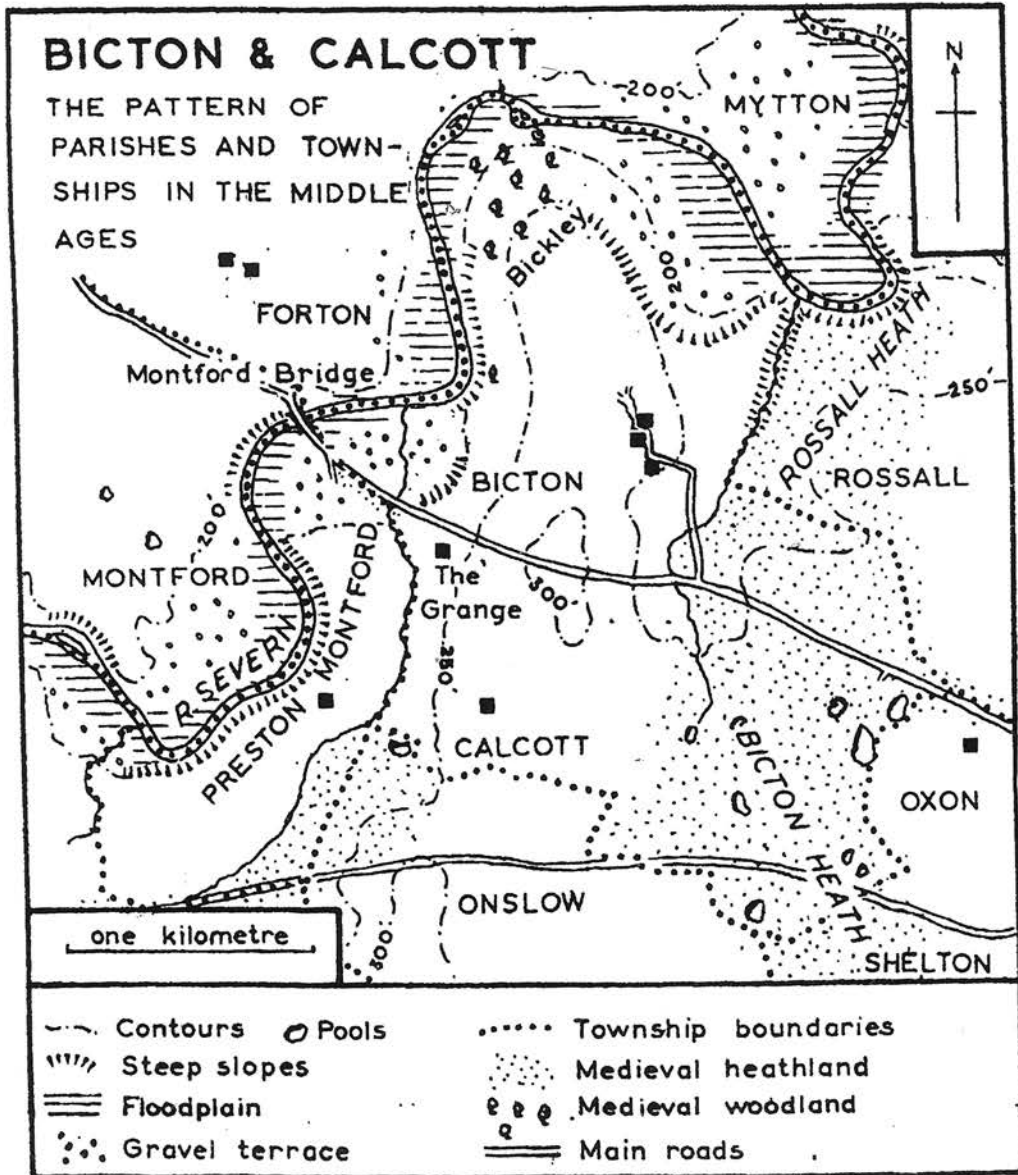


This map refers to article "History Of Bicton"



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Number 488
MARCH 2007

Bicton

Village

HISTORY
of BICTON
by David Pannett



News

THE HISTORY OF BICTON

Part I of a series of articles first published in this Newsletter over 20 years ago.

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago the Shell Guide written by Michