

Mystery Solved

Back in 2016 a mysterious structure was discovered hidden under ivy and trees at Bicester Heritage, the former RAF Bicester site. Despite historic research using old photographs and records, the use of the building remained a mystery. After a plea for help from the public a number of clues and suggestions helped investigators, overseen by Historic England, to explore further.



Earlier this year the investigation revealed what appears to have been a gun mounting point centrally within the structure, made with beautifully crafted rounded engineering bricks. This would have been used to fire on enemy parachutists should they have landed and tried to take over the airstrip. The unusual weather proof tanking found on the outside of the brickwork, which is unique among all the defensible shelters found on the site, is likely to have protected the munitions held inside.

But now the Historic England investigation team have even suggested which kind of gun may have been used. It was likely to have been a fairly light machine gun,

probably mounted on a stork. The most likely contender being a Stork A.A. twin gun mounting.

Since January 2016 Historic England has given Bicester Heritage over £47,000 in grants to restore a number of buildings and structures on the site. In April this year they provided a further £10,000 to help Bicester Heritage continue the work they are doing in clearing, inspecting and repairing four brick and concrete built structures on the Heritage at Risk Register, including mushroom pill boxes and the former mystery structure.

Although the future of the many stunning buildings at this site of national historic importance is secure, several of the scheduled monuments, including some defensive structures, are still at risk. The ongoing partnership between

Bicester Heritage and Historic England is helping to improve the condition of these so that in the future they can be removed from the Heritage at Risk Register.

- Matthew Hathaway



Contents

Bicester, From a Brook 2

Bicester Festival & Heritage Open Day 3

Bygone Bicester 4

Talks Update 5

Oxfordshire & The Norman Conquest Talk 5

Dates For Your Diary

September Newsletter Submissions Deadline
8th September

Bicester Advertiser Local History Article
12th September

Annual General Meeting & Talk
16th September - 7:30pm
see page 5

Bicester Festival & Heritage Day
21st September
see page 3

Oxford Walk
28th September

October Newsletter Submissions Deadline
4th October

Bicester Advertiser Local History Article
10th October

Bicester, From a Brook The Second Phase

This is the second in a series of articles that were originally published in the Bicester Advertiser in 1932.

Last time, the origin of Bicester was traced from the earthworks forming the Roman encampment to the building by a Celtic tribe of huts on the site now known as Crocwell. A trackway was gradually formed from the huts to the mill (now the Priory grounds) and another trackway on the right bank of the brook was designated simply "The Street". This street and the Mill Way were linked across the brook by a ford (now the Bicester Town Bridge) and another ford existed on the road to Bucknell, where the present "stone burge" (bridge) now stands.

The diagram below illustrates the second phase, the further development of the configuration of the village by the making of the Causeway to the Priory buildings, and the erection of St John's Hospital on the site now occupied by the long block of premises on the Crocwell side of North Street. The dotted line is the brook.

It should be explained that before the Causeway came into the plan the settlement had been extended by the advent of other tradesmen besides the miller and the blacksmith. The village consisted of two ends, separated by an intervening space. One end was composed of the Manor House, the Priory and the mill house, called Town End. For the time being the other end remained unnamed.

In studying the plan of Bicester at that date it should be distinctly borne in mind that Sheep Street had not been dreamt of. An open field was there. So far as can be gathered the track from Crocwell to the mill, on one bank of the brook ran in practically a straight line through Albert Terrace, which is the oldest part of Bicester, over the Rose and Crown site and along Water Lane. The present line of Sheep street is, of course, some 100 yards or more distant from, though parallel with, the old Mill Way.

"The Street" was on the opposite bank, and presumably came straight through from Crocwell and

near the Old Brewery premises to join the other track by a ford. Hereabouts the land was low-lying and liable to flood, the Priory monks therefore paved The Street with stone and raised that part of it liable to flood some feet above the level of the marsh. An elevated track is a causeway, therefore that portion of The Street leading from Crocwell, on the Bicester House side of the brook, ran over the meadows to Priory gate in Church Lane and thence over the brook, and was designated The Causeway.

