kneeling figure (possibly the owner of the seal) in front of a standing St John the Baptist with the pascal lamb in the field between them. It is suggested that the inscription around the edge reads: "The Seal of Prior Reginald of London".

Reginald was the seventh prior of Bicester Priory and held that position from 1261 to 1269. John Dunkin suggests that he died in 1268.

It remains to be seen as to what will happen to the seal – the finder may well decide to keep it or sell it or, hopefully, donate it to the MRC.

- B. Hessian & M. Hathaway



The medieval seal of Prior Reginald

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Dates For Your Diary

Dressing up the Past Talk
16th May - 7:30pm
see page 5

"The Real Candleford Green"
book launch - Coles Bookshop
19th May - 7pm

June Newsletter Submissions
Deadline
3rd June

Lost Villages of Oxfordshire Talk
20th June - 7:30pm
see page 5

EMPIRE AIR DAY, 1936
THE ROYAL AIR FORCE
STATION,
Upper Heyford,
 will be OPEN to the PUBLIC
 On **SATURDAY, MAY 23rd, 1936,**
 from 2 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.

All branches of R.A.F. activities will be available for inspection by the public.

Varied Flying Programme.
Aircraft
Park Demonstrations.

Refreshments will be available.
 Admission—Adults 1/-. Children 3d. FREE CAR PARK. Proceeds in aid of the R.A.F. Benevolent Fund.

Taken from the Bicester Advertiser - May 1936

Village History Fritwell

The village of Fritwell developed from two neighbouring Saxon settlements, both of which had their own manor house.

After the Norman conquest of England in 1066 William FitzOsbern, 1st Earl of Hereford, held a manor of 10 hides of land at Fritwell. William's son, Roger de Breteuil, inherited William's estates when he died in 1071, but in 1075 Roger took part in the Revolt of the Earls, was defeated by William I and imprisoned. The Crown confiscated and redistributed Roger's lands and gave Fritwell to Roger de Chesney.

The manor then descended in the de Chesney family until 1160, by which time Maud, Daughter of William de Chesney, had become married to Henry II's chamberlain, Henry FitzGerold. Henry and Maud's son Warin FitzGerold had inherited the manor by 1198 and died in 1216. The manor then passed to Warin's daughter, Margaret de Redvers.

The manor remained in the de Redvers family until Isabella de Fortibus, Countess of Devon died in 1293. One of the Countess's heirs was Warin de Lisle, a descendant of Margaret de Chesney. In 1368 Robert de Lisle surrendered all his lands to Edward III. From then onwards the tenants of the de Lisle manor were tenants-in-chief.

The de Lisle manor house was probably built late in the 16th century and rebuilt in 1619. The architect Thomas Garner restored the house in 1893 and made it his home until his death in 1906. Sir John Simon (1873–1954) bought the house in 1911, had a west wing added in 1921 and lived there until 1933.

Meanwhile, in 1086 there was a second manor recorded at Fritwell. It had six hides of land and its feudal overlord was Odo, Bishop of Bayeux. This manor later became known as Ormondscourt. In 1519 Richard Fermor, a merchant, acquired the Ormond manor. Richard remained at his house in Easton Neston and put the Ormond manor in the charge of his younger brother William Fermor who already owned the manor of

nearby Somerton. The Ormond manor remained in the Fermor family until the last member of the family, William Fermor, of Tusmore Park, died in 1828.

The Ormond manor house seems to have been at the southern end of the village. It was still standing when Fritwell was assessed for the hearth tax in 1655 but had been demolished by 1677, when a map of the village was made that showed no trace of it. Dovehouse Farm appears to have been built on its site, incorporating fragments of the old house. But by 1955 the farm had been renamed Lodge Farm.

The church of St. Olave was built between the two settlements sometime before 1103. The building was originally Norman, the north and south doorways and original chancel arch survive from this time.

Early in the 13th century the chancel was rebuilt and the bell-tower and south aisle and were added. The chancel retains two Early English Gothic lancet windows from this rebuilding. The Decorated Gothic north aisle was added in the late 13th or early 14th century and the Perpendicular Gothic clerestory was added to the nave in the 15th century.

In 1865 the church was restored and the bell tower was rebuilt under the direction of the Oxford Diocesan architect G.E. Street. He also had a new, wider chancel arch built and had the original Norman arch relocated against the north wall. In 1868 the square-headed Perpendicular Gothic east window of the chancel was moved to the north aisle and the present east window inserted in its place.

The Fermor family were Roman Catholics and throughout the 18th century they let the Ormond manor to fellow recusants. Fritwell's Roman Catholic population increased and was served by a priest visiting the village from the Fermor chapel at Tusmore. The Roman Catholic Relief Act was passed in 1791 and a Roman Catholic school had been opened in



St Olave's Church - present day, and before 1865

Fritwell by 1808. However, after 1817 the Catholic population declined and from 1854 no Catholics were recorded until 1897, when Thomas Garner converted to Catholicism and got permission for Mass to be said at the manor house.

