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Bicester Historian

The monthly newsletter for Bicester Local History Society

Transportation

The Story of Martha Busby

On the 7th or 8th of April 1836, there was a robbery at the Crown Hotel, Sheep Street. A cash box belonging to the proprietor, Mr William Hitchman, was stolen. It contained cash and securities,

including a Bank of England note for £100, dated Manchester, 9th September 1835; a cheque for £145 6s drawn by Charles Hartall, on Gillett and Tawney's Bank, Banbury; and a bank post bill for £34 8s drawn by Forrester Wilson Esq.; with a total value of about £700, or about £93,000 in today's money. When the crime was discovered, the box hadn't been used for a few days, so it was impossible to say when it had been taken or who had taken it.

Whether through the extreme exertion of Bicester's police officers, or the inducement of a handsome reward, by the end of the month the suspected offender had been apprehended. The Oxford University and City Herald of the 28th May reported that Martha Busby had been committed to the County Goal, charged with stealing the cash box and its contents. Then Jackson's Oxford Journal of 11th June reported the discovery of the missing cash box, further incriminating the accused:

"Since the confinement of Martha Busby, on suspicion of having stolen the cash box from the Crown Inn, Bicester, her house has been re-searched, and £125 in cash found concealed therein; the cash box was also found in an adjoining sewer. The prisoner had for a long time been

employed as a laundress by Mrs Hitchman; and on the day the box is supposed to have been stolen she was at work in the house. None of the bills and securities have yet been recovered."

On Wednesday 13th July, Martha Busby's case was heard at the Oxford Assizes by Mr Justice Littledale and Mr Justice Patteson. This was reported in Jackson's Oxford Journal:

"Mr Hitchman said that he keeps the Crown Inn, at Bicester, and had employed the prisoner for several years as charwoman; he had placed confidence in her, and she had access to every part of the house. She was employed at his house on the 8th of April last. The day previous he had changed a £100 note of the Bank of England for cash; the cash box was brought downstairs from a drawer in his bedroom, and Mr Hitchman put the note in the box, and desired it to be carried upstairs to its usual place. His sister was there at the time. The box was missed on the 9th, about the middle of the day."

"Cross-examined by Mr Swaby. – His house is in Bicester Market End, which is a different parish from Bicester King's End. The prisoner had worked for him many years and borne a good character."

"Eleanor Hitchman daughter of William Hitchman, corroborated the testimony of the above."

"Elizabeth Pitts, the cook at the Crown Inn; was there on the 7th, 8th, and 9th of April, when the prisoner was also there. Witness missed the

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March Newsletter Submission Deadline	13th March
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Bicester Advertiser Local History Article	24th March
April Newsletter Submission Deadline	10th April
Bicester Reflections Talk	25th April @ 7:30pm See page 6

prisoner for about three quarters of an hour in the evening; when she came back, she had a bundle under her arm and a shawl over it; the bundle was thrown upon the dresser. Prisoner was in the habit of supping with witness; she did not do so on the above evening but went away. She lived about a mile off and was in the habit of washing linen for Mr Hitchman's sons."

"The Rev David Jackson stated that on Thursday the 7th of April he sent a £100 note to Mr Hitchman to be changed; the note now produced is the note; his name is on it in his writing; he has the No. in his pocketbook."

"Elizabeth Hounslow – Knows Eleanor Scarsbrook, who lived with the prisoner; about a month after the robbery, she brought witness a bit of paper, which much resembled a bank note. Witness read part of it. Mr Hitchman's name was on it, and the sum of £34 8s on the front of it. After she read it, she gave it to Eleanor Scarsbrook, who asked her to read it to her, and to explain it. Witness did not mention the circumstance to any person for about three weeks. She had heard of the robbery before, when Mrs Busby was taken up; she was surprised she was taken up in consequence of what witness had said."

"Eleanor Scarsbrook was servant to the prisoner nearly four years. The prisoner cannot read or write. Witness remembers the robbery; she carried a piece of paper to Mrs Hounslow; she got it off a table standing in the prisoner's house. The prisoner and her little boy came in together; and Mrs Busby said her little boy had picked it up in the street. Witness does not know what a bank note is – never saw one. (The note was shown to her, and she said it was like that.) Witness took it of her own accord to Mrs Hounslow. Mr Hitchman's name was on it. When



HMS Buffalo (L) meets John Renwick (R), by John Ford

she took it back, she put it in a corner cupboard in the prisoner's house, and never saw it afterwards."