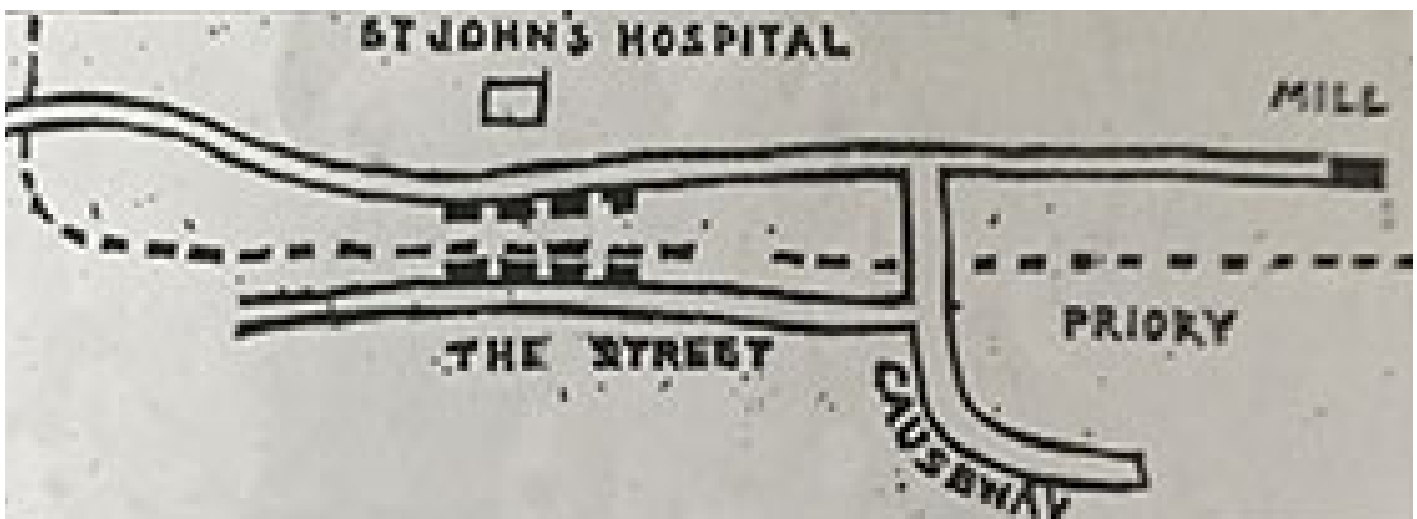
If we return for a moment to the Mill Way (via Water Lane or Chapel Street) we find that it had on its right side a raised bank formed by the widening of the brook. This bank is now occupied by the "Passive Resistor" and other cottages on the west side of Chapel Street; it was known as The Green bank under the Canon's wall, which indicates that the Priory was bounded on its east side by the brook.

We have now discovered that the straight portion of Crocwell from the infants school to Albert Terrace is a definite part of the old mill way until blocked at the Albert Terrace end. It is almost safe to assume, also, that the tchure, on which Dunkin's cottage stands, was one terminus of The Street then running over the brook and through Bicester House grounds.

Some years elapse, and we find the monks building St John's Hospital on the site of the present "Cyclists' Rest". A paved way led by this from Crocwell - "St Johns Street", of which a portion remains (that piece running from Albert Terrace into North Street).

The hospital became the home of a monk. John Puff kept the mill and a field, which was known as Puff's Furlong. This was the topography of the village 200 years after Domesday Book.

Now that we have studied the "roads" some attention may be given to footpaths at that time. The straightest of them was that giving passage way to St Edburg's Well (near the Middleton Stoney Road) and took the form of a grass track running between plough ridges on each side. Hayward's Path (that path of the Warden of the Hay) ran through a field near Bucknell parish.



St. Edburg's Church Bicester

Heritage Open Day

Saturday September 21st 2019

10 am to 4.00 pm

THEN AND NOW

Exhibitions, Tours & Family activities

Refreshments all day

A FREE EVENT

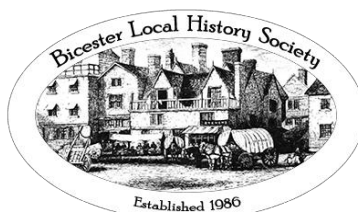
Dovecote Open Day

Saturday September 21st 2019

10 am to 4.00 pm

Join BLHS at The Dovecote, Old Place Yard, for a rare look inside this mainly 17th Century Grade II listed building. Find out more about the history of the Augustinian Priory that once flourished in this historic area of Bicester.

Join walking tours around the historic priory site
at 11 am and 2.00 pm.



4th August 1893

MR J.W. SMITH'S EMPLOYEES' EXCURSION

On Monday the men employed by Mr J.W. Smith, builder, Sheep Street, went for their annual excursion. To defray the costs of which it is their custom to put by a certain amount per week, for a fixed period.

Early in the morning they started to Oxford by "brake", and from thence journeyed by the Great Western Railway excursion for Southampton, which was reached about 9 o'clock. After making a general inspection of the place they took a boat to Cowes, which afforded them an opportunity of witnessing some of the places of interest and views of the Isle of Wight.

Afterwards a visit was paid to Portsmouth and an inspection made of the dockyards.