The parish had a small number of Methodists by 1823, who had their own meeting house by 1829. No one knows whether this was a private house or a purpose-built chapel, but there was certainly a stone-built chapel by 1853 when the congregation numbered almost 100. The chapel was replaced in 1874 by the present building, which was still in use early in the 20th century but is now a private house.

By 1853 a stone-built chapel for a different branch of Methodism, the Methodist Reform Church, was being completed in Fritwell. In 1857 most Methodist Reform congregations merged with the Wesleyan Association, but the chapel in Fritwell was one of the minority who rejected the merger and together founded the Wesleyan Reform Union instead.

By 1878 non-conformists were said to be a third of the parish's population. A new Wesleyan Reform chapel was built in 1892 but thereafter both Methodist congregations decreased. The two chapels merged in 1920 and the combined congregation continues today as the Wesleyan Reform Methodist Chapel.

- Matthew Hathaway

Marj's Memories Cookery Lessons at the Grammar School

In the mid-forties when I went to St Edburg's Senior School (Bicester CofE), we didn't have a cookery classroom, so we went for Domestic Science lessons at the Grammar School, in an upstairs room, overlooking, what is now, the Courtyard. The boys also went there, next door, for woodwork and metal craft lessons.

The Domestic Science teacher was Miss Kingsnorth. She was a tall, slim lady with very high white headgear. She taught us (or tried to teach us) how to make such things as stew, pastry and cakes, and do washing and ironing. There were no washing machines in those days. We used flat irons to do the ironing, heated on the stove and tested by splashing a little water on. If it fizzled and disappeared quickly, that was good for linen and cottons, but when it stayed on longer she would say, "Just right for silks and woollies".

We enjoyed going there for these lessons. It was at the time that the Garth Park playing area opened to the public. We looked forward to going over on the swings and slides, often carrying our efforts with us before we went back to our school.

Not long after, Bicester CofE School had some new classrooms built; there was a Science Room, Sewing Room and a Domestic Science Room as well as modern classrooms. We had a new Domestic Science Teacher called Miss Evans.

Miss Kingsnorth was the Housekeeper for Mr Layton who lived in the big house to the right of the Regal Cinema. The house was later bought and lived in by Mr Albert Taylor of Taylor's Coaches; he bought the Chain of Office for the Chairman of the Council, still used by the Mayor to this day.

- Marjorie Dean MBE

Bygone Bicester (Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

10th May 1856

MAY DAY AT BUCKNELL - On Thursday, May the 1st, the villagers of Bucknell were entertained in a very pleasant manner by Mrs and the Misses Drake. Tea was provided for all the labourers and their families in the coach-house, which was tastefully decorated for the occasion.

The young people amused themselves after tea in a variety of old English games and a great number of prizes were distributed among the best players in the various sports. And sweetmeats, nuts, etc, were plentifully provided. Dancing was also kept up with much spirit in the coach-house.

The whole of the proceedings appeared to afford the highest enjoyment to all the guests, who will long remember their happy May day.

8th May 1896

THE WATERWORKS QUESTION - On Friday evening last, in the Council Chamber, Market Hill, an adjourned special meeting of the Bicester Urban District Council was held to consider the replies which the Clerk had received to certain enquiries which he had been directed to address to some nine or ten "neighbouring towns recently supplied with waterworks".

Councillor J.W. Hunt, Chairman, presided and seven councillors were present.

It will be remembered that the enquiries the Clerk was instructed to make were framed at the meeting of the council held on Friday the 17th April, and were as follows: 1) population, 2) system of waterworks, 3) distance water brought, 4) height of source above town, 5) cost of waterworks, 6) how cost provided for, 7) name and address of engineer, 8) how does

the system work.

These questions had been addressed to the clerks of the authorities of the following towns: Caversham, Brackley, Abingdon, Witney, Faringdon, Thame, Buckingham, Chipping Norton and Stony Stratford. All of whom had replied, and their respective answers were read and carefully considered.

8th May 1936

LOCAL RESIDENT BROADCASTING - Mr Sid G. Hedges' twelfth book on outdoor and indoor games, as well as his fifteenth book on swimming - "How Well Do You Swim?" (Methuen 3/6), appear this week.

Mr Hedges is broadcasting in June from the Midland Regional in the Children's Hour on Outdoor games. This will be his first Children's Hour talk, though he has been "on the air" something like a score of times before, with talks on swimming and travel.

20th May 1976

SHELL SEEK OIL AT DEPOT - Shell Oil have been given permission to search for oil at the Bicester Ordnance Depot.

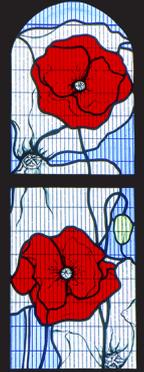
Oxfordshire County Council planning committee has given permission for a 160ft high drilling rig at the depot for 12 months. It was told by Mr Geoffrey Barlow, the county minerals officer, that drilling would go on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for three months, but noise from the drilling was not likely affect anyone living in the surrounding area.