"Cross examined – The paper was lying on the table openly; Mrs Busby left it there and was not present when witness took it to Mrs Hounslow."

"Jas. Archer, a police officer, took the prisoner to Oxford; she told him to tell Eleanor Scarsbrook that if she knew anything about the paper not to tell anybody, but to keep it until she came back."

"Walter William Oman, chief police officer at Bicester, searched the prisoner's house four or five times; it is a cottage house, containing five rooms; he first searched on the 9th of April; the prisoner was under examination; he made only a hasty search, and did not find anything. She was discharged, and afterwards taken up again about the 4th of June. Witness searched the house whilst she was in prison; Scarsbrook occupied it for a few days. Witness found a roll of paper in a hole in the house, and handed it to Lord Chetwynd, who opened it in his presence; it contained a £100 note."

"Lord Chetwynd produced the roll of paper, which had been in his possession ever since; it contained a £100 note, and a £20 note, and a £5

note. Mr Hitchman stated that the £100 note was the same he changed for Mr Jackson; he had a £20, two £10 and three £5 notes; but he could not swear to the £20 or £5 note now produced."

"John Ward searched the prisoner's house and found the box in the privy in an adjoining yard; it was in several parts. The prisoner had a right of road through the yard where the privy was."

"The cash box, broken to pieces, and a screwdriver, were shown to the Jury; the box had marks upon it corresponding with the screwdriver. Mr Hitchman identified the box; the lock was unbroken, and the key in Mr Hitchman's possession unlocked it."

"The prisoner, in her defence, merely stated that she was innocent. – The Jury retired for about half an hour and returned a verdict of guilty. Transportation for life."

But who was Martha Busby? From the various documents relating to her transportation, it is possible to reconstruct something of her life before the events described above. At the time of the trial, she was 34 years old and a widow with five children. She could read, but not write, and worked as a laundress. Standing at 5' 1½" tall, with a sallow and freckled complexion and with

brown hair and eyes. Amongst her distinguishing features it is recorded that she had lost a tooth on the right side of her upper jaw, the top of her nose was scorbutic, she had a scar on the inside of one of her wrists, and that her little and third fingers were contracted. She was the daughter of Francis and Elizabeth Rouse and had been baptised on 29th July 1798 at St Peter's Church, Broadwell. The marriage registers of St Edburg's in Bicester have an entry dated 29th April 1822 for a wedding after banns between Thomas Busby and Martha Rouse, neither of whom could sign their name, and witnessed by William Hodges and Thomas Hicks. Sadly, the marriage did not last; in summer 1832 Thomas Busby, a sawyer, passed away aged 31 leaving Martha a widow with four surviving children, including Charles, born 11th July 1824, Charlotte, born 26th January 1828, George, baptised 11th July 1830, and Jane, baptised 20th May 1832. The family never seems to have been well off and soon after Thomas' death Martha and her children became dependent on the parish poor relief.

Martha was transported to New South Wales aboard the John Renwick, leaving on 3rd May and arriving on 31st August 1838. Their arrival was not without incident, however. The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser reported that during a gale, while anchored, she collided with the Nimrod, with the result that both ships lost their main booms.

Martha was one of 173 female convicts being transported for a variety of offences ranging from highway robbery to handling stolen goods, and even stealing stockings, but she was the only one being transported for life. Convicts were sent to Australia to work. Their sentences stipulated they would work from sunrise to sunset, Monday to Saturday. This was their punishment, but the colonial

administration also viewed it as an opportunity for redemption, it was believed that 'honest sweat' was the convict's best chance of improvement. Martha Busby travelled to Australia at the height of the transportations, with some 7,000 arriving in 1833 alone. Over the period of the transportations, about one in seven were women. In all, about 164,000 convicts were transported to the Australian colonies between 1788 and 1868.