The company accomplished the return journey about 12 o'clock and reached Bicester by the same means as in the early morning they were conveyed to Oxford. The day was a thoroughly enjoyable one.

13th August 1926

HOLIDAY CHILDREN

The first batch of 42 London children who had spent a fortnight in Bicester under the Children's Country Holiday Fund, returned on Thursday in the last week to their homes in the more congested districts of London, and a similar number of newcomers took their place and return on Thursday next. The children, the majority of whom are Jewish, are in the charge of a superintendent, and have greatly enjoyed their holiday.

7th August 1959

AN ALL-OUR-OWN-WORK FASHION SHOW AT HIGHFIELD SCHOOL

These elegant young ladies are fashion models with a difference. A significant difference too. They made the clothes they modelled. The fashion models of the House of Dior in Paris, or the salons of Hartnell in London, merely wear the dresses and gowns their masters make. The teenage models of the House of Highfield go one better and make and model their own creations.

One of the end-of-term highlights at Highfield Secondary School in Bicester was a fashion show by girl students. It could rightly have been called an All-Our-Own-Work Show.

Forty-six girls showed just what nimble needleworkers they are with a colourful and creative range of garments. There were divided skirts and shortie nighties. There were negligees and blouses, dresses of cotton and wool, tweed skirts and a tweed suit.

Needlework and dressmaking at Highfield School is taught by Miss D.E. Waite and Mrs B. Hall. Miss Waite was full of praise for her talented pupils. The purpose behind the fashion show was, she said, to develop the girls' dress sense and to give them confidence and poise.

Confidence and poise they certainly had. These

pictures, taken by Highfield science master Mr Fred Jeffs, are proof of that.

The girls made their clothes from trade patterns. They do each process themselves under supervision but without practical help. Miss Waite said the subject was very popular with the girls. Many of them make their own clothes at home.

One of the outstanding creations at the show was a tweed suit made by Judith Barney, in her fourth year at Highfield. Lingerie highlights were made by Josephine Austin, Patricia Vincent and Gillian Webb, while Ann Jeacock and Sylvia Keetch showed excellent tweed skirts.

The outstanding second year students in the show where Bridget Barney (skirt and blouse) and Patricia Makin (dress).

Third and fourth year girls who showed dresses of exceptional quality were Dorean Eyelard, Rita Wheeler, Judith Barney, Sara Handcock, Madeleine Fields, Elfredia Henna, Bronwen Spence, Valerie Jones, Diana Faulkner and Pamela Leach.

20th August 1993

NEW STATUE ADORNS CHURCH

A new 11ft high statue of the Madonna has been hoisted on to the front of Bicester's Roman Catholic Church.

The bronze statue, weighing about half a ton, was lifted



★ THREE SMART GIRLS: Diana Faulkner, Sara Handcock and Dorean Eyelard



★ AND SO TO BED: Josephine Austin, Gillian Webb and Patricia Vincent

into position by crane. It replaces a small statue of Our Lady of Lourdes that has stood in a niche above the front door of the RC Church of the Immaculate Conception for several years.

The parish priest, Father Aldo Tapparo, said the new statue came out of the £40,000 a late parishioner, Miss Margaret McCann, had left to the church in her will. He said: "It was a marvellous benefaction. We decided to use the money to improve the front of the church."

Already new steps plus a ramp for wheelchairs have been installed outside and the front doors have been brought forward.

The statue was commissioned from a young sculptor, Mark Delf, of Stafford, who was a student at Cotton College, a Roman Catholic establishment for potential priests and lay students. The statue has been blessed by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham, the Most Rev. Maurice Couve de Murville.

The statue of Our Lady of Lourdes will be kept and placed in the neighbouring property the

RC Birmingham diocese has bought for the parish. The property was recently a secondhand furniture store called All Sorts.

Earlier the diocese bought the former restaurant Toppers opposite the church. Fr Tapparo explained: "We are not quite sure what we are going to do with Toppers. It was going to become a parish centre, but the All Sorts building is bigger and being next door to our presbytery, it is more convenient."



The statue of the Madonna in place



The new and old statues side by side

Talks Update

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

Monday 16th September

Our **AGM** and a talk by Bob Hessian based on the research of the late Gill King.

Monday 21st October

Liz Woolley returns to tell us about Oxford's suburbs in her talk, **Oxford's Base and Brickish Skirt**.

Monday 18th November

Everyone's favourite newsletter editor attempts to tell you all the story of **Bicester's Great War**.

Oxfordshire & the Norman Conquest Talk

On Monday 15th July Julie Ann Godson came to talk to us about Oxfordshire in the Norman Conquest.

