

CAVERSFIELD

Oxfordshire

The Social History.

Caversfield is a village about 1.5 miles north-east of Bicester and is situated on the old main road between Bicester and Banbury - the ancient Roman road between Alchester (Bicester) and Towcester, (now known as the A4421).

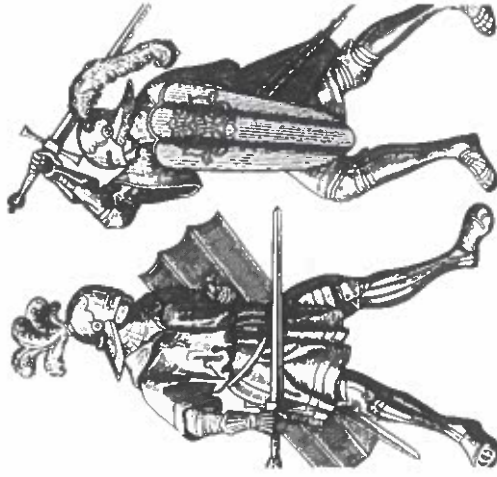
Its history dates back to the time of the Roman Occupation. A great battle occurred between the Emperor Carausius and a general of his forces, Allectus who rebelled against him, this was in the year 293-4.

The battle took place near the site of St. Laurence Church and all those slain in the battle, including Carausius, were buried in the enclosure - a square once protected by a mound and ditch, where the present day churchyard is situated.

In recent years there is some question as to whether the high verges outside the church were actually Saxon stone walls of a fort dating back to this time. Digs are due to take place to try and find out more.

Until 1844 Caversfield used to be in Buckinghamshire, (as a portion of Caversfield was in Stratton Audley), however, the Acts in 1832 saw it being transferred to Oxfordshire by a Local Government Board Order.

The parish consists of 1,497 acres of arable, permanent grass, woods and plantations. However, in recent times, with the building