On 8th January 1841 Martha requested to marry an ex-convict, John (or possibly James) Carolly. He had been transported to Australia aboard the Lady Harewood, arriving on 5th August 1832. At the time he was 17 and had been a stable boy in London. He was sentenced at the Sussex Quarter Sessions on 17th October 1831 to be transported for seven years for stealing a watch. He was 5' 2" tall, had a ruddy complexion, with brown hair and chestnut eyes.

On 27th February 1841, after banns, and with the consent of the Governor, Martha and John were married in the parish of Petersham, in Cumberland, New South Wales. As with Martha's first wedding, neither bride nor groom could sign their name. Matrimony, whether between convicts or former convicts, was something that the authorities encouraged as part of an effort to build up the numbers of the fledgling colony.

By this time John was a free man, having completed his seven-year sentence and obtained his Certificate of Freedom, dated 23rd January 1839. Many transported convicts did, after the completion of their sentences, remain in Australia as free colonists, many, in the manner of Charles Dickens' convict in Great Expectations, Abel Magwitch, rising to positions of power, fame, influence and wealth.

On 1st October 1848 Sir Charles Augustus Fitzroy, Governor-in-Chief of New South Wales, granted a

conditional pardon to Martha Busby, noting that "...it is hereby expressly declared to be a Condition of this Pardon, that if the said Martha Busby shall, at any time during the continuance of the term of her said Sentence, go to, or be in, any part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland then this Pardon shall thenceforth become wholly void."

Sadly, at this point, both Martha and John disappear from the records and their fates are unknown.

Perhaps the most painful part of being transported to Australia for Martha was the separation from her young family, her youngest child being only about 4 years old at the time of her conviction. In the days of wood and sail, any communication between Bicester and New South Wales could take weeks or months to arrive, and that's if Martha could find someone to read and write the letters for her. But she could take comfort in knowing that they were being looked after by members of her extended family. By the time of the first National Census in 1841 Charlotte and George are listed as living with James and Mary Rouse at Hethe. Sadly, both George and Charlotte passed away young, on 16th January and 23rd October 1847 respectively, and both are buried at the Church of St Edmund and St George in Hethe. It appears that Charles died aged 25, being buried in Hethe on 1st December 1850. The 1841 Census places him in the home of possibly another set of his mother's relations, James and Elizabeth Rouse, and working in Finmere.

What happened to the youngest of Martha's children, Jane, is somewhat unclear. Although records make mention of Jane Busby, correct as to date and place – one paper trail even leads to Australia – none tie any of the candidates down as being the younger daughter of Martha Busby with any certainty.

- Mark Lewandowski

3rd February 1882

SUDDEN DEATH AND INQUEST AT THE WORKHOUSE

On Tuesday morning last, an inquest was held in the boardroom at the Union Workhouse, before W.W. Robinson, Esq., coroner, touching the death of Phoebe East, an inmate, who was found dead in her bed on the morning previous. Having viewed the body, the coroner said they were called together in consequence of the deceased having been found dead in bed, to ascertain the cause of her death.

The first witness called was Ann Austin, single woman, who first found the body, said she had been an inmate of the house for 16 years. Knew Phoebe East during the fortnight she had been in the house, and had heard her complain of rheumatism. Saw her very often; but she could not get in or out of bed or scarcely walk. Saw her every day, and slept in the same room with her and four others. The nurse gave the deceased liquid medicine every night. Never saw her take another medicine, and she could always take her food. Put her to bed between seven and eight o'clock on Sunday night. She did not complain, and there was no conversation between them during the night, neither was she restless. Got up at seven o'clock to see if the deceased wanted anything, and touching her face found it was cold. Thought she was dead, and that she had been so for hours. Fetched the nurse at once.

Elizabeth East, daughter of the deceased, said her mother was the widow of John East, farm bailiff, and had lived at Launton for about eleven months. The deceased was 72 years of age, and had suffered from rheumatism for the past two years. They both came to the union together a fortnight last Saturday. She did not object to come, thinking she should get more comfort and medical attendance. She had never been in a workhouse before. Saw her last on Sunday week, she was as usual and her appearance was as before. She had been taking medicine, but could not say if she had seen the doctor.

