



Issue: 41 January 2018

# Bicester Historian

The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society

## Another Successful Calendar

A few years ago we produced a calendar to celebrate 2016 as the society's 30th anniversary. This proved so popular with the public that we were asked by Coles Books to produce another one for 2017.

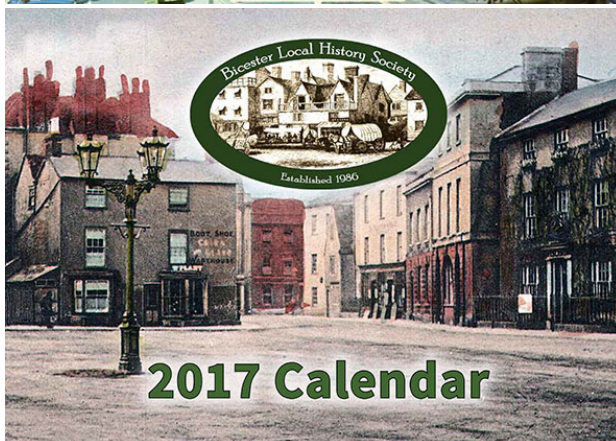
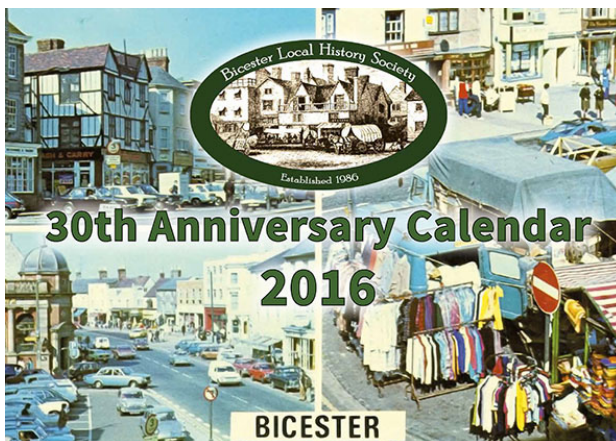
Coles took over the task of getting it printed, and all the initial costs, and then sold them exclusively through their shop, with a discount price for BLHS members.

They managed to sell 150 copies to non-members, with very little advertising, and so decided to ask us to do another one for 2018.

The latest one has been on sale since late November and has now almost sold out.

Its gratifying to know that they are always so popular, and we look forward to producing many more.

- Matthew Hathaway



## 2018 Calendar



### Contents

Marj's Memories . . . . .	2
Bygone Bicester . . . . .	2
Village History . . . . .	4
Roll of Honour . . . . .	5
Talks Update . . . . .	6
Canal Communities Talk . . . . .	6

### Dates For Your Diary

Westgate Excavations Talk  
15th January - 7:30pm  
see page 6

February Newsletter  
Submissions Deadline  
2nd February

Oxford University Talk  
19th February - 7:30pm  
see page 6

### AVAILABLE NOW!

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



# Marj's Memories

A Poem I Learned at School

## "If" by Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too:  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim,  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same:  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,  
And never breathe a word about your loss:  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much:  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

- Marjorie Dean MBE

# Bygone Bicester

(Taken from the Bicester Advertiser)

## 20th January 1882

OFF WITH THE OLD - It has often been said that a cow which makes the most fuss at losing her calf is the one likely to forget it soonest.

About seven weeks since a man living not twenty miles from Bicester, much nearer to Buckingham, lost his wife; and he mourned her departure with much (apparent) sorrow, as she had left him with four or five motherless bairns, and his sad lot was the subject of much commiseration.

He is, however, about to heal up his wounds by taking to his arms and hearthstone a "dashing young widow with three or four strings to her bow."

Since the death of her husband she has been the subject of many a pang borne with exemplary patience; but now an eligible offer presents itself she has determined to be "off with the old love" and "on with the new." Beauty is said to be "skin deep only," and it seems as though love goes very little deeper than their good looks.