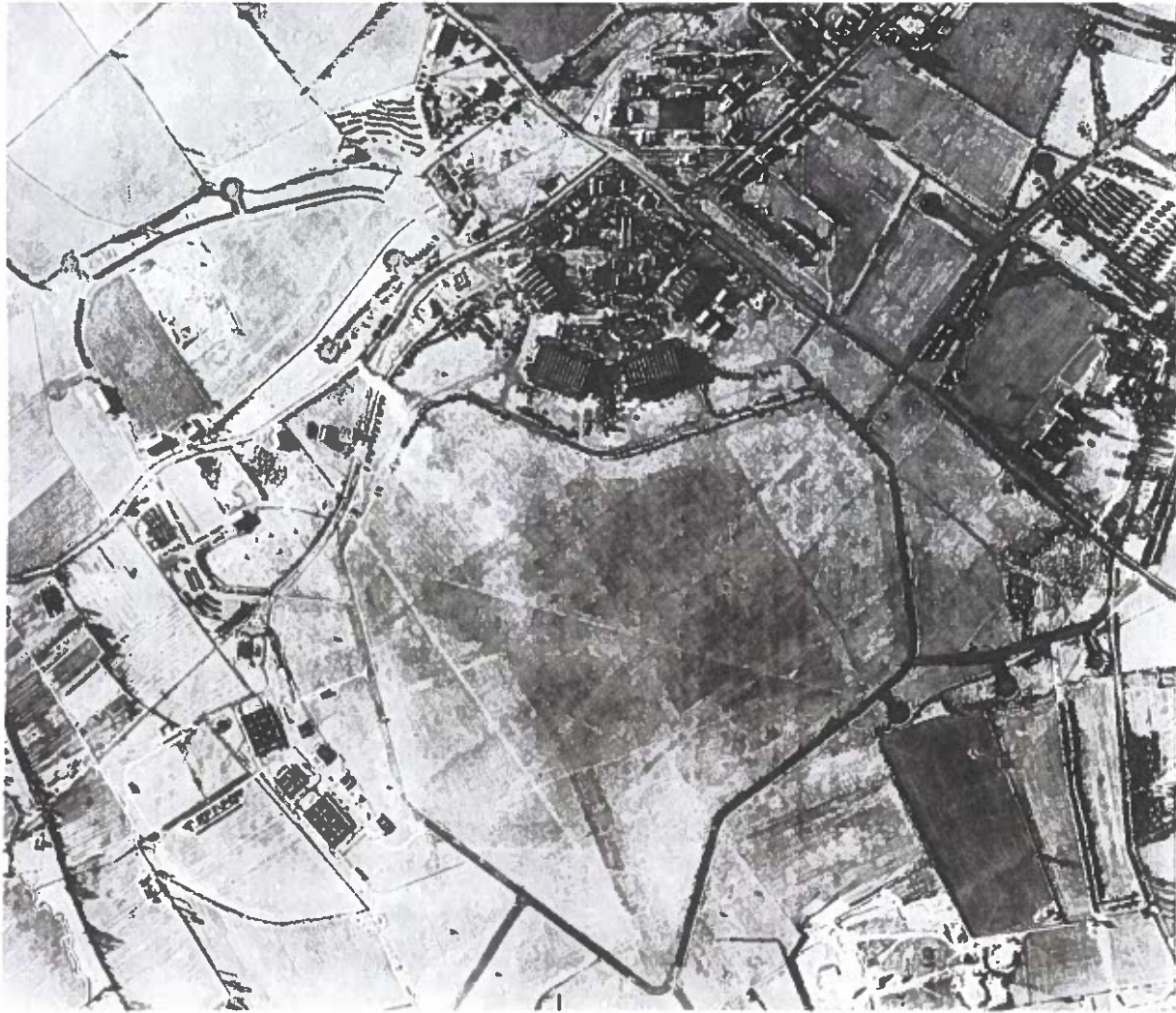


of the Eco Town, the population and number of buildings have risen rapidly.

Until 2010, the population was 1,788. Housing consisted of Brashfield House, Caversfield House and Lodge, The Stables, The Old Vicarage, Home Farm and RAF Bicester (including its personnel housing).

The River Bure flows from Bainton through Caversfield and on to Bicester. The soil consists of cornbrash and stony subsoil.

The name Caversfield has changed over the centuries from Cavrefelle, Kaueresfuld, Chaursefeld, Caffresfeld, Caueresfeud and Kaversefeld and by the 18th Century it was Catesfield. Open field farming existed until 1780 when enclosures started being used, thus Caversfield means field enclosure.



Aerial view of RAF Bicester Airfield.

The Manor is mentioned in the 1086 in the Domesday Book as being owned by William de Warenne, 1st Earl of Surrey.

In 1236 the Gargate family held the feudal tenancy of Caversfield and half was endowed to the Augustinian Priory of Bicester. This was held until the Dissolution of the Monasteries after 1536.

The old farmhouse, Home Farm, dating back to the beginning of the Ordnance Surveys in the 16th Century, consisted of a two-storied stone house with original stone-mullioned windows to the front. The windows of the upper storey were of two lights with moulded jambs and mullions and the ground-floor windows are also moulded. These were originally 3 moulded but removed and replaced with wooden frames.

Stone was quarried for building the farm and its buildings from an area of the farm called The Pitts and created large, stone quarried holes. While alterations were being made to the house, some 50 years ago ancient, unique stained glass windows were discovered in its walls, but were so badly damaged that they have not survived to this day. The original house was thatched.



The old farmhouse, Home Farm

Near the house are two 16th Century stone barns which were lit by narrow loopholes and roofed with thatch. These buildings have now been converted into commercial units from agricultural, when they would have housed turkeys, hens, geese, shire horses and animal feeds.

A further range of stone and brick buildings served as calf pens, milking parlour and a room where milk was collected in churns before being collected from the side of the road by a milk lorry.

In 1764, the Manor and Parish were bought by Joseph Bullock for £3,400. It is possible that he continued to quarry stone from The Pitts and subsequently renamed it Bullocks Pitts. Joseph Bullock was a very wealthy man. He created one of the first bathrooms in the Manor and a special water stove. He grew hops and made his own beer and had a passion for planting trees. Mr. Bullock died in 1808, he certainly made his mark in the countryside.