Eliza Mansell said she had been the nurse for five years and nine months. Saw the deceased when she came to the house, at which time she was ailing from rheumatism, and could not get into bed without help. Took Mr Drinkwater to see her a week yesterday, because she complained of more pain. Was present when the doctor saw her, and the medicine was sent by him specially for her, of which she gave her two spoonfuls at eight every night. She did not take her medicine on Sunday night, and had objected to doing so on two previous occasions. Her attention was called to the deceased at 7 o'clock, when she was quite dead.

Thomas O'Kelly, doctor of medicine, and assistant to Messrs. Drinkwater and Foster (medical attendants of the house), said he saw the deceased on the 14th of January, when she was admitted, at which time she complained of rheumatism in the muscles of her body. He considered nothing but medicine was required internally, which was sent in a bottle with directions for use. But the case was too chronic for the medicine to have had much effect. Had seen her since she was dead, and had noticed nothing unusual. From what he saw, he attributed death to failure of the heart's action. She was very ill, but he did not think she would have died so quickly.

One of the jurymen spoke to seeing the poor woman in the Launton Road in an open cart at the time they were conveying her to the workhouse, and he described the pitiable and weak state she was then in.

The jury at once returned a verdict of "death from natural causes."

2nd February 1917

DEMOLITION OF AN OLD LANDMARK

The work is in progress of pulling down the old brewery building to the level of the adjoining stores. By the removal of the old chimney, an old landmark which can be seen for miles from various directions will be demolished.

The building had certainly become somewhat unsafe, whilst the chimney was out of upright, and was gradually becoming more so.

The work is being carried out by Mr J.A. Harris, of the Cross Keys Inn.

28th February 1941

HOME GUARD NOTES

The Platoon spent another interesting morning last Sunday, in getting in some field practice, and the men, on the whole, did fairly well. It was not a severe test they were set, but in the general talk afterwards, a few complained of the time given them to get from their post to the depot in London Road.

Most of the fields traversed were under water, but this did not deter anyone. However, there had to be a little harder "spit and polish" after the exercise as there was plenty of mud about.

While on the subject of polish I should like to compliment the Platoon in general on their spic and span appearance when on parade. Although it is not, in a way, compulsory, neither has it been ordered to be done, the cleaning of equipment is necessary and it is a credit to us if we can turn out with boots polished and buttons, etc., well cleaned.

Another thing which has caused me satisfaction is the compliments I received on Sunday from one or two residents concerning the smart appearance of the men and the manner in which they fell in and marched off the Square. That is where the value of our competent Army instructors comes in. I know most of the men have welcomed it, because, as they put it, they did not want to look foolish when parading on the Square, or elsewhere in the town, where people were watching them; rather would they prefer to make their mistakes, and be corrected, in the seclusion of the London Road depot.

Recruits continue to join us, and if those who have enrolled will visit me at the Market Square, I will endeavour to fit them out with their uniform, etc., from the limited supply at my command.

*W.H. Morgan
Platoon Commander*

10th February 1989

SHIP'S CREW SHRUG OFF PUB'S BAN



Lt. Cdr. Malcolm Fewtrell chats to some of the cadets who piped him aboard the council offices on Friday evening

Sailors from HMS Bicester were refused admission to a town centre pub when the ship's crew spent a weekend in Bicester.

After a civic reception staged by the town council at their offices, The Garth, some of the crew went into Leo's pub in the Market Square for a quick drink before returning to their billets at Bicester Garrison. But as they were in uniform they were turned away. A Bicester town and district councillor, Mr John Brown, said: "I thought it was a bit disgraceful that they could not stay in the pub, although I appreciate the pub does have a lot of soldiers and American Airmen among its customers."

The ship's commanding officer, Lt. Cdr. Malcolm Fewtrell, said: "I do not think it was a great problem. Bicester is a garrison town and it would be unfair on the Army lads for the landlord to break a no-uniform rule. Even so, we had an absolutely terrific weekend in Bicester."

The pub manager, Mr John Byrne-Burns, said: "We stick rigidly to a no-uniform rule due to friction that may be caused among our customers who include soldiers from the Garrison and Americans from Upper Heyford. I

do not think these lads from HMS Bicester would have caused any trouble and I appreciate they may only come to Bicester about once a year. Our dress rule is smart casual clothes and we even turn away people in work clothes."