The Board of Guardians gave the widow three pairs of shoes for her children for the sake of "getting rid of her;" but who will be surprised to hear after a while that this unseemly and untimely marriage has been the means of creating further responsibilities for the ratepayers?

## 10th January 1908

BACHELOR'S BALL - The annual bachelor's ball took place on Wednesday evening at the Corn Exchange.

Owing to unfortunate circumstances the attendance this year was somewhat curtailed, but, nevertheless, a very enjoyable party, numbering between seventy and eighty, were present and a capital time was spent.

The Oxford Hungarian Band supplied the music in capital style. The decoration of the Corn Exchange was entrusted to Mr H. Jackson, who, with the aid of patriotic flags, mirrors, curtains and evergreens, transformed it

into a capital ballroom.

The billiard and market rooms were utilised for the supper, the catering being entrusted to Mr and Mrs Drover, who had the assistance of a competent chef, and, needless to say, everything was carried out with perfect satisfaction. The retiring rooms were found on the first floor, and were comfortably furnished with easy chairs and loungers.

The secretaries, Mr C.E. Shouler and Mr Arch. Busby efficiently acted as MC's, and dancing was kept up vigorously until the expiration of the license extension at 4am on Thursday.

## 8th January 1932

HEALTH OF BICESTER - The annual report of the Medical Officer of Health for the South Oxfordshire Combined Districts, Dr W.H. Hill, has now been issued for 1930.

The number of inhabited houses in Bicester at the end of that year is returned at 867 (Henley had 2017; Thame 874; Wheatley 342).

The births in Bicester totalled 57, and the deaths 44, the birth rate per 1000 being 18.7, and the death rate 14.5.

The water supply is reported as "constant and abundant, and of excellent quality; there are still a number of houses supplied from private wells".

The district has been very free from notifiable infectious diseases. No action has been taken under the Prevention of Tuberculosis (Article 5 or 6); no action has been taken by the council under the Public Health Act (Section 62) and none has appeared to be necessary.

In the Bicester rural district the Registrar General's estimate of population in 1930 was 9403, an increase over 1921 of 816.

The births numbered 175, and the deaths 106; the

birth rate being 18.6 per thousand and death rate 12.0.

The number of inhabited houses at the end of 1930 was 2503 (Crowmarsh 1376; Culham 685; Goring 901; Headington 1351; Henley 3251; Thame 1702).

The district is supplied with water from springs, deep wells and shallow wells. Springs, usually collected in small reservoirs and piped to standpipes form the chief supply at Godington, Hethe, Upper and Lower Heyford, Newton Purcell, Piddington, Somerton and Souldern.

There are deep wells at Bucknell, Islip, Stratton Audley and Launton. At Bucknell and Islip (privately owned) the water is pumped to tanks, whence it is distributed by gravitation.

Blackthorn is supplied partly by spring and partly by shallow wells at the margin of the outcrop. There are also deep wells here, which however yield a saline water unfit for drinking purposes. A bore sunk in the higher ground is fitted with a windmill pump and provides a supply for the village.

Ancott depends to some extent on the collection and storage of rainwater, but is also supplied from a pond, the water from which passes through a primitive gravel filter.

### 25th January 1957

WHEN THE "BELL" HAD TENT BEDS AND FOUR-POSTERS - When the contents of the Bell Inn, Sheep Street, one of Bicester's oldest hostelries, were sold in 1846 the inn had gas fittings throughout, and eight bedrooms were equipped with tent beds or four-posters, and some straw mattresses.

These facts were revealed by Miss A.P. Deeley, of Merton, who was speaker at a meeting of the Bicester Local History Circle on Thursday evening last week. The subject of her talk was "Household Deeds and their importance in the study of local history".

She told her audience that at one time it was necessary to keep all legal deeds, but the Law and Property Act of 1926 changed the position, so now it is only necessary for the owner of property to be able to prove his title for the past twenty years.

