

# Bicester Historian

Issue: 29 January 2017

The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society

## Another Great Xmas Tree Festival



Back in December St Edburg's Foundation once again held their annual Christmas Tree Festival in St Edburg's parish church. And once again the BLHS committee rose to the challenge of decorating a tree for the society.

In previous years we had concentrated on celebrating the history of Bicester and the area. But as 2016 was our 30th anniversary year we decided to celebrate that fact and look at the history of the society itself as our theme. So we chose to show our current membership as they were

30 years ago, along with some pictures of big events that the society has been involved in over the years.

We had a great response from members, many supplying old photographs for us to use (many of which are shown below), which were put into baubles to decorate the tree.

After the festival ended a lot of the members asked to buy their baubles from us and we decided to donate the money collected from that to the St Edburg's Foundation in support of the great work they do in restoring and promoting Bicester's oldest building.



- Matthew Hathaway



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### Dates For Your Diary

- Bicester in Old Photos Talk  
16th January - 7:30pm  
see page 5
- February Newsletter  
Submissions Deadline  
3rd February
- No Little Scandal to God or  
Man Talk  
20th February - 7:30pm  
see page 5

### AVAILABLE NOW!

Our new DVD, **Bicester's Buildings**, is on sale now. See the website for more details.



And our 2017 Calendar is still available through Coles Bookstore.

# Village History Kirtlington

Kirtlington village lies about 6 miles west of Bicester and the parish includes the hamlet of Northbrook.

The Portway is a pre-Roman road that runs parallel with the River Cherwell on high ground about 1 mile east of the river. It bisects the parish and part of it runs through the village as a short stretch of the A4095. Longer stretches form minor roads to Bletchington and Upper Heyford. The Roman road called Akeman Street also bisects the parish, running east-west just north of the village. A 4 mile minor road linking Kirtlington with Chesterton follows its course.

Kirtlington had two water mills on the River Cherwell. They are recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086, and in subsequent documents in 1240, 1538 and 1689. All documents after that refer to there being only one mill in the parish. The village also once had a horse mill.

The parish had small enclosures of farmland in the 13th century and 99 acres had been enclosed by 1476, but most of the parish was still farmed under an open field system. By 1750 the enclosed land totalled 900 acres, and the remaining common lands were enclosed in 1815.

The oldest visible parts of the present Church of England parish church of St Mary the Virgin include the early 12th century Norman arches that support the central bell tower and a tympanum, of the same date, that is now over the vestry door.

Beneath the floor of the chancel are the foundations of a former apse that also was built early in the 12th century. About 1250 the nave was rebuilt and north and south aisles were added. The transeptal Chapel of Our Lady, on the south side of the tower, may also be of the same date. The apse was replaced with a rectangular chancel late in the 13th century.

By 1716 the Lady Chapel was in ruins and Sir Robert Dashwood, 1st Baronet, had it converted into a family chapel and burial vault.

In 1770 the tower became unsafe

and was demolished, leaving just its arches between the nave and chancel. In about 1853 Sir Henry Dashwood, 5th Baronet, had the bell tower rebuilt by the Gothic Revival architect Benjamin Ferrey, in a Norman Revival style.

In 1877 Sir Henry and Lady Dashwood had the chancel restored by Sir George Gilbert Scott. At the same time the organ was installed in the Dashwood Chapel, obscuring a 1724 memorial to the first three Dashwood baronets and other members of the family.

In 1583 John Phillips, a draper, bequeathed the rental income from a house in Woodstock to employ a schoolmaster in Kirtlington. His bequest did not provide for a schoolhouse, so a tenement called Church House was used. In 1759 the school had to close because the house in Woodstock had decayed to the point that it was unfit to be let. But in 1766 the house was let on a repairing lease to George Spencer, 4th Duke of Marlborough, and by 1778 the school had reopened. The vicar and Sir James Dashwood, 2nd Baronet, were the governors, and it seems that from then on the Dashwoods, as well as the Phillips endowment, supported the school.

By 1808 two other schools had been founded in the village, and by 1814 one of them was a National School. In 1833 the three schools were effectively merged and in 1834 a purpose-built schoolhouse was opened. In 1947 it was reorganised as a junior and infants' school and in 1951 it became a voluntary aided school. It is now Kirtlington Church of England Primary School.

The village's annual festival is called the Lamb Ale. By 1679 it was an established tradition that would start the day after Trinity Sunday and last for two days. That year Thomas



St Mary the Virgin parish church

Blount and Josiah Beckwith wrote:

*“At Kidlington in Oxford-shire the Custom is, That on Monday after Whitson week, there is a fat live Lamb provided, and the Maids of the Town, having their Thumbs ty’d behind them run after it, and she that with her mouth takes and holds the Lamb, is declared Lady of the Lamb, which being dress’d with the skin hanging on, is carried on a long Pole before the Lady and her Companions to the Green, attended with Musick and a Morisco Dance of Men, and another of Women, where the rest of the day is spent in dancing, mirth and merry glee. The next day the Lamb is part bak’d, boyld and rost, for the Ladies feast, where she sits majestically at the upper end of the Table and her Companions with her, with musick and other attendants, which ends the solemnity.”* (It is generally considered that the reference to Kidlington was a mistake, and that Kirtlington was the correct location.)

