



Issue: 77 March 2021

Bicester Historian

The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society

'LOOK MUMMY – IT'S ANOTHER BEAUTY'



—and that's the best of Electric Cooking—you get all the advantages of older methods of cooking without their drawbacks. You get clean, healthy heat that comes or goes at the touch of a switch. Joints are sealed with heat so that all the natural juices are retained—you never need to baste and the meat doesn't shrink. Cakes are done to a turn—the even, natural heat, controlled to a degree, cooks them right through. Cook your food the clean, healthy way without fumes, flames or fuss.

WESSEX ELECTRICITY

WESSEX ELECTRICITY CO. AND ASSOCIATED COMPANIES



Domestic bliss in 1938.
(Adverts taken from the
Bicester Advertiser)

ELECTRIC HOT WATER is a real joy

The home that has electricity need never be without plenty of hot water. There's no need to worry about dampers or draughts or clinkers—you don't need to fetch or carry, just turn on a tap and electricity will do the rest. Electricity will look after your pocket too, for as soon as the water is hot enough, the heater switches itself off automatically.

You can buy a 1-k.w. Electric Immersion Heater to supply several taps at once, or a 2½-gallon Storage Heater to give you hot water at the sink, by paying 25 quarterly payments of 7/6, which works out at only a penny a day. Electrical installation and wiring up to a length of 30 ft. and normal plumbing are free. The local Electricity Showroom will advise you what method of Electric Water Heating will suit your own requirements best—why not drop in and talk to them about it?

**1d. A DAY
BUYS AN
ELECTRIC
WATER HEATER**
(INCLUDING INSTALLATION)



... of course it is—it's the ELECTRIC wash boiler, they don't waste time on wash-day in this house. Switch on and it's ready to take the wash as soon as the breakfast things are cleared—no fire to lay or to coax—no coals to carry—just no trouble at all. And then there's the electric washing machine that does away with scrubbing and back-aches, the electric wringer that does the work while you just pass the washing through, and the electric iron that never needs re-heating and that glides over your nicest pretties like a charm. Oh yes. Washday's just as pleasant as any other day if you let Electricity take a load off your hands.

Contents

Bygone Bicester	2
Incident at Stratton Audley	3
Bicester Memories	3
Talks Update	4
Roll of Honour	5
Tragedy of a Gifted Actor	5

Dates For Your Diary

April Newsletter Submission
Deadline

9th April

Salt in Prehistoric Britain Talk

19th April @ 7:30pm

See page 4

Bicester Advertiser Local
History Article

22nd April

4d a WEEK	24½ a WEEK	1½d a WEEK
BUYS THIS ELECTRIC WASH BOILER CASH PRICE £3.11.6.	BUYS THIS ELECTRIC WASHER & WRINGER CASH PRICE £17.0.0.	BUYS THIS ELECTRIC IRON CASH PRICE 8.6.

16th March 1861

BICESTER PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY'S CONCERT

The concert took place on Friday evening with, we are glad to say, entire satisfaction to a crowded audience.

The different glees and choruses being rendered with a precision worthy of the untiring zeal of its indefatigable conductor, Mr C. Franklin. The solos by Mrs Parslow, and Messrs J.M. and C. Franklin, were exceedingly well given, especially the former in "Bid Me Discourse" and "I Love the Merry Sunshine", the latter calling forth a well-merited encore. The duet "Syren and Friar", by Mrs Parslow and Mr C. Franklin, was uproariously redemanded. Mr R.A. Jones received the same mark of approbation for his exceedingly well executed flute solo, "Kinlock of Kinlock".

As a whole, we have great pleasure in saying it was one of the best musical entertainments we have ever had in Bicester.

20th March 1896

CHAINED BOOKS SALE

A catalogue of second-hand books issued by a London bookseller this week contains some interesting items of "chained books" that formerly belonged to the library of Bicester School in the 17th century. Each of the thirteen volume for sale is fitted with a brass ring, and they range in price from one to two guineas each.

The books were presented to the school by White Kennett, Matthew Bate, Abraham James, and others. It appears, according to Kennett, that the Augustine Priory in Bicester, about 1233, provided a school known as "Schola Barcestrenses". According to the note in the catalogue - "More than 100 years later a Schola Barcestrenses came into existence in Bicester itself; one of the 17th century grammar schools, which provided their early education for the sons of the gentry. The vicars for the time being undertook the mastership of the school, which was held in a part of the church bricked off for the purpose. This school possessed a library - no inconsiderable advantage in those days - and certain of the books were chained. All the books were kept over the church porch until its destruction in the present century."

