

# BICESTER HISTORIAN

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The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society

## WOODEN ANNIVERSARY

This month the Bicester Historian celebrates its 5th birthday.

We are now five years on from the first edition, published in August 2014. In that time we have covered five interviews, 43 village histories, 50 of Marj's memories, 463 entries on the Roll of Honour, 46 talk summaries, 223 Bygone Bicester articles, and one very curious Christmas fairy.

Editing it all has been a very interesting, though sometimes arduous, task. But, as well as passing on information and news about the society and any relevant goings-on in the town, the aim has always been to educate and inform anyone who was interested in our local history. It is always so gratifying to hear from someone who found a particular piece interesting or useful, and to see extracts of the newsletter appearing on Facebook posts, being shared with the world.

Anyone who read in the April edition about the sad passing of Gill King will know of her extensive involvement with the society. But you may not appreciate the fully enthusiastic (some might say nagging!) involvement she had in getting the newsletter started.

Through her extensive research

into her family tree, she had become a member of a number of similar societies around the country, and always saw what they did as things we could at least emulate, if not improve upon. The quarterly(ish) newsletter that we had at the time served its purpose, but she was convinced that we could do better and that it could become something that we would be proud of.

Well, five years on, it is certainly something that I am proud of, and I hope that, wherever she is, she is proud of it too. Just as I hope that, when you all sit down to read this, it is something that you look forward to doing, with interest, wondering what curious little tidbits you will pick up this month.

It is a labour of love, and one that I look forward to continuing for years to come.

- Matthew Hathaway



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4th October
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- Oxford's Base & Brickish Skirt Talk  
21st October - 7:30pm  
see page 7



## BICESTER, FROM A BROOK Phase Three

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

Bicester, it is of interest to note, has lost two streets, and gained six.

Continuing our researches into the past we find that the passing of years has brought us down to the time when the little collection of huts with a water-mill had extended to a village of small size. To obtain a clear idea of the configuration it should be borne in mind that the place has at this date become made up of four elements. First, there is the original Celtic settlement at Albert Terrace, which has extended to Crocwell. Here exists a well, and close by it has been set up the earliest form of church in Bicester - a cross, which probably stood under a roof of thatch, and here the inhabitants went from the settlement to hear missionary preachers tell the story of the Gospel and receive their blessing. One of these itinerant preachers is said to have been Birinus the bishop who, according to one theory, gave Birinchester its name. Following the track-way from Crocwell along the far side of the brook (its eastern bank) brings us in due course to the mill, and we are now in the second component part of the place - Bury or Town End. A few rough cottages are here, of wattle and daub, - wood and clay - which, cracking by the heat of summer or winter frost, was repaired by the same material - and to gain access to the other bank we cross the stepping stones at the ford. A very short walk across country, going by way of what is now Church Street and King's End brings us to the tiny village of Bignell - the third element in the locality. Had we continued along the Mill Way (down the present Chapel Street) the walk would have brought us to Wretchwick hamlet, under Gravenhill - the fourth point. Instead of crossing the ford, the inhabitants of Crocwell on the Bignell side of the stream could reach Bury End by traversing "The Street" (running parallel with the Mill Way) which has long since disappeared under grass.

Now, the village enters upon the fourth stage of its career. In the interim a Saxon Church has been built, to be replaced by one of Norman design. A track from "The Street" leads round by the present Tinker's Lane, now blocked at one end, to the church and the Priory buildings,



A Saxon bed. One could sleep, by transit, either in King's or Market End.

which have an entrance at Church Lane. Another foot-way passes down from Crocwell to Bignell (the "Fox" Lane) and Bignell village green is near Tinker's Lane, probably

with some plots of cultivated ground.

Now there are tradespeople - a miller, a blacksmith, a baker and a butcher, followed by beer brewers and alewives, as the brook is convenient for the supply of water. A cloth manufacturer, now called a draper, supplied a rough material for clothing, and a tailor was at hand to fashion it into clothes. A rough mason built and repaired such buildings as were made of stone, and a carpenter those of wood.