Later the festival extended to a whole week, and in 1849 three special constables were sworn in “for the better preservation of peace and order at the ensuing Lamb Ale Feast”.

The custom died out early in the 1860s. But in 1979 Kirtlington Morris was formed and revived the tradition, in a modified form. Every year since, the Ale has been held at the end of May or in early June.

- Matthew Hathaway

# Bygone Bicester

(Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

## 31st January 1863

LOYAL COCKER FRIENDLY SOCIETY - The members and friends of this society sat down to their annual dinner at the Fox Inn, on Wednesday last, under the presidency of Mr W.B. Savins, and Mr Gessey, vice-chairman.

A very large party had assembled together, and justice was done to the good spread provided by Mr and Mrs Buswell. The Bicester Rifle Volunteer Band were present and added much to the enjoyment of the evening by their lively strains.

## 27th January 1904

THE WINDMILL - For several days the old wooden windmill, near the school at the east end of Charlton-on-Otmoor, had been in process of demolition, and on Monday last the post was thrown down, thus rendering the demolition quite complete.

The mill was too much out of order to justify a sufficient outlay required for its proper repair, and its owner, Mr Frank Pullin, carpenter, resolved to use the oak of which it was built for other purposes.

The demolition of the old mill has taken away a conspicuous object in the landscape at that end of the village.

## 3rd January 1947

FOOD GIFTS - Under the supervision of Mrs W.T. Hodgson, gifts of food, forming part of the consignments sent from Australia and South Africa, for distribution in the Ploughley rural area, were made to old-age pensioners and persons living alone, etc, in Fritwell, Somerton and Souldern. The delight and gratitude of the recipients has been most touching.

## 6th January 1989

CHURCH BID LIKELY TO GO AHEAD - Approval for a plan to sell a plot of land for development is likely to be given soon. The sale will enable the Roman Catholic church in Bicester to be improved.

Since last summer the Roman Catholic parishioners have been planning to sell the half acre site on which the old St Mary's school and hall stand off Piggy Lane.

A new St Mary's Roman Catholic primary school was finished in the mid-1960s and the old school and hall have been used by the parish and also hired out to a playgroup, boxing club and other organisations.

The buildings were finally vacated in the summer and since then the parish has been in discussion with the Charity Commissioners over the sale of the land.

The parish priest, Fr Aldo Tapparo, said: "There were complications with the Charity Commissioners over the trusts that held the land and buildings. The land could only be used for a church or presbytery, which of course we already have. But now I think it has been resolved and I expect the land will be sold by March."

It is expected the plot, which is not far from the town centre, will probably go for building, perhaps flats.

The money raised from the sale will be spent on the second phase of improvements to the Roman Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception.

Plans include the building of a chapel for weekday services and a function/parish room. Improvements have been made already to the presbytery next door.

Extensions to the church and renovations to the presbytery are expected to cost around £400,000.

Fr Tapparo said the parish had between 500 and 600 active members.

## Marj's Memories

### London Brick Company, Calvert

I worked at Calvert Brick Works from 1962 for 5 years. A lot of the employees had moved there from Bedfordshire with their families in the early 1900s and put down roots. Some of the older employees at the time had moved into the tied cottages when the clay was first worked. It was a regular occurrence for someone in the wages office to look up and say "there's our dad" and we would all look to see whose "dad" it was in the brickyard. LBC allowed men to work beyond retirement age, some into their eighties. Mr Will Hiron, from Bicester, was one. He had survived the First World War, the only one of 5 brothers to do so. I have happy memories of him coming to speak to me: it was good to see the men from Bicester.

There was an active social club on site that was well supported and a lot of fun was had on Saturday nights: talent competitions, dances and parties and, however amateur we were, we all joined in. They had cricket matches, a good football team and a summer fete with a lot going on, even bowling for the pig (a real pig on site).

The conditions were not good but LBC paid good

wages to their employees for the hard work they did. My memories are of a happy crowd, some living in the cottages on the estate and others from the surrounding villages and imported labour from hostels in Leighton Buzzard and Bedford; there were a lot of Italian employees at that time.

The clay was dug up from the knothole, leaving a terrific, deep crater, then transported on a conveyor belt which went through several processes of brick making and then the bricks were put into the arch shaped kilns where they were "burnt" for well over a week.

It was a regulation that when the knotholes had been worked and clay extracted, they were infilled, some with water (possibly 60 feet deep) - hence the lovely nature reserve and Greatmoor Sailing Lake in that area.

LBC bricks were distributed all over the country and a lot of us have lived in houses built with them. I remember seeing the invoices going out for dapple lights to be delivered to Kennedy Road where we bought our first house.

- Marjorie Dean MBE

# Roll of Honour

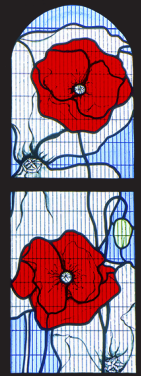
The following are the local men who died in the Great War, 100 years ago this month.