The Phipps family lived at Home Farm from 1942. It was a dairy farm, with butter and cheese also produced for personal use. An old thatched outside toilet in the back garden still exists, although now updated



The old farmhouse, Home Farm

and used for a garden store. Water had to be pumped out from a hand pump in the front garden.

Electricity did not arrive until the early 1950's, until then gas lamps and open fires filled all the needs. A cottage is located in the front garden where there is an original bread oven and stone boiler with free standing range in a delightful old fireplace.

By 1950 some early tractors had begun to appear although most of the farm work at this time was carried out by shire horses. The main occupation on the farm was dairy although a variety of crops were grown consisting of corn, swedes, turnips and potatoes - these were often shared with local people and animals. Free foods consisted of blackberries, elderberries, apples and mushrooms, the children had a great time collecting this produce and sharing it with the neighbours for a few pennies.

Supplies were delivered to the farm on a weekly basis. Visits came from Mr. Grace the fish man, Mr. Capel Smith who provided dough for bread-making, Jack Taylor the grocer and Tom West the butcher. Often traders would call by including tea sellers, carpet people and onion sellers. A man used to call from time to time to sharpen all the knives and there were often gypsies selling their wares.

The weekly market at Bicester was held on a Friday which meant a walk of 2.5 miles (with children) and back again. Access to school was either by foot or on a bike and this was in all weathers. Later a school bus was provided.

As a child of this time, it was hard work but great fun. After getting up early to bring the cows down the fields for milking, it was



The old oak tree by The Pitts

then on to preparation of breakfast with homemade bread and fresh milk, it was then off to school. On return there was a list of jobs we had to do before tea.

At weekends we had complete freedom when we were told to go and play and not come home until tea time. These were times of joyful exploration and great fun - there were few cars on the road and few strangers.

Harvest time was always the hardest work but fond memories remain of the picnics taken into the fields for the workers and family.

During the Second World War, RAF Bicester would store the Spitfires and fighter planes along the stream by the farmhouse where large willow trees hid them from enemy planes. Some of the brick and pole fencing within the farmyard was built by Prisoners of War who did a superb job and became much valued workers on the farm and where lifelong friendships were made.



St. Laurence Church.

Summer always seemed longer and sunnier and the winters a lot colder with much more snow. One year a full scale igloo was made which lasted weeks. It was possible to skate on the frozen flooded fields and sledge down the slopes.

The farmhouse, gardens and surrounding green spaces are home for a large variety of wildlife including deer, rabbits, badgers, foxes, woodpeckers, finches, tits, wrens and many more. An established 3 bat flight path also exists from Caversfield House over the road and across the existing green space by the farmhouse. These bats are protected and there is nothing more special than catching sight of them on a summer's evening as the light fades.

Several names of local families still exist to present day from 1793 – Smith, Stevens, Busby, Tredwell, Hawkins, Handcock, Grimsley, Spencer, Wadley, Dean and Coker.

St. Laurence Church.

Quiet and peaceful and nestled amongst ancient trees and an abundance of snowdrops in the spring, St. Laurence Church can probably be dated back to the 10th Century.



St. Laurence Church.

The ground stage of the tower retains two original windows in the north and south walls. The tower arch although restored is probably of 12th Century origin. The chancel and nave were restored in the late 12th Century along with the north aisle.

Over the centuries further restoration and additions were made to the church right up to 1874. Much history exists about the internal history of the church and further documentation is available for anyone interested.

St. Laurence houses one of the three oldest bells in the country which is thought to date back to 1216/19. The bell hung at the top of the tower until 1921 when the bell framework cracked. It was then hung on a wooden frame and placed at the base of the tower in 1927. The treble and second bell were hung in 1949 in memory of members of the Phillips family, previous owners of Caversfield House. Two of the bells are exceptional in that they are inscribed with a dedication to St. Laurence.

On 1st June, 1953 the five bells were rung for 2 hours and 47 minutes to celebrate the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The bell ringers on this occasion were Mr. Frederick



Caversfield House.