Much local history was lost when old deeds were thrown away. Miss Deeley appealed to householders to preserve their deeds and pointed

out that in Oxfordshire they would be accepted either by the County Architect or at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. At both County Hall and the Bodleian deeds could be deposited, or given outright.

Miss Deeley illustrated her talk by reference to deeds that Hall's Oxford Brewery deposited in the Bodleian relating to two Bicester inns, the "Bell" and the "Star". The site of the Bell can be traced back to the 17th century when it was a Derby freehold. At one time it was known as the "Rising Sun".

The meeting was amused at the rapid social promotion of Robert

Maynard, of the Star, from publican in Bicester to gentleman at Weston-on-the-Green.

Miss Deeley showed some typical deeds and explained their chief features. Fines and recoveries, for instance, were used to break entail. Fictitious cases were often brought in the Court of Common Pleas. Such cases were "full of stooges", most notably a fictitious character called Hugo Hunt whose existence should be known to the amateur searcher of old documents.

At the close of the talk a vote of thanks to Miss Deeley was proposed by Mr R.A. Chard.

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# TEXAS

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## BICESTER

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The new Bunnings store in Launton Road occupies the site originally built for Texas. Advert taken from the Bicester Advertiser - January 1989

## Village History Souldern

The village of Souldern lies about half way between Bicester and Banbury, and forms the north-east corner of the BLHS area.

The name Souldern, or “Sulthorn” as it was earlier known, is derived from the Old English “Sulh-þorn”, meaning “Thornbush in a gully”.

Early in the 12th century Jordan de Say, a Norman nobleman who owned the manor of Kirtlington, seems also to have owned the manor of Souldern. He married his daughter, Eustache, to Hugh FitzOsbern, by whom the manor became part of the honour of Richard’s Castle in Herefordshire. Hugh

and Eustache’s sons took their mother’s surname de Say, and overlordship of the Honour of Richard’s Castle, including Souldern, remained with the family until about 1196, when their grandson, Hugh de Say, died leaving Richard’s Castle to his daughter Margaret. She married three times and the castle eventually passed to the heirs of her second husband, Robert Mortimer. The Mortimers kept the castle until Hugh Mortimer died in 1304, leaving it to his daughter Joan. Joan married twice and with her second husband, Richard Talbot, had a son, John, who was recorded as overlord of Souldern in 1346.

By 1196 Hugh de Say, grandson of Hugh FitzOsbern, had transferred lordship of the manor of Souldern to his brother-in-law, Thomas de Arderne. By 1279 the Ardernes were mesne lords, collecting rent from the de Lewknor family. By 1307 the de Lewknors had conveyed Souldern to the Abberbury family of Donnington, Berkshire. Sir Richard Abberbury, knight of the shire for Oxfordshire in 1373 and 1387, granted lands at Souldern to both Donnington Hospital and a house of Crutched Friars at Donnington. Sir Richard’s nephew, another Richard Abberbury, inherited the remainder. The younger Richard seized the Crutched Friars’ land at Souldern and granted it to William de la Pole, 1st Duke of Suffolk, in 1448. The remainder of Richard’s land at Souldern passed to his nephew Sir Richard Arches, MP for Buckinghamshire. Souldern was then inherited by his daughter, Joan, and her husband, Sir John Dynham. When their son, John Dynham, 1st Baron Dynham, died in 1501, Souldern manor was divided into four parts which remained in separate hands until the 1590s.

One part passed to Thomas Arundell, of Lanherne, Cornwall, whose mother was a Dynham, and remained in the Arundell family until Sir John Arundell sold it to John Stutsbury, Robert Weedon and his son, John Weedon, who together already owned one of the other



Church of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary - 1906

parts. Robert married Stutsbury’s daughter and by the time he died in 1598 Robert had acquired a third part. In 1604 John Weedon acquired the fourth and final part of Souldern by quitclaim, eventually reuniting the manor after just over a century of division.