The visit by about three dozen of the 45 crew was the first at Bicester since the minesweeper returned from patrol in The Gulf last year.

At the civic reception Lt. Cdr. Fewtrell spoke of the importance to the crew of the links with the town and the Bicester Hunt, after which the ship is actually named, being a Hunt class mines counter measures ship. He was not the commander at the time the ship was in The Gulf but he said HMS Bicester was the most successful minesweeper in the patrol, finding more mines than any other.

Since returning, HMS Bicester had taken part in a Nato exercise in the Arctic circle in northern Norway, had been to Rotterdam and had operated in the Clyde and along the South Coast.

HMS Bicester is now at its base in Rosyth, Scotland, where she is undergoing maintenance and improvements to equipment. This enabled most of the crew to visit Bicester for the first time. Previous visits have been by smaller groups.

The Mayor of Bicester, Mr Raymond Bainton, in greeting the crew, recalled his childhood naval background as he lived in Portsmouth and his father worked in the dockyard. Mr Bainton was presented with a crest of HMS Bicester and his wife, Dorothy, with a bouquet from the crew.

Sea Cadets from Banbury piped the crew aboard The Garth. The cadets have formed a link with the ship.

Guests included members of Bicester branch of the Royal Navy Association and a joint master of the Bicester Hunt, Mr Ian McKie, of Twyford.

The following day, the crew played football against a team at the King's End Association club.



Lt. Cdr. Fewtrell, right, contests the ball with 'Pop' Cannon of KEA

Talks Update

Unless the situation changes again, these talks will all be held at the Clifton Centre, with appropriate safety measures in place. Recorded versions will then be available to view on our website afterwards.

Monday 21st March

Sheila Allcock talks on the history of council houses in Oxfordshire and the rest of the country in **Homes Fit for Heroes**.

Monday 25th April

Our illustrious editor, Matthew Hathaway, will take us through the changing faces of Bicester's streets as described in his recent book, **Bicester Reflections**.

Monday 16th May

Eberhard Sauer returns to give his long-awaited update on the findings of extensive works carried out at **Alchester**.

Town Walks

This summer, architecture enthusiast Pat Snelson will guide us on a walk around Bicester town centre. Exploring the evolution of architecture within the town and the changing fashions and fads of the residents who built the town we have today.

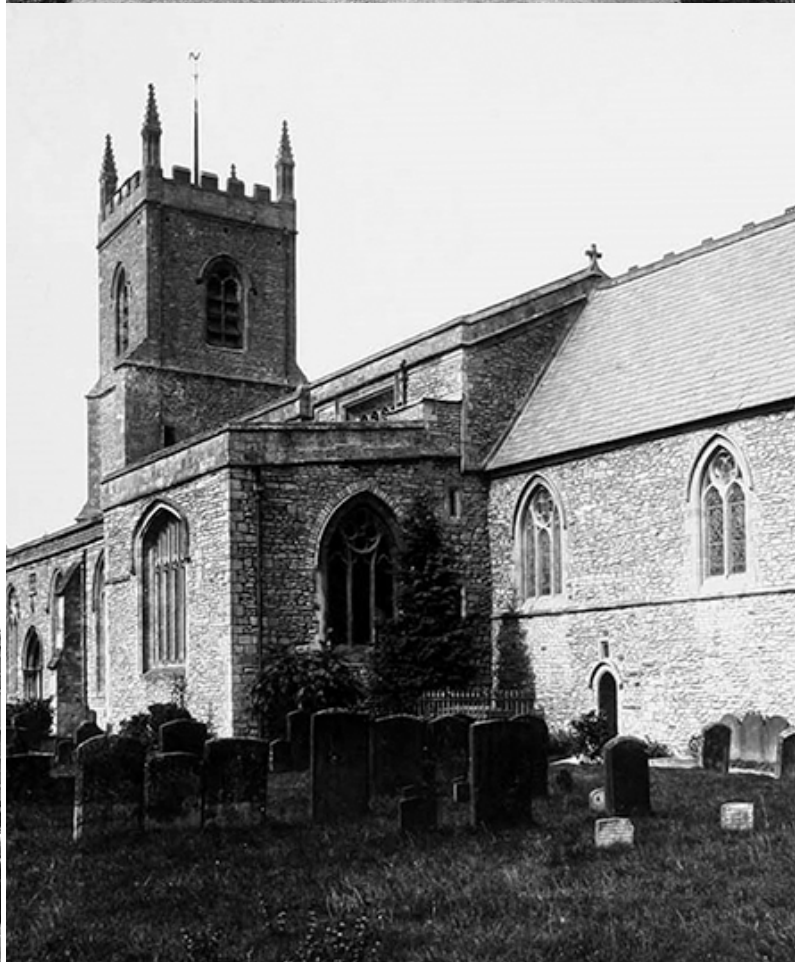
This walk serves as an introduction to Bicester's architectural history and will explore its central streets and view the facades of some of the town's most distinctive buildings.