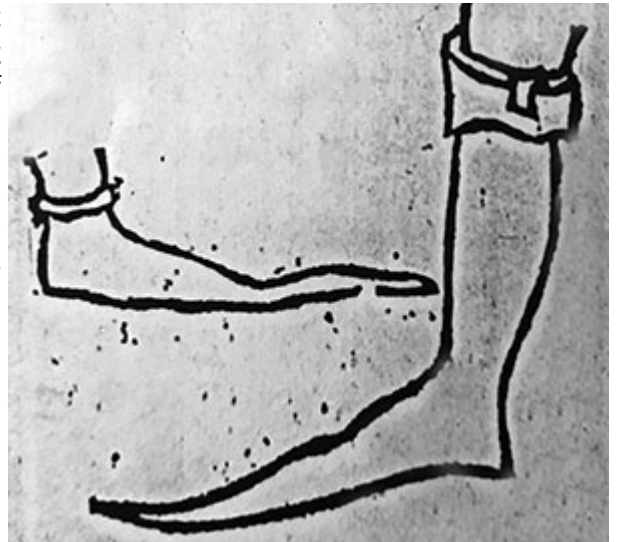
A Norman gentleman, perhaps a member of the Urban Council (or rather the Court Baron).

In the meantime several other changes have occurred. Gilbert Bassett's manor house which stood near Priory Terrace, has become the original part of the Priory ("The Monastery of Bissatour"), where the monks are erecting their own church. St John's hospital has been converted into the home of a monk and is known as "The Hermitage" wherein lives a hermit who has a distant colleague on the top of Muswell Hill. This hermitage should not be confused with the present building of the same name, which Mr S. Baker occupies in London Road; as the first was at the Cyclists Rest in North Street. Courts Baron were held for business connected with the land, and Courts Leet for the trial of moral offences, and the Priory also had its courts, as described in "The Bicester Rolls".

At a later stage we find that Bicester, in common with the rest of the country, is visited by the Black Death which kills among others the Vicar and Prior. The guest house at the Priory, no longer thrown open by the monks to all comers, is now a public house, "The Bell", kept by a woman. Another inn has been established near the wooden bridge of St Mary on the Mill Way - "The Swan", with John Fletcher as landlord, which is now Ambrosden House. With the building of "The Swan" commences Bicester Market, for the packmen and traders began to frequent it and set up on the ground near it booths and stalls for the sale of their wares. Thus a public house may be said to have originated the main market of the town. The king, in 1440, grants Bicester market a charter "know ye, that out of consideration of the good services which our dear servant, Robert Brooke, render to us, we and our special grace grant to him a piccage, stallage, boothage and tollage with the assize of bread and beer to our new market below the town to Burcester when all the profits

which duly belong to us for which we are informed no account has been given, for the said Robert or his deputy to have, enjoying thence such fees as shall belong to the same paying to us thereof the annual sum of 6s 8d." Wooden sheds are built round the new market place, and houses, with swinging signs, such as those now standing in the Square. "The Cross Keys" is opened near the market and the tower of the parish Church having been built, "The Six Bells Inn" begins business, so called from the number of bells at the church.

Some years have yet to lapse before the construction of Sheep Street, and centuries must pass before the advent of London Road and the highway to Oxford. "The Street" and part of Tinkers' Lane having gone, Bicester must be said to have lost two of its streets. At a future time the town gained six by the making of Sheep Street, King's End, London Road, Victoria Road, Priory Road and a thoroughfare to Banbury.



Henry VI boots - Just the thing for a walk in Love Alley.

## MARJORIE'S MEMORIES The Crown Hotel and Cinema

In the thirties and forties we had two cinemas in Bicester. Children regularly went to the Crown cinema. If we couldn't "get in" at The Crown we would go down to The Regal in London Road. The Crown cinema was open for children on Saturday afternoons, showing films such as "Dumbo", "Bambi" and cowboy films. My early memory was of children crowding around the large double doors waiting to go in, then a small door within the large door on the right, would open. An orderly queue would have been sensible, but the

children would rush forward and bottle neck into the small door pushing their way in.

The Crown was a smart hotel, situated to the left of the entrance to Crown Walk. Miss Tilt was the manageress in the forties and fifties and she had some tragic happenings to deal with. In the early sixties a triple murder took place in the hotel. People watching a film in the cinema could hear the shots of a gun. A woman and two men died; they were part of a love triangle. Some years later there was a serious fire there.



The picture shows The Hunt going through Sheep Street in 1913. The Crown Hotel, a white building on the left of the picture; to the right of the building Harris's the jewellers (it was still there in the seventies). On the other side of the road are iron posts and railings. I remember there were some ornate railings there just before the Second World War but, of course, then all railings were taken down to make ammunition. Some of the buildings can still be recognised by looking at the rooftops.