**Private Arthur John Lake**, of Souldern.

Died: 25<sup>th</sup> January 1917 Aged: 19 Served in: Worcestershire Regiment

**Lance Corporal William Henry Westbury**, of Souldern.

Died: 26<sup>th</sup> January 1917 Aged: 36 Served in: Royal Fusiliers



## Society News

- We raised £20 in December from the Christmas tree bauble donations and presented this to the St Edburg's Foundation.
- We are currently looking at Chipping Norton, Stanton St John and Oxford for our programme of walks this summer, as well as a World War One themed walk around Bicester. More news on those will follow once details have been finalised.
- The 2017 calendar we produced in conjunction with Coles Bookstore has been selling really well so it looks likely that it'll become a regular thing.
- Our Christmas social event at December's meeting went really well and the short film, made with some of the more humorous interview clips that weren't able to be used in our first DVD, proved really popular. We still have more footage that hasn't been used so we may do something similar for a future talk, although Father Christmas will probably be too busy to attend in person a second time!
- We are currently in the process of refreshing our website. We will be changing over to the new design sometime in February and are looking to have a lot of new content and sections added soon after. These include our archive catalogue, a grave index for St Edburg's churchyard and the cemetery, a more detailed look at the town's buildings and architecture, a much larger photo gallery with both old photos and
- ones of our society events, and much more besides. More news on that in the February newsletter.
- Some of you may have noticed some issues we have been having with the sound equipment at the monthly talks. The echo on the speaker's microphone has been so bad at times that we've ended up going without it in some instances. But we've investigated the issue with people from the Clifton Centre and hopefully it has now been resolved. The December meeting didn't have any problem but we will be keeping a close eye on it over the next few months.
- Our display in the library is due for a refresh so keep an eye out for that in the coming weeks.
- We are also working with the Bicester Advertiser to try and produce a weekly feature for the newspaper. Something along the lines of the Bygone Bicester feature we have in this newsletter each month. Hopefully that will help to draw attention to the society and attract in some new members, particularly from the newer residents who don't even know we exist. It'll also give us space to promote our activities and any issues we get involved with, so keep an eye out for that too.

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## Talks Update

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

### Monday 16th January

Chairman Bob Hessian shows us **Bicester in Old Photographs.**

### Monday 20th February

Chris Day gives us a talk entitled **No Little Scandal to God or Man.**

### Monday 20th March

Trevor Rowley talks about **Oxfordshire Castles.**

## Drovers' Roads in Oxfordshire Talk

Tim Healey's excellent talk in November made us all eager to go in search of an old drovers' road.

These roads, also called green lanes (and sometimes green tunnels), were a cat's cradle of routes drovers used to move livestock on epic trails across the country. Tim alerted us to some telltale signs of these ancient routes that we might come across.

First, an inn situated at a lonely spot (drovers avoided villages and towns in fear of their livestock being rustled or contaminated).

Second, a 'drovers' marker' – an unexpected group of Scots pine trees planted by the drovers on ridgeways (Scots pines grow fast).

Third, a name such as 'Coldharbour' given to roads or buildings, usually situated outside towns. 'Coldharbour' was the name of a resting point or shelter for drovers – and as the name suggests, no refreshments or comfort offered!

Fourth, unusual pub names (e.g. the Welsh Pony in Oxford) – drovers rode ponies to herd their livestock.

And fifth, roads with very wide green verges, seemingly for no apparent reason.

In Elizabethan times, because of the great fear of vagabonds and vagrants, laws were passed stipulating that drovers had to apply for special licences, which could only be claimed by men over the age of 30, who owned their own home. Drovers became heroic figures, travelling through wind and rain, and sleeping with their animals under the stars.

They were hired on contract by farmers to move livestock from the farms to the large markets of London (Smithfield) and other key trading locations. Tim told us that in the heyday of drovers (1700-1850) as many as 30,000 cattle per year were moved from the Welsh counties of Camarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Cardiganshire to London, and other locations in the south.

A lot of the routes to London converged on Barnet, where huge livestock fairs were held. The main objective of these Welsh drovers would be to safely transport their cattle from Wales to Barnet, paying as few tolls as they could, avoiding towns and villages, and losing as few cattle as possible.

Working six days a week (not

Sundays), drovers would cover an average of twelve miles a day, and a large herd of cattle could span over half a mile in length, requiring a dozen or so drovers on horseback to steer them on their way. Drovers would also use dogs (the Welsh drovers used corgis).

To withstand these long journeys, the cattle were shod. We learned that the cattle from Wales were very thin and the long journey was used to fatten them up en route, before reaching their final destination. The wide green verges of the drovers' roads enabled the livestock to graze during the day and during the night, and smaller drove roads would lead from the main route down to watering places for the livestock in valleys.

The demise of drovers (around 1850) was largely due to the introduction of the railways, which became the main mode of transport for livestock. Today, drovers and their way of life still conjure up rather heroic and romantic images, respected for their independence and skill in transporting vast numbers of livestock all over the country.

- Sally Dexter

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