

Festival Success



On Saturday 16th June we were invited by Cherwell District Council, as part of their ongoing plans to promote Bicester's heritage, to help them open the old dovecote, in Old Place Yard, to the public as part of the Bicester Festival. So we set up a small display on the history of the site and the Priory that once stood on it.

Despite being a bit out of the way and separated from the main festivities in Sheep Street and Market Square, we still had a fair amount of interest. Many

people passing by took the opportunity to see inside the dovecote itself and take a closer look at our display.

Some people were also quite interested in hearing about Cherwell's plan for the site. Although the heritage aspect of that is continually evolving as they put together their Heritage Lottery Fund bid, it does focus around preserving and renovating the dovecote, to open it to the public as a small display space to tell the story of the Priory and its influence on the town.

- Matthew Hathaway



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Dates For Your Diary

- Wireless War Secrets Talk**
16th July - 7:30pm
see page 6
- Open Air Museum Visit**
22nd July
- August Newsletter Submissions Deadline**
3rd August
- Chesterton Countryside Walk**
5th August
- Aynho Countryside Walk**
19th August

AVAILABLE NOW!

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



21st July 1882

CHARGE OF ATTEMPTED SUICIDE - William Bowerman, residing at Launton, and formerly of Bicester, was brought up in custody to the Magistrates' Chamber, Bicester, before W.W.M. Dewar, Esq., on Wednesday last, charged with attempting to commit suicide by drowning himself.

Mary Heritage, housekeeper to Mr Thomas Sansom, landlord of the Fox and Hounds Inn, said: Prisoner lodges at Mr Sansom's house, and has done so for the last five or six years. He got up at about five o'clock this morning and went downstairs. Witness got up at about a quarter past six, and looking out of the window saw the prisoner looking into the well. Went down to him and asked him to have a cup of tea.

Prisoner followed witness as far as the door, but when she had poured out the tea found that he had not followed her into the house. Went to look for him and when she got to the door she found he was getting into the well. By the time she was there he had both legs in. Went to him and held him up till Sansom came to her assistance. They got him out, and she went into the house. PC Sirman was passing at the time and took him into custody.

Last Monday prisoner was in a very low state, and witness removed the razors from his room. The week before he talked of doing away with himself. Prisoner had been ill, and she had heard he had received 12 shillings a week for the last five or six weeks.

Stephen Sirman, police constable, stationed at Launton, said he was passing the Fox and Hounds beerhouse, at about half-past six in the morning, and heard the last witness screaming. She was in the passage at the time, and he asked what was the matter. They told him Bowerman had been trying to drown himself, and that he must be taken away. Prisoner was going upstairs at the time, with his shoes and bottom of his trousers wet. Called him back and charged him with attempting to commit suicide by drowning himself. Prisoner made no reply. Searched him, but found no knife or anything by which to injure himself. Brought him into Bicester, and searched him again. Found upon him three half-sovereigns and a gold watch.

Remanded till the petty sessions, on Friday week.

10th July 1908

AN INMATE'S COMPLAINT - Robert Lang, who with his wife and family, has for some time past been an inmate of the Workhouse, appeared before the Bicester Board of Guardians and said he had to ask their advice as to what he ought to do.

He came to the house to prevent himself from being locked up as he had nowhere to take his children, but it now appeared that he was wrong in doing this, as his wife had been put on reduced diet, and his children were struck and always wrong. He did not know what to do. He thought before now the Board would have got a cottage for him as he had been there twelve months. He was not idle, or a drunkard, and had always been a hardworking man. Sickness and family troubles had brought him to the house.

The Chairman: "It is not our business to find you a cottage."

Mr W. George: "Do you insinuate they are punished when they ought not to be?"

Lang said he was told that the youngest child was smacked the previous day for no offence, by the Matron.

Mr George: "Perhaps she deserved it."

Lang answered that he did not know whether such was the case. They were accused of being very unruly and disrespectful children, but they never had that character before.

The Master said he never knew a more destructive lot of children in his life. Lang's wife had no control over them, and only the other day he had to have the plumbers in to put in a pipe they had wrenched out.

The Chairman remarked that some time ago Lang had leave to go out to see if he could obtain work, and find a house, and Mr Chinnery suggested that the man should go out and have another trial.