- Marjorie Dean MBE

St. Edburg's Church Bicester

## Heritage Open Day

Saturday September 21<sup>st</sup> 2019

10 am to 4.00 pm

# THEN AND NOW

Exhibitions, Tours & Family activities

Refreshments all day

**A FREE EVENT**

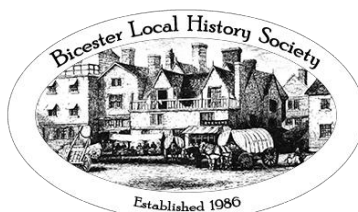
## Dovecote Open Day

Saturday September 21<sup>st</sup> 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.



## 8th September 1893

### PRESENTATION TO MR TUBB

For some time past the committee and members of the Bicester Cricket Club have been desirous of presenting Mr Tubb with a testimonial, to show their appreciation of his services as captain of the club for the past 21 years.

A subscription list was started, and in a short time many had placed their names to that list, which closed about August 17th. Since then the committee have had a hard task on their hands to choose a present which they thought would be suitable for such an occasion.

The testimonial took the form of a magnificent silver bowl, on a massive black ebony stand, which bore the following inscription upon the front: "Presented to Henry Tubb, Esq, by past and present members of the Bicester Cricket Club, in appreciation of his services as captain for the last 21 years, and as a token of their high esteem and regards. - September 7th 1893".

The presentation took place on the Bicester cricket ground, after luncheon, there being a match between Bicester and Brackley. The committee and many other members partook of the luncheon, numbering in all 60 or 70, and supplied by the caterer to the club, Mr Shepherd. The presentation was made by Mr C.T. Hoare, of Bignell House, who, in presenting the bowl, said he rose to perform an exceedingly pleasant task, which was to present Mr Tubb with the bowl before him, on behalf of the members. The reason why they did it was because for 21 years Mr Tubb had borne the burden of the club. He had not only done so with the bat and ball, which had been to his credit, but he had managed the affairs of the club in a way that nobody else could.

Before he sat down he wished to mention that as time went on there would be prepared the names of the 110 subscribers on a sheet of parchment to go with the bowl.

Mr Tubb, who was heartily received on rising, said he only wished he was capable of expressing half of what he felt for the kindness shown to him. He wished to say that when the club started about 21 years ago he had many good friends to help him, and since then, considering that he had good secretaries and other officers of the club, it had been quite an easy task for him. He had received great help from all sides, and had never had difficulty in getting players to play for him.

The Brackley team had been their oldest and best opponents. Years ago the two clubs used to play for a new cricket ball, and he hoped they would pardon him when he said he used to get more balls than they did, because Bicester were generally the victors, but since then Brackley had very much improved.

As long as he could play cricket he would, but he thought he had no reason for despair at present, when the two gentlemen by the side of him (referring to Mr Ramsay and Mr Draper) were still skipping about the field like three-year-olds. He thanked them all most heartily and only wished he could do better.

The bowl was supplied by Messrs. Camozzi and Baxter, of the Market Place, Bicester.

## 10th September 1926

### GOOD EXHIBITION, BUT POOR ATTENDANCE

Horse shows and the like are mainly social events, and when the public do not turn up in large numbers much of the glamour and interest evaporate. Thus it was with Bicester Agricultural, Horticultural, and Hunt Horse Show, held in the Sports Ground, Bicester, on Tuesday last. Certainly it was a dismal day, with rain in the early morning, but the weather, which kept fine throughout the proceedings, should not have appreciably affected the attendance.

Though a whole-hearted endeavour is made to retain the popularity of the Bicester Show, it must be confessed that of recent years the financial position has not been, to say the least, encouraging. Fresh sections were introduced, naturally creating more expenditure, but the income was not correspondingly increased. This year, for economy's sake, it was decided to delete the shire classes from the schedule, to increase the prize money for jumping (the most popular feature of the show) and also the floral and horticultural department which is gradually coming back into its own.

There were two more entries in the hunter classes than last year, a total of 95. A strong class of hunter mares with foals was won by Mr Gilbey's Satanella, a nice mare whose foal also won the prize for the best foal shown in the class. Lady Chesham's Creole, which was second at Brackley, was also second in this class.

Yearlings proved the best class of young horses, though the three animals noted by the judges were outstanding. In the two-year-old class Messrs. Bonner's Miss Magee, which had done so well at other shows this year, had to give way to Mr Cooper's and Mr Dickins' exhibits. Messrs. Bonner's Saucy Girl, however, easily won the three-year-old class.