She started by explaining that Oxfordshire's involvement in the Norman Conquest started between 1003 and 1005 when Edward the Confessor was born in Islip. Edward was the seventh son of Æthelred the Unready, and the first by Ethelred's second wife, Emma of Normandy.

England had been suffering Danish raids since 997, and in 1002 the king was told that the Danish

men in England would take his life and his kingdom. In response, he ordered the deaths of all Danes living in England, which led to the St Brice's Day massacre on 13th November 1002. The massacre in Oxford was justified by Æthelred in a royal charter of 1004 explaining the need to rebuild St Frideswide's Church (now Christ Church Cathedral).

This provoked the Viking invasions under Sweyn Forkbeard and his son, Cnut. Following Sweyn's seizure of the throne in 1013, Emma fled

to Normandy with Edward and Æthelred. When Cnut became King of England in 1016, Edward again went into exile. In 1017 his mother married Cnut and in the same year Cnut had Edward's last surviving elder half-brother, Eadwig, executed, leaving Edward as the leading Anglo-Saxon claimant to the throne.

Edward remained in exile in Normandy until 1041 when Cnut's son, Harthacnut, knowing that he didn't have long to live, named Edward as his successor to the

throne. Harthacnut died on 8th June 1042 and Edward became king, later being crowned in Winchester Cathedral on 3rd April 1043.

During his reign Edward, knowing that his celibate life would produce no heirs, seems to have promised the succession to the throne to both William, Duke of Normandy, and Harald Hardrada, of Norway. But on his deathbed he entrusted the kingdom to Harold Godwinson, Earl of East Anglia. He then died on 5th January 1066 and was buried in Westminster Abbey the following day. The same day that Harold was crowned king. This obviously upset William and Harald, who both decided to invade England and take what they each considered to be theirs by right.

Harold, expecting an invasion from Normandy, spent most of the summer on the south coast with a large army and fleet. But the bulk of his forces were militia who needed to harvest their crops, so on 8th September Harold dismissed them, just as Hardrada started his invasion of northern England. Harold marched north to meet the invading army, gathering troops as he went. The Battle of Stamford Bridge, on 25th September 1066, saw Harold victorious, but it would prove to be a costly victory. Harold's army was left in a battered and weakened state, and far from the English Channel.

A few days later William launched his invasion from Normandy, bringing with him an army that included cavalry and archers. They landed at Pevensey, in Sussex,



A section of the Bayeux Tapestry showing Harold meeting Edward shortly before his death.

on 28th September and quickly erected a wooden castle at Hastings. Harold marched back south and on 14th October the two sides met at Hastings. It is believed that the numbers on each side were about equal, but ultimately William had the superior and well-rested forces and he won the day.

After his victory at Hastings William marched to London, but was unable to storm London Bridge and reach the capital. He moved up the Thames Valley to cross the river at Wallingford. He then travelled through the Chilterns and towards London from the north-west, fighting further engagements along the way. Eventually the English leaders surrendered to William at Berkhamsted, in Hertfordshire and he was crowned King on 25th December, in Westminster Abbey.

Robert d'Oilly, one of the Norman noblemen who came with William, was left in charge of Wallingford. He married Ealdgyth, the daughter of Wigod, the Saxon lord of Wallingford.

After Wigod's death, William appointed Robert as the lord of Wallingford, and ordered him to fortify Wallingford Castle. He also inherited Wigod's lands.

His brother Nigel's son was Robert Doyley, the founder of Osney Priory, Oxford. He was also an ancestor of Henry D'Oyly, one of the major feudal barons of the Magna Carta.

Robert was appointed High Sheriff of Oxfordshire. Oxford Castle was built under his orders in 1071, and the collegiate church of St George's within the castle was founded by him in 1074. The church of St Peter-in-the-East was first mentioned in 1086 as a possession of Robert's although it is possible that he merely acquired it, along with St Mary Magdalen's Church.

He is also credited with the construction of a series of stone bridges at Grandpont, which formed a causeway over the River Thames. This is now Folly Bridge. It is possible, however, that he merely fortified an older crossing point.

- Matthew Hathaway

Committee & Contacts

Editor:

Matthew Hathaway
editor@blhs.org.uk

Website:

www.blhs.org.uk

Committee Members:

Bob Hessian (*Chairman*)
chairman@blhs.org.uk
 01869 350662
 Sally James (*Treasurer*)
 01869 243804
 Sally Dexter (*Minutes Secretary*)
 John Roberts (*Membership Officer*)
 Matthew Hathaway
 Peter Crook

Meetings Address:

The Clifton Centre
 Ashdene Road
 Bicester
 OX26 2BH

Postal Address:

BLHS c/o Sally James
 14 George Street
 Bicester
 OX26 2EG