According to the inscriptions written in the volumes the school was in a flourishing state from 1671 to 1692, the books being presented between those dates.

22nd March 1918

UNKNOWN MAN FOUND DEAD IN A FIELD

Mr George Coggins, coroner for the Northern District of Oxfordshire, held an enquiry at Lower Heyford last Saturday respecting the death of a man known as

George Smith, whose address was unknown. Doctor Turner, of Deddington, examined the deceased and was of the opinion that he had been dead over a week.

John Calver said - "I am a platelayer on the Great Western Railway. On Wednesday last, at about 1:30 in the afternoon, I was on land in Lower Heyford, between the Great Western Railway and the canal. I was going fishing. There is a shut-up boarded cattle hovel on the land. I noticed the door was upended and there was a board off. I looked through the aperture and saw a man lying on the floor inside. I shouted to him but got no reply, so I shouted again but he did not move or speak. I then entered the hovel and took hold of his shoulder and shook him, but found him to be cold and dead. His coat was over his body and his boots were a few yards off. There was no blood about. The man appeared to have died in his sleep. I left the hovel and sent for the police. I afterwards helped put the body on a cart which conveyed it to the village. I do not know the man. He is a complete stranger to me. I had not been in the hovel previously for some three months."

PC Thomas William Russel, of Steeple Aston, said - "On Wednesday last, at about 3:30pm, my wife told me that a person had been to say that a dead body had been found in a shed near Heyford Station. I went and saw Mr Dew, and together we went to the hovel mentioned by the last witness and found the deceased as described by him. I searched the body and found two inmate cards issued at Coventry and two pawn tickets, dated January 19th and 22nd 1918, and issued at Gloucester. The tickets showed that he received 2s 6d for two articles of underwear. I searched the flag basket which was hanging on the wall and found a knife and fork and a few other articles. The deceased was well dressed. Enquiries have since been made by the police, but the man has not been identified."

11th March 1938

WOMEN'S RALLY

The Bicester Corps of the Salvation Army arranged a women's rally yesterday week, which took place in Wesley Hall. Officers of the Salvation Army taking part were Colonel Blow, of London; Major Brown, of Northampton; Captain Wright and Lieutenant Butcher, of Chipping Norton; Captains Moffat and Jones, and Lieutenants Brown and Raunds, of Bicester.

Tea was provided in the Salvation Army Hall, after which an entertainment was given.

Members of the Bicester Methodist Sisterhood, Bicester Congregational Women's Own and the Charlton-on-Otmoor Women's Hour and others were represented at the rally.

Incident at Stratton Audley

Amongst my accumulation of “stuff”, I found a hand-written note, written in a “not easy to read” scrawl, (reminiscent of a doctor’s prescription note!) of an incident that had happened locally to Stratton Audley. It looked as though someone had written it with the intention of sending it off to the local newspaper. Could well have been the local vicar – it’s the sort of thing they did in those days! (mid. 1800s?)

“Stratton Audley: On Monday last, the wife of Mr Palmer who keeps the Plough public house, Caversfield, Bucks, deposited a £10 and a £5 note in a cupboard in the bar. In the course of the morning the £10 was missing, and it being suspected that a lad who called at the house with garden seeds had stolen it. Mr Palmer, jun. went in pursuit of him to Fringford, accused him of the theft, searched him carefully and narrowly watched him to prevent him making away with it. As the note was not found and the boy’s father was a respectable resident of Bicester, he was permitted to return home and his parents apprised of the circumstances. On being strictly questioned, the

boy ultimately admitted he had taken the note to spite Mr Palmer and swallowed it while being searched. There had been no evacuation since leaving the public house, application was therefore made by the father to Mr Davis, surgeon of Bicester to know if there was any prospect of ascertaining the correctness of his son’s statement. He administered a strong emetic which acted powerfully but the £10 note did not appear, so a second and a third was tried, when at 2 o’clock on Tuesday the note was ejected from the stomach whole and uninjured though 14 hours had elapsed and the lad had eaten two hearty meals since it was swallowed.

It is understood that out of respect to the father and in consideration of the son’s age no prosecution will follow”.

Note: The Victoria County History (1959) refers to a Plough Inn being in Stratton Audley and that the building still exists. If it was on the road to Caversfield it may well have been in Bucks as Caversfield did not become part of Oxfordshire until 1844.

- Bob Hessian

Bicester Memories

I received the following notes from Margaret Rose Smith (née Ralph), back in 2004, of her recollections of living in Bicester. She was born in Bicester in 1937 and lived in Field Street. She was 67 when she wrote these notes. She’d be 84 in 2021.