Mr Barlow said after the meeting that Shell believed there was a 20 to one chance against finding oil.

Roll of Honour

This is the local man who died in the Great War, 100 years ago this month.

Private Gerald Judge, native of Ardley.
Died: 24th May 1916 Aged: 26 Served in: Royal Fusiliers



30 Years of BLHS Talk

As it was our 30th Anniversary and was also a Social Event, I didn't want to do a 1 - 1½ hour talk and spoil the evening! So I limited myself to speaking about how the society was formed and how we'd grown from an initial membership of around 10 to the current 110.

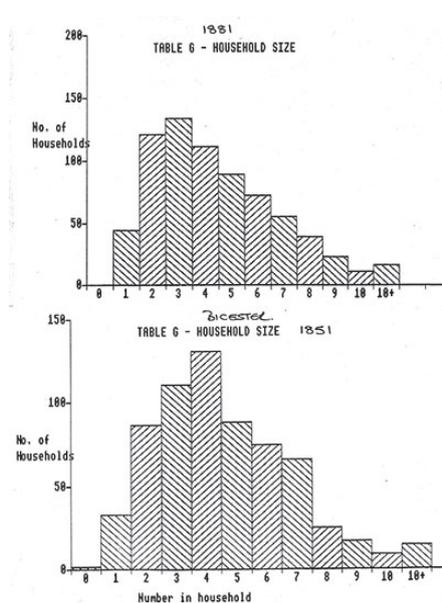
The story started in 1985 with an evening class, held in Bicester School, entitled "Town & Village Life in 19th Century Oxfordshire". There were about 14 people on the course and we analysed the 1851 census return for Bicester.

No portable laptop computers were available then and everything was transcribed onto small pieces of paper – a "pink slip" which was a form of record card – one slip per census entry – and this equated to over 3000 "pink slips" for Bicester!

We did start on the 1881 census but the number of people in the class had fallen to below ten and was deemed to be too low (by the authorities) and the evening class closed. But we'd done so much work on these censuses that we decided to form a small group to continue the work – and from that group Bicester Local History Society was born!

I showed the sort of results we obtained from all the data – and explained that when I presented the data as a talk I had to use an overhead projector with acetates that I'd prepared using my first ever computer – a BBC B+ with 128Kb of memory – how things have progressed since then in the way

we do presentations now. Needless to say, I do still have that computer (and the acetates!).



But I also mentioned that our Census work was never documented or published and that still needs to be rectified.

We held our first exhibition in 1987 (in the Methodist Church) and followed up with another in the following year.



At a Town Meeting in April 1986, it was unanimously agreed that

provision for a town museum or archive facility should be made in Bicester. During the 1987 Exhibition we collected over 200 signatures supporting the idea – and we still have the list. It's good to see that most of the people who signed are in fact still alive!!! At the time we engaged with O.C.C. and had discussions about the potential use of the Dovecote. And now some 30 years later we are involved in more discussions, this time with C.D.C. about using the Dovecote to tell the story about the Priory.

We held another exhibition in 2011, when amongst the many exhibits on display was one of the Anglo-Saxon skeletons excavated during the building of the new John Paul II Centre.

I briefly described some of the publications we have produced - books, leaflets and a DVD – with another DVD on the way.

I also gave some examples of the visits and days out we'd had over the years – White's of Appleton



(bellhangers), the bus museum at Long Hanborough and Broughton Castle to name but a few.

Cont...

Talks Update

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

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.

Monday 18th July

Martin Greenwood talks to us about **The Real Candleford Green** with a lively new story of Fringford, Flora Thompson's Candleford Green. Previously unseen letters from Flora and others add a very personal touch to the story.

Cont...

In 2004 we were given a room in the attic of the Garth and spent many hours cleaning the place up before storing some of our material up there. And it was in the grounds of Garth Park that the town fire-engine was discovered – and so started a restoration project culminating in having a completely restored fire-engine on display at the 2011 exhibition.



Some of us have had the opportunity of dabbling in a bit of archaeological work, the highlight for me being allowed to work on the Bryan House site, where, for a brief moment in time, we thought we'd

found the remains of St Edburg!



2009 saw the launch of the blhs.org.uk website. The queries that I receive via the "Contact" page never cease to surprise and at times amuse me!

Our walks programme, whether they've been around towns and villages or the further afield countryside walks have taken us to places we probably wouldn't have necessarily thought of going on our own. But it will be a long time before the tea we had after our visit to Hampton Gay is bettered!

And finally a miscellaneous mixture of events to recall – Christmas Tree decorating, stalls at the Bicester Big Lunches, celebrating 100 years of Bicester North railway and the anvil firing as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee – how will I ever forget that?!



I ended this brief summary of the history of the society and its involvement in local affairs by reading a report from the Bicester Advertiser, September 1987. The headline read: "The Big Debate – A Superstore for Bicester?" I'll say no more!!!

- Bob Hessian

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