The Stutsbury and Weedon families were recusants and during the English Civil War the Parliamentarians confiscated the Weedons’ estates. After the English Restoration the Crown restored the estates, which then stayed in the family until John Weedon died in 1710. John left his manor to Samuel Cox, the infant grandson of Richard Kilby, of Souldern. The Cox family lived in Farningham, Kent, and were largely absentee landlords. In the 1860s Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Snead Cox, of Broxwood, Herefordshire, was listed as lord of the manor of Souldern, but thereafter the lordship was allowed to lapse.

John Stutsbury was recorded as a recusant in 1577 and 1592. John Weedon and his wife were fined for recusancy in 1603 and the Weedons were said to have mortgaged land to a house of Benedictine nuns in Dunkirk. The Kilby family were recusants and were said to have mortgaged land to the Benedictine Douai Abbey. The Cox family were also Roman Catholics. The number of recusants recorded in Souldern was nine in 1643, 21 in 1676, 19 in 1690 and 25 in 1703. for the remainder of the 18th century the number fluctuated between 10 and 14.

The manor-house had a Roman Catholic chapel hidden in the attic. But, with no resident priest, they would have relied on visiting clergy to celebrate Mass. In 1778 Parliament passed the Papists Act and in 1781 Souldern’s hidden chapel ceased to be used. The attic chapel was used again from 1852 until 1869 when it was succeeded by Saint Joseph’s chapel, which the Gothic Revival architect Charles Hansom created by adding a brick extension to convert the manor house’s stone-

built coach house. These developments helped to revive Souldern's Roman Catholic community which by the end of the 19th century comprised about nine families.

The parish church of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary originally dates back to the 12th century. The church was enlarged and altered at various times between about 1200 and 1500. The mediaeval chancel fell into disrepair in the 18th century and was demolished after 1775. In 1896 the Gothic Revival architect Ninian Comper rebuilt the chancel and in 1906 G.F. Bodley dismantled and rebuilt the Norman tower and tower arch.

From 1161 until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 the Benedictine Eynsham Abbey owned the advowson of the parish. After 1623 John Williams, Bishop of Lincoln, granted it to St John's College, Cambridge.

The parish had a rectory that was built before 1638 and had fishponds well-stocked with carp by 1723. The poet William Wordsworth stayed there in 1820. Afterwards he wrote the sonnet A Parsonage in Oxfordshire, and in another sonnet called the house "this humble and beautiful parsonage". In 1890 this historic house was demolished and replaced with a new one designed by the Gothic Revival architect E.G. Bruton.

Souldern Mill is on Ockley Brook, just west of the village. The oldest known record of it is from 1279. By the latter part of the 17th century there were two mills, but the second mill did not survive. The mill was independent of Souldern Manor, and being on the county and parish boundary with Aynho it may have served both villages. A watermill between the two villages was still working in 1920.

The parish's open field system of farming was ended at a relatively early date. Early in the 17th century the lord of the manor wished to terminate all common land rights but the freeholders opposed him and the case went to court. The judge advised the parties to accept

the arbitration of the Recorder of Banbury, Sir Thomas Chamberlayne, who ruled that the parish be "measured, divided and inclosed". The parish was duly surveyed and in 1613 the division and awarding of land was ratified by the Court of Chancery.

Before enclosure much of the parish was arable, but afterwards farmers converted the major part of their land to pasture and meadow, apparently to minimise the amount of tithes that they had to pay. Most of the conversion was by sowing sainfoin, which by 1700 had doubled the value of the land. The good pasture supported the development of cheese-making in the parish. Early in the 20th century up to 15 cheese-makers were employed at the manor house.

Souldern's economy was unusually diverse for a village. In the 17th century it included two tailors, a weaver and a mercer. At a later date there were three tailors and a milliner. At one time Souldern had three lace-making schools and in 1851 there were more than 30 lace-makers in the parish, but the trade declined towards the end of the 19th century.

Souldern's first purpose-built village school was paid for by William and James Minn and opened in 1816. In 1820 Sarah Westcar died, leaving £200 to be invested for the school to pay the salary of a National School master. The School was affiliated to the National Society for Promoting Religious Education by 1847.