She lived in the house of her paternal grandmother (16 Field St) which was a terraced property. The next-door neighbour was Mr Miles – stonemason, whose workshop and showroom were in the Causeway. Further down the row of cottages: Miss Rimer – retired school mistress. At the end of the road – a small shop run by Mrs Allen – selling ice-cream to die for.

She went to St Edburg’s Primary School and remembers a large tree (beech?) in the playground and a wall around to keep the children in... the story continues in her own words:

“In cold weather the teacher would have us circle the tree singing “Here we come gathering nuts in May” – it was to keep us warm! The school room had high gothic windows and a tortoise stove in the middle. The old air-raid shelters were still in situ at the back of the school when I left to go up to the newly built overflow classrooms built at Highfield in 1947. This was built on farmland adjacent to the council housing estate. My family moved to Highfield in 1944. When I passed the 11+ examination to go to the Grammar School, Miss

Lewis, the then headmistress, treated all pupils who had passed to tea at Mary’s Café. This was run by Mary Goble and was above the fruit and vegetable shop run by her family. Whilst at the Grammar School I was in a classroom at Claremont House for the first year. Access to the main school was via a pathway at the back of Dean’s the ironmonger’s shop.

When George VI died, the school were called to assembly in “the hut” as it was known. A wooden building in the grounds of the main school. I remember going to the Market Square to hear the Proclamation read. “The King is dead, long live Queen Elizabeth II.” We were taken to the old Regal Cinema to see the conquest of Everest. Very few people had television in those days!

On leaving school my first job was with Billy Baughan’s electrical shop in Market Square. There I learnt to fit a new element on a kettle and an iron, and all for 30/- wages. (£1.50 in today’s money). I moved on to the Co-op in Sheep Street, in the drapery department under Miss Kate Clifton as the manageress. This was located above the grocery department managed by George Dean and next door to the butchery department.

In those days customers would place their orders for goods, clothing or shoes to be ordered once a week from the Oxford branch. This was a service much used by the ladies from surrounding villages. At that time a

weekly delivery service was made with groceries and the milkman came out from Oxford daily as well as the baker. Most people walked then, but I wanted a bicycle. Mrs “Frenchie” Smith, so called because she was French, ran a cycle shop in the Causeway. She allowed me to choose a bicycle and pay her 10 shillings a week. There was no written agreement, but she knew my mother and I was on my honour to pay each week until it was mine.



At the age of 20, I went to work at Bicester Garrison. This was a camp staffed mainly by lads doing their National Service, regular soldiers, and a large number of civilians from Bicester and the surrounding villages. I worshipped at St Edburg’s Church and remember collecting “Whitsun farthings” for the missionaries overseas. The boy and girl who collected the most went to Christchurch Cathedral in Oxford to present them to the Bishop on behalf of their Sunday School. One year, this was me and I was accompanied by Terry Hawtin.

Sunday School was attended by most children then. Our yearly outings were a coach trip to Oxford to Folly Bridge where we boarded a Salters boat to cruise down to Abingdon. I remember the paste and jam sandwiches which always accompanied the lemonade for our tea. Miss Verity Wheeler (her father managed the International Stores) and Brenda Maltby (her father was Station Master at Bicester London Road), were our Sunday School teachers and the Reverend Cowland-Cooper was the vicar. We also visited Wicksteed Park if funds allowed. When I was confirmed, the service took place at Caversfield Church, which I seem to recall was in the grounds of the “big house” owned by Col. H. Wyndham.

Pleasures were simple but we always attended Bicester Carnival at the August Bank Holiday and looked

forward to Thurston’s fair arriving in the town. Summers always seemed hot and dry then and a feature of this was Mr Alan Mattocks from the Council riding round on his bicycle advising housewives that the water supply was to be turned off for several hours. They were advised to fill baths and buckets to last for the day. At the approach of Christmas, I would go carol singing around the neighbourhood and at the local pub, The Star. I’m afraid the money raised did not go to charity but bought Christmas presents for family and grandparents. I did not have any pocket money.

During the Second World War, many evacuees came from London. We had such a family living next door to us. I was fascinated by their accent and no doubt they by mine, but they remained after the war so perhaps a quieter life suited them. I remember several images from wartime, the searchlights and parachutes at Weston on the Green, P.C. Saunders on black-out patrol, the huge tree that was felled and placed across the Bucknell Road as a barricade as night fell, men in blue suits with red ties (injured service men), the sound of the siren and the coalman’s horse being abandoned in the street. Mr Harris the coalman was also a fireman and his patient horse stood for many an hour until he arrived back.”

There’s more to follow – next time.

- Bob Hessian

Talks Update

This month’s talk, given online via Zoom, proved to be a big success. So we will be continuing to deliver our talks online for the time being.