The same walk will be given on three separate occasions to enable as many members as possible to come along whilst still maintaining safe and manageable group sizes. Each walk will begin at 3pm outside St Edburg's Church and end outside the Methodist Church approximately 90 minute or 1 mile later.

The walk will take place on the following dates:

- Sunday 12th June
- Sunday 3rd July
- Sunday 7th August

Places are limited so early booking is advised. Booking forms will be sent out to all members soon.



Roll of Honour

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

Sergeant Donald George Allen, of Toronto, Canada.

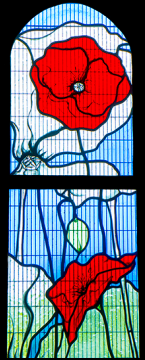
Died: 21st February 1942 Aged: 21 Served in: Royal Canadian Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)

Pilot Officer William Keith Johnson, of Denver, USA.

Died: 25th February 1942 Aged: 25 Served in: Royal Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Bicester, buried in Caversfield)

Sergeant Joseph Walter Connell, of New Brunswick, Canada.

Died: 27th February 1942 Aged: 19 Served in: Royal Canadian Air Force
(Died on service at RAF Upper Heyford, buried in Upper Heyford)



Bicester Reflections Book

On 15th March my new book, Bicester Reflections, will be released.

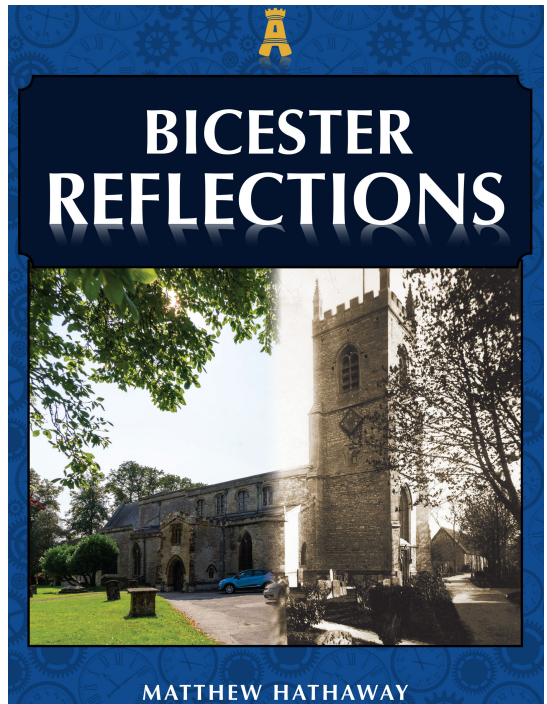
In it I have used a collection of merged old and new photographs, such as the ones below, to show how parts of Bicester have changed a lot whilst other parts have remained largely untouched, all with a bit of local history thrown in for good measure.

It will be available locally from Coles Bookstore and hopefully WH Smith too, but it is also available to order online from Amazon or directly from the publisher at www.amberley-books.com/bicester-reflections.html. The RRP is £15.99.

It is part of a new series with titles already available covering Bideford, Birkenhead, Chester, Cork City, Greenwich, Leith and Wolverhampton. As well as Barrow-in-Furness, Belfast, Colchester, Preston and Walworth all coming soon. Details of those can be found on the publisher's website.

I'll also be giving a talk, based on the book, to the society in April and hope to have some copies available to purchase then too, at a special members only price.

- Matthew Hathaway





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