The school eventually outgrew its premises, and in 1851 James Minn died leaving land for a new school building and cottages for two teachers. These were completed in 1856. After 1871 the school was enlarged again and a new house added for the schoolmaster. In 1930 it was reorganised as a junior school, with senior pupils being sent to Fritwell. By 1951 it was a voluntary controlled school and by 1954 the number of pupils had declined to 17. It has since closed.

- Matthew Hathaway

## Roll of Honour

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

**Shoeing Smith Ernest Walter Pitts**, of Bardwell Terrace, Bicester.

Died: 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1918    Aged: 38    Served in: Royal Engineers Training Depot

**Corporal Charles George Colton**, of Bicester.

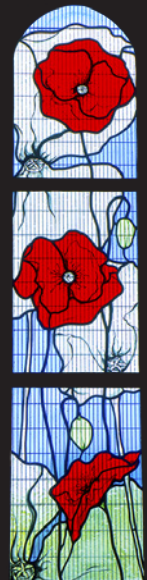
Died: 13<sup>th</sup> January 1918    Aged: 28    Served in: Royal West Surrey Regiment

**Lieutenant Francis Harry Varney Wise**, of Somerton.

Died: 13<sup>th</sup> January 1918    Aged: 23    Served in: Royal Flying Corps

**Lance Corporal Alfred Drake**, native of Fritwell.

Died: 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1918    Aged: 46    Served in: Military Police Corps



## Talks Update

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

### Monday 15th January

We have Ben Ford's talk on  
**Excavations at the Westgate.**

### Monday 19th February

Chris Day talks to us about the  
**History of Oxford University.**

### Monday 19th March

BLHS member Pat Snelson gives us **A Window into Bicester's Architectural History.**

## Canal Communities Talk

On Monday 18th December Martin Buckland came to talk to us about canals, canal people, and his experiences in helping on the Wiltshire & Berkshire Canal. He started by explaining that a canal is a man-made waterway, it could either be made completely from scratch or by developing an existing river system.

Canals came into their own during the industrial revolution, when more and more people were living in towns and working in factories, and a cheap form of mass transit was required to move the large amount of goods and raw materials that they required. But they actually date back a lot farther.

Way back in the 6th century BC canals were seen by the Chinese as a way of moving things relatively easily. But much later the Romans brought them to Britain. Fosse Dyke and the Exeter Ship Canal are both examples of early canal systems. But where canals really started was with the Bridgewater Canal, built by the Duke of Bridgewater to export coal from his mines.

One of our local unsung heroes, known worldwide, was William Smith, an uneducated man who got involved in the construction of the Somerset Coal Canal. He noticed when the channel was being dug that there were various bands of earth, stone coal and things. He called these strata and later went on to survey the strata of the whole country.

Whether you owned your own boat or just crewed it, it was usually a family affair. With the parents and children all working and living onboard. Living accommodation was cramped to say the least, usually a single room at the back of the boat, 6 feet wide by 8 feet long. At Braunstone three generations of the Nurser family built and decorated narrowboats for many years.

Canals were originally known as the Navigations, so those that dug them were called the navigators, which became shortened to navvies. They were tough, hard working men who were paid piecework and so had to move as much earth as possible.

The Wiltshire & Berkshire Canal started construction and it took fifteen years for the navvies to dig through as far as Abingdon. The navvie families would move along as they built the canal. But behind them the canal was already starting to be used, which created new jobs for boatmen, lock keepers, warehousemen, etc. It is now possible to trace back family names and see how each generation moved further and further along the canal, as it was opened up and the new employment opportunities were created.

As the people were always on the move it wasn't always easy to make use of local amenities like schools and healthcare.

Health was a big issue because the canal was the only source of water and, even after boiling, it was still pretty unsanitary. A nurse called Mary Ward took it upon herself to do something about it so she based herself at Stoke Bruern and administered to anyone passing who needed it.

- Matthew Hathaway

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