Our next talk will be on the **19th**

April, at 7:30pm, when Dr Janice Kinory will be presenting her talk on **The Production, Distribution and Use of Salt in Prehistoric Britain.**

Discussing the archaeology of salt from the Bronze Age to the arrival of

the Romans and covering its various uses and methods of production and distribution.

The link for the talk will be emailed out to members nearer the time.

Roll of Honour

The following are the local men, and those buried locally, who died in the Second World War, 80 years ago this month.

Aircraftman George Francis Laver, of Sydenham, London.

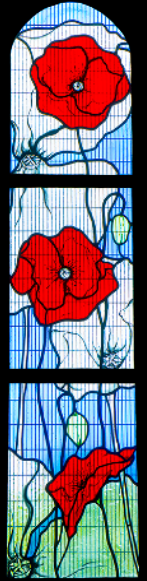
Died: 8th March 1941 Aged: 22 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Bicester, buried at Caversfield)

Flight Lieutenant Robert James Hill.

Died: 14th March 1941 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Bicester, buried at Caversfield)

Sergeant Francis Xavier Leighton.

Died: 23rd March 1941 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Buried at Hethe)



Tragedy of a Gifted Actor

Bicester doesn't have many notable claims to fame. But we do have one in the person of George Rose.

The actor and singer in theatre and film was born in Bicester on the 19th February 1920. The son of Walter Rose, a butcher, and his wife Eva Rose, nee Rolfe. His mother's family came from Bucknell and his parents had been married there, in the parish church, in 1910. But by 1920 they were living above their butcher shop in Sheep Street, and by 1939, when George was helping out as a teacher at the Methodist Sunday School, the family were living comfortably in Ambrosden House, at the bottom of Market Square.

He trained as a musician before enrolling at the Central School of Speech and Drama, in London, and after World War Two he joined the Old Vic company, making his stage debut there in 1946, the same year that he made his Broadway debut in a production of *Henry IV, Part I*. He continued to play in New York and London for the remainder of the decade, but then spent most of the 1950s appearing in broad comedy roles in the UK, later joining the Royal Shakespeare Company.

The 1950s also saw the launch of his film career. His notable film credits include *The Pickwick Papers* (1952), *A Night to Remember* (1958), *The Flesh and the Fiends* (1959), *Hawaii* (1966), and *A New Leaf* (1971).

His first Tony Award nomination was for his portrayal of Louis Greff in the Broadway musical *Coco* in 1969. In the 1974 comedy *My Fat Friend*, opposite Lynn Redgrave, he won a Drama Desk Award and received another Tony nomination. In 1976, he finally won a Tony as Alfred



Doolittle in the Broadway revival of *My Fair Lady*. In 1980, he appeared as Major General Stanley in the hit adaptation of *The Pirates of Penzance*, being nominated for another Tony award. He also starred in the film adaptation, released in 1983. He won his second Tony in 1986 for his appearance in Rupert Holmes' musical adaptation of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

In 1984, he purchased a large three-bedroom house near Sosúa, a small village on the north coast of the Dominican Republic, where he spent much of his time between his performances. He was gay, and had no immediate family or permanent partner, but reportedly longed to have an heir. Shortly after purchasing his home in Sosúa, he took in a local 14-year-old boy, Juan, whom he supported financially and adopted in January 1986. Changing his will to leave his entire \$2 million estate to his newly adopted son.

But, on 5th May 1988, whilst staying at his home in Sosúa during a two-week hiatus from the national tour of *Drood*, George was kidnapped, tortured for eight hours, and beaten to death by Juan, Juan's biological father, and two others. The assailants tried to make the

death look like a car accident, but eventually confessed to killing George. Though all four men were charged and spent time in prison, no trial was ever held, and Juan was released after about a year.

Because Juan was never convicted for the crime, there was nothing to stop him claiming his inheritance. But the executor of George's estate managed to fight it enough that Juan only got the house in Sosúa, valued at about \$250,000. The remainder of the estate went to George's alternative beneficiary, the small parish church in Bucknell where his parents had been married and his grandparents are buried.

Using the proceeds from the sale of the house, Juan fled to America, returning home in 1997 just before his father and the other two men were freed from prison. Eventually Juan used his inheritance to build a large apartment block to rent to tourists and to help his father set up his own car maintenance business. Meanwhile, George lies buried in an unmarked grave in a derelict cemetery near Sosúa. A simple plaque in the church in Bucknell stands as the only local reminder that he was ever here.

- Matthew Hathaway



Bicester Methodist Sunday School teachers in 1939 (George is 5th standing from the left)

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