The increased prize money did not bring out so many jumpers as last year by two, but an entry of 24 must be considered very satisfactory. At the completion of the first round Miss Bullows' If Not, Mr Joslin's Cherry Picker, Mr Connolly's Darby, and Weedon Equitation School's Larkin, were equal with half-a-fault each. The owners decided to divide the £40 prize money between them.

Last year there were eleven classes for cattle, with 45 entries. This year seven classes attracted 35 entries. A useful class of down-calving cows was won by Mr W.H. Phipps' roan, which was reserved for the championship. Mr Roper's short-horn cow won the open class, with Mr Phipps' roan second; and Mr H. Brazier won the open down-calving heifer class.

The dead poultry exhibits could be claimed to be the best ever seen at Bicester. There were some very fine cockerels and pullets. Ducks were a short entry, but the competition was keen.

Two large tents were devoted to the floral and horticultural section, and the exhibits were well staged. This section, as stated, is gradually improving, and it was encouraging to see the increased entries.

The collections of flowering and foliage plants in the open class were not up to the old standard. Mrs S. Twynham stood out as the winner with chrysanthemum, Scarborough Lily, maidenhair fern, asparagus springii, aspidistra, and begonia.

The collections of cut flowers were extremely well set out. There was little to choose between Major Gosling's collection and Mrs Tubb's. Both had very choice flowers. In the former, which was awarded the first prize, were dahlias, penstemons, lilliums, Michaelmas daisies, anemones, begonias, orchids, roses, antirrhinums, chrysanthemums, etc. In Mrs Tubb's collection were dahlias, lilliums, schizanthus, flocks, helenium, and montbretias. There was only one entry for sweet peas, and this scarcely deserved a prize. Chrysanthemum blooms were very good for the season. Cactus dahlias were a good entry, and there was keen competition.

Mrs Tubb had an easy win in the collection of fruit. Seven competed for dessert plums, and there was little to choose between the winners. The show of grapes was a great improvement on last year, and Mrs Tubb had first prize both for black and white. Peaches were few in number, but of good quality; whilst the dessert apples produced keen competition, as did also dessert pears. Mrs Slater-Harrison had an easy win for melon; and also scored a good win in a very strong tomato class.

It was gratifying to see increased interest in the amateur classes. Flowers were especially a good section. Once again the table decorations attracted great attention, and Mrs Pankhurst won with an effective decoration of the Lulu variety of roses.

The cottagers certainly had a fine display, and Mr J. Bradbury, of Cottisford, was the principal winner. There have been times when the children's wild-flowers class had taken up much space, but this year it was only one exhibit.

## 25th September 1959

### BICESTER REMEMBERS 'THE FEW'

The 19th anniversary of the Battle of Britain in 1940 was commemorated at Bicester on Sunday with a large-scale church service at St Edburg's Church followed by a parade and march-past in Market Square. On Market Square throughout the weekend was a Spitfire fighter aircraft of the type which flew in the Battle of Britain.

The service at St Edburg's Church was conducted by the Vicar of Bicester, Rev. W.H. Trebble, and the preacher was the Bishop of Dorchester, Rt. Rev. David Loveday. The lesson was read by Air Vice-Marshal E.N. Lowe, Air Officer Commanding No.40 Group, RAF Bicester.

During the service the new standard of the Bicester and District branch of the Royal Air Force Association was placed at the altar.

After the service a large crowd watched the parade and march-past at which the salute was taken by Air



Vice-Marshal Lowe. With him on the saluting base was Coun. S.A. Winterbone, JP, chairman of Bicester Council.

In the parade were members of the RAF and WRAF from RAF Bicester, troops from Bicester Garrison, airmen from the United States Air Force Base at Upper Heyford, members of the Bicester and District RAFA branch, and officers and cadets of the Bicester and District Squadron, Air Training Corps. The parade was headed by the Band of the 4th Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. Wing-Commander A.F. Mann, DFC, of RAF Bicester, was the parade commander.

After the parade Air Vice-Marshal Lowe and Wing-Commander Mann entertained Coun. Winterbone, local officials, and a number of civilian and Service guests at a sherry party in the officers' mess at RAF Bicester.

A detachment of RAF personnel commanded by Flt. Lt. T.C. Williams attended a Battle of Britain service at Bicester Methodist Church on Sunday morning. The service was conducted by the minister, Rev. E.N. Goodridge. Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Cubs and Brownies attended the service. After the service coffee and biscuits were served to the RAF personnel by the ladies of the church.

Collections at both St Edburg's Church and the Methodist Church were for the RAF Benevolent Fund.