The Master said he was going to change the man's diet, and put him on the proper one. He only made a few beds and did no work.

The Chairman then pointed out to the man that he and his wife had been having extra diet as a privilege.

Lang said he was willing to work and had never refused to do a day's work, but he had nowhere to keep his children.

The Chairman said there was a strict diet they could put the man on, and intimated that the Inspector recommended them to put anyone on it who was fond of being in the house. There was no punishment diet.

The matter was allowed to drop.

29th July 1932

BICESTER'S COLOURFUL CARNIVAL - Bicester held a carnival yesterday with all success. The Weather God at first set his face against it and ordered rain for the day, so it drizzled miserably from an early hour with persistence till 5:30pm.

What was to be done? To be or not to be? Boldly the committee decided against postponement and, as if by magic, fancily dressed folk appeared from nowhere; decorated cars nosed round each corner of the town and not long elapsed before a procession was in course of formation under the guiding charge of Chief Marshal E.V. Charles (in Oriental costume) and a very fine, colourful and ingenious parade wound its way serpentine through the Bicester streets.

Quite a large crowd watched the spectacle and hugely enjoyed it. The police were most helpful all the time.

CROWNING THE QUEEN

What would a carnival be without a Queen, the regal point of interest, and the reigning spirit of the time? A monarch had therefore been chosen for the occasion and Miss Nellie Hawtin was a smiling attractive sovereign in her crown of gold, studded with jewels; a white dress with gold braid, blue cloak and white fur collar.

She carried a bouquet, and her pretty maids of honour looked delightful in dresses of various hues, lent by the County School, with chaplets of flowers on their heads; each maid carrying a posy. These sprightly attendants

were Jean and Mary Goble, Ruby Grimsley, Betty Lane, Gladys Jackson, Edith Evans, Myrtle Metcalfe and Esme Harris.

This ceremony took place at the Fox Corner and Councillor G. Goble, with a few appropriate words, introduced Mrs Ruck-Keene, who duly did the crowning, and was presented with pink carnations by Miss Kathleen Goble.

The queen's car was charming in the extreme with its delicate pink hangings, posies and throne.

MEDLEY IN THE TUN ROOM

In singles, pairs and groups those taking part in the parade came to the Tun Room where the marshals and judges were awaiting them. A bright spectacle of motley was here seen, and there gathered so heterogenous a myriad of mummers that if petrified or waxed they would have been not unfitted to a Madame Tussaud's.

Here a savage Zulu, more or less direct from his native wilds and in war paint, which was not printer's ink, was in conversation with a dainty Zuluess. Mexicans, Indians and soldiers mounted, clowns on foot and V.A.D. nurses took the collecting boxes round.

One by one motor tableaux sailed slowly and with grace upon the scene, sporting their streamers and flags and many tokens of ingenious and original thought. A land yacht, which in its everyday life is a motor car, but had been magically transformed for marine travel, anchored cheek by jowl, with the mainbrace spliced, near a portable model kitchen, complete with all fittings, where a chef was busy preparing dishes for one of the strangest menus that possibly the wit of man (or woman) has yet devised.

"Say it with music" urged a placard fronting the turnout of the Legion Band, and round the slogan danced painted clefs, bars, minims and quavers. Another tableau, with Mr L. Evans in charge of the Boy Scouts, advertised the B.U.F.S. annual parade on Sunday next and the sports on the following day.

The tableau of the Bicester V.A.D. was particularly happy in its scheme, representing Florence Nightingale, of Crimean War nursing fame, and the nursing service in the Great War.

The Legion Band played in its best style.

The judges were Admiral and Mrs Ruck-Keene, Major and Mrs Coker, Mrs Rashleigh, Dr and Mrs Montgomery, Dr Holmes, Mr and Mrs G.E. Grainger, Mrs and Miss Tubb, and the following from Oxford, Mr R.A. McCulloch, Mr E.G. Buckman and Mr E.R. Morgan.

The Bicester and Brackley Fire Brigades turned out in efficient style, and the old local manual said it was 218 years old.