Sharpe, George Gregory, William Baggett, Patricia Ayris and Cyril Kinch.

The churchyard includes 25 Commonwealth War Graves connected to RAF Bicester dating from before and during the Second World War. This was a training station for Bomber Command and a number of the burials are of airmen killed in training accidents. Three German soldiers were buried in the churchyard but have since been returned to their home country.

Caversfield House.

(Previously known as The Manor).

The Manor can be traced back to before the Norman conquest when it was a 5 hide manor.

In 1086, it became the possession of William de Warenne. From then on it passed to a number of recognised families.

From 1836-1897, the house was owned by Robert Bullock-Marsham and then his son until it was bought by the Phillips family.

Between 1842-45, the architect, C.R. Cockerell designed Caversfield House on the site of the former manor house. The architect William Wilkinson designed the neo-Tudor style Brashfield House which

was built in 1872-75 in the east of the parish by the old Roman Road.

In the early 20th Century, the Wyndham family bought the estate including the house, stables and beautiful park land. Colonel Wyndam (1888-1970) was himself a keen researcher of history and in 1950 wrote the book, 'A Backward Glance', full of history and facts of the local area.

Caversfield House now stands in beautiful grounds with ancient trees surrounding a lake. A walled garden provides fruit and vegetables and greenhouses provide more delicate fruits. An old bridge spanning the River Bure, takes the road within the property, out onto green parkland.

The House has undertaken many changes over the centuries and in the 1970s a fire destroyed a good part of the building, but has since been re-built.

Disclaimer: Whilst every effort is made to ensure that any information given is correct, no responsibility can be taken for the accuracy of the information given or the consequences of relying on it. The information expressed is that of the contributor at the time of submission. Sheila Wallington (nee Phipps).



Pre War Fort type 1959/34 brick fort.

RAF Bicester Airfield.

Originally built in 1911, it wasn't until 1916 that the RAF took over the site for the Royal Flying Corps.

The airfield provided a home for No.1 Camouflage Unit with Blenheims and Spitfires. The first flight of the prototype Handley Page Halifax took place here in 1939 and was home of No.71 squadron Maintenance Unit.

A Pre War 'Fort' type 1959/34 brick watch officer still remains and has been restored in recent years, as have many of the hangars and other buildings.

During the Second World War, the airfield was used as a glider base. Later the airfield was used to store vital equipment necessary for the invasion of north-west Europe, which thankfully didn't happen.

Post-war Bicester became a non-flying unit, used for maintenance and later as a Motor Transport depot. In 1953 No 71 Maintenance Unit formed here as a main salvage unit. Crashed aircraft were brought

here and reconstructed in one of the hangars for crash investigation purposes.

In 1976, the RAF ceased to use the airfield but still maintained staff here to run the gliding association operation.

Briefly in the mid 1980s the USAF used the Technical and Domestic Area for storage and in 1990 medical personnel and hospital equipment was kept here in anticipation of a large number of casualties during the 1991 First Persian Gulf War which never materialised.

Personnel housing was built along Skimmingdish Lane in the eastern part of the parish and in the recent decade much of this housing has been bought and sold to private owners. The RAF vacated in 2004.

The site was taken over in 2013 by Bicester Heritage creating a revolution in historic vehicle ownership.

The hub is the only location of its type in Britain and hosts 45 specialist business on its 444 acre site.



Tiger Moth.

The RAF site was neglected for the best part of 40 years and was added to Historic England's 'At Risk Register'.

In 2008 it was designated the most 'at risk' of all Defence Estates in the UK. Since Bicester Heritage's tenure over 95% of the buildings have been delicately restored or re-activated for modern business use and occupation with the site now held as a national exemplar of constructive conservation by Historic England.

Several Open Days/Scrambles have been staged here with everyone wearing Second World War costumes and driving and tending vintage/historic vehicles beautifully restored.

The buildings house many vintage and classic vehicles from sports cars to tanks and early flying machines.

Information and photographs kindly provided by Philip White of Bicester Heritage.



Bicester Heritage site.