## 24th September 1993

### CLASS OF '33

Nearly a dozen former pupils of Bicester County School got together again after they first met up in the classroom.

The "Class of '33", as they call themselves, from the school which is now occupied by the Hometree House retirement flats, met for a celebratory lunch at the Littlebury Hotel in Bicester. Well-known former town resident, Mr Vic Redfern, 72, who lives in Lincolnshire, and Mr Tudor Jones, 71, of Bicester, organised the reunion.

The reunions first started in 1963, the 25th anniversary of them leaving the school in 1938. Eleven of them got back together for the latest reunion along with seven spouses.

They heard a message of goodwill from California, from the last remaining member of school staff from the group's time, Mrs Mary Vanstone. She was then Miss Fryer, who was also a founder member of Bicester Hockey Club.

Mr Redfern had a surprise in store for the rest of the former pupils when he presented each of them with a commemorative plate he had commissioned to mark their 60th anniversary.

Attending the reunion were Mr Redfern, Mr Jones, Mrs Harris, Mrs Daphne Hillier of Upper Heyford, Mrs Margaret Rogers of Kirtlington, Mr Geoffrey Miles of Birmingham, Mrs Cynthia Wilcox of Christchurch, Mrs Mary Stoneley of Hassocks, Sussex, Mrs Mary Dudfield of Bicester, Mrs Betty Hewitt of Botley, and Mrs Margaret Belcher of Kidlington.



## 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.**

## BICESTER'S JUBILEE BUILDINGS

While large towns and cities would commemorate Queen Victoria's jubilees by renaming parks, commissioning buildings or installing monuments, Bicester's celebrations confined themselves to shop displays or town parades. There are, however, three buildings which we know were constructed in Queen Victoria's Golden (1887) and Diamond (1897) years.

Victorian terraces were ubiquitous in the north and Midlands, where heavy industry needed to house a large workforce, but they are more unusual in medieval towns like Bicester, whose inhabitants were still predominantly engaged in agricultural occupations. We do not know who built Jubilee Terrace (1887) on London Rd – probably either the Layton, Grimsley or Jackson family who were all successful builders in 19th century Bicester.

By this time, domestic houses were being built using patterns books to guide the plan so the builder could maximise the number of dwellings in the space available and minimise the required materials. Builder's trade



directories also offered ready-made windows, doors, and carpentry – cheaper than fabricating everything on site. It was almost certainly a speculative development. In other words, the builder bought the land and financed the build in the hope of selling or renting the resulting properties.

Jubilee Terrace is built of red brick but also has yellow London stocks (bricks that were now finding their way across country via the railways) laid in a rather eccentric decorative pattern – the 'Maltese' Cross shape at the first floor storyband is

particularly unusual. Polychromatic brickwork was very popular in the early Victorian years, but had fallen out of fashion by the time these houses were built. The builder is



either adding a celebratory jubilee flourish or, more likely, is using a bit of low-cost embellishment to attract customers. These small, modest houses also have canted bay windows – a feature Victorian builders often used to try and distinguish their houses from basic back to backs, and so attract higher rents from or even purchase by clerks, small business owners or shopkeepers.

You can see what difference the brickwork and bays make if you compare this terrace with Alchester Terrace, further down London Road, which was almost certainly built for railway workers only two years earlier.



Alchester Terrace

A second 1887 Jubilee terrace exists at 81-85 Sheep Street (pictured top right). The brickwork on the upper floor is almost identical to London Road and it is likely that the same builder, or at the very least, the same bricklayer was used. This was originally built as a row of 2-3 shops – the doorways at either end of the building enabling independent access to accommodation above. The pierced bargeboards of the dormer windows are also a favourite Victorian decorative device – you can



see many more on The Garth (1870s).

Diamond Villa (pictured right) built in the year of Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (1897) was certainly commissioned as a private dwelling – possibly by Thomas Grimsley and family who were very successful Bicester merchants and businessmen. It originally existed as a completely separate domestic dwelling adjacent to shops but the ground floor has been much altered and is now an integral part of a Bicester Toys. The complicated roof line of intersecting gables, dormer window with fish scale tiles and crest tiles show that this was a substantial house.

On the first floor we can still see many decorative features (stone lintels; chamfered window dressings and quoins; and an elaborately carved date stone) that Victorian builders used to distinguish high-end houses. The bay window on the left was originally full height and supported a balustrade.

Diamond Villa would have been an expensive build and still makes an important architectural impression in a town with relatively few Victorian buildings.

- Pat Snelson



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