12th July 1957

SHELWELL MONSTERS - A couple of monster eels in Shelswell Park lake came to the end of their slippery careers on Sunday when they were caught by local angling brothers Ron and Gerald Waddup.

The eels measured 5ft and 4ft 6ins, and the largest weighed over 5lbs. Both were caught on a three-pound line, and the 5ft monster resisted half-an-hour before it was landed.

Both eels had been hooked in the past but got away. Proof of this came when Ron and Gerald gutted their catch. They found 11 old hooks in the biggest eel, and 6 in its companion.



First stop, next to Folly Bridge



Caudwell's Castle, on Folly Bridge Island (built in 1849)

Grandpont Walk

On Sunday 8th July a small group of us braved the heatwave and headed off to Oxford for the first of our annual programme of guided walks. Starting from the Head of the River pub we were taken around the historic features of Grandpont by Liz Woolley, who many of you will know from the numerous talks she has given us over the years.

The walk itself was very interesting, and it was surprising to see so much crammed into such a quiet area of Oxford. From Salter's boatyard and Friar Bacon's study, via Oxford's first railway station and football ground, to the waterworks and pumping station that now make up the open air swimming pool and South Oxford Community Centre.

For those of you that missed it Liz does do the guided walk, and many others, for members of the public on a regular basis, and we strongly recommend that you tag along to one, although maybe when the weather is a bit cooler!

See her website, www.lizwoolley.co.uk, for details.

- Matthew Hathaway

Roll of Honour

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

Sergeant John Howard Grimsley, of King's End, Bicester.

Died: 15th June 1918 Aged: 23 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private William Robert Robbins, of Souldern.

Died: 15th June 1918 Aged: 19 Served in: Ox & Bucks Light Infantry

Private Thomas Franklin, of Oddington.

Died: 16th June 1918 Aged: 25 Served in: Royal Fusiliers

Sergeant Lionel Allan Pratt, of Kirtlington.

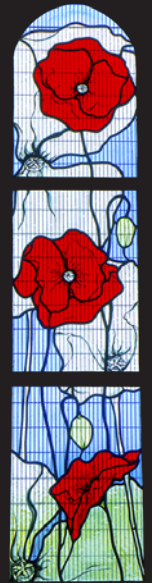
Died: 23rd June 1918 Aged: 28 Served in: Royal Army Medical Corps

Private H. H. Davis, of Kirtlington.

Died: 26th June 1918 Aged: 32 Served in: Army Service Corps

Private John Wyatt, of Bucknell.

Died: 29th June 1918 Aged: 31 Served in: Sherwood Forresters



AGM Notice

Our AGM is on Monday 17th September at 7:30pm at the Clifton Centre, Ashdene Road, Bicester. If you would like to add an item to the agenda or make a nomination for the committee (or find out more about committee membership or membership of our volunteers groups), please contact Chairman, Bob Hessian (01869 350662) or chairman@blhs.org.uk by 3rd September.

Railways in Oxford Talk

For our June talk we again welcomed Liz Woolley, this time to tell us about the history of the railway in Oxford.

After a brief introduction on the beginnings of the national railway network in general, she went on to explain that the Great Western Railway line from London reached Steventon, just outside Didcot in 1838. A bill was presented to parliament in 1837 that proposed a small branch-line from there to Oxford, but it had to go through several revisions before it was finally passed in 1843. The original route was to come in to the east of the River Thames and terminate close to Magdalen Bridge. This route would have cut through the village of Iffley and had a lot of local opposition, so it was rejected.

A second bill was put forward the following year, but this was objected to by the University, fearing for the morals of its students when provided with easy access to London. So the proposed route was moved to the west side of the river and planned to terminate close to Folly Bridge. An addition to this third bill allowed University officials to patrol the station, which removed the University's objection and helped it to finally be approved. Work on the new line started almost immediately, and it was opened to the public on 12th June 1844, to much excitement.

The line came along what is now Marlborough Road, with the station located around the junction with



Rewley Road Station in 1914



Western Road. A single track then continued north to the

riverbank, where there was a jetty and crane to load and unload river barges.

In 1850 the line branched off at Hinksey and was extended north to Banbury, and eventually to Birmingham. Then, in 1851, the London & North Western Railway opened its line to Oxford which came in from the north and terminated at Rewley Road, on the site of what had been Rewley Abbey. It was planned to open the new station on the same day as the opening of the Great Exhibition in London, 1st May 1851, and the engineers of the exhibition building, Fox & Henderson, were commissioned to build the station on the plan of the exhibition building. Unfortunately delays in acquiring the land meant that the building was not completed in time and a temporary station, further up the line, had to be used instead. The Rewley Road station then opened three weeks later.

The London & North Western line and station became part of the London, Midland & Scottish Railway Company in 1923 and the station was eventually closed to passengers in 1951. After it was closed to freight in the 1980s it was sold and became a tyre depot, before being dismantled in 1999, to make way for the Said Business School, and relocated to the Buckinghamshire Railway Museum.

Although the station has gone, the swing bridge that spanned a short navigation cut which connected the River Thames with the Oxford Canal, still exists. Badly in need of preservation, it sits just to the north of the old station site, in the middle of a modern housing development. Cranked by hand it would pivot around and connect the tracks on both sides of the canal, only being opened when needed to allow boats to pass.

In 1852 the Grandpont station, now rather inconveniently located, was replaced with a new passenger station on the main line, immediately adjacent to the L&NW station. It continued as a goods station for a number of years but was eventually closed in 1872 and the land sold off for housing development.

The new station remains as Oxford's only central station today. It originally had an overall roof, but this was removed in 1891, when the station was remodelled, and replaced with short awnings that just covered the platforms, as still remain today.



The swing bridge

A number of line extensions and spurs were added over the years. These included connections to the Oxford Gas Works at St Ebbe's and the Morris Factory at Cowley.

In 1908 a number of halts were opened around the city, including at Hinksey, Abingdon Road, Iffley and Garsington Bridge, and a steam railmotor service was introduced. But with competition from buses the service was quite short lived and ended in 1915.

The railway coming to Oxford had many far-reaching effects on the city. As well as influencing development, there were also economic consequences. The coaching trade was an early victim, going from 240 coach services a week in 1835 to just three a week in 1855, and by 1900 the only coach service remaining was to Cheltenham, which had no direct rail link. This had a knock-on effect on many of the coaching inns around the city, many of which closed down.

The Oxford Canal managed to withstand the competition of the railway for quite some time, largely thanks to many manufacturers preferring to send certain goods by canal, particularly fragile things, like pottery and slate, that were easily damaged by railway shunting. The canal company was also able to offer good storage facilities at its wharf in Oxford, including a large pottery warehouse. But by 1928 there was very little trade left on the canal, and in 1937 the wharf was sold and Nuffield College was built on its site.

- Matthew Hathaway



Archive Update

We have now moved into our room in the old St Edburg's School. Its small, but ample for our storage needs, with a room next door that we can use for working on things. We are now in the process of unpacking and sorting the part of the archive that had been temporarily stored above the council offices in the Garth.

As we rebuild the catalogue of things that we hold it will be made available to browse on our website. So please keep an eye out and if there is anything that you'd like to see, maybe for your personal research or just out of interest, then please get in touch and we can arrange a time to view it.

We're also still adding new things to the archive, so if you have anything that you'd like to donate, or let us copy, then please get in touch too.

Talks Update

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

Monday 16th July

John Beaumont comes to talk us through some **Wireless War Secrets**.

Monday 17th September

Our AGM is followed by a talk by St Edburg's Heritage Group on **The Extraordinary Women of Bicester**.

Monday 15th October

Mark Davis tells us about **"The Bicester Gang" and Other Stories of Oxford Castle**.

Fire Station Open Day

On Saturday 7th July the Bicester Fire Brigade held their annual open day at the fire station on Queen's Avenue. They invited us to bring along the restored Georgian fire pump, and we were only too happy to oblige.

The static display provoked some interest, but nothing compared to the practical demonstrations when it was filled with water and, with the aid of a few volunteers, pitted against one of the modern pumps. Despite a few leaks the pump managed to hold its own against its modern counterpart quite well, although the nozzle did take

on a mind of its own and start drifting from side to side. But in the sweltering heat I don't think anyone minded getting a little wet!

- Matthew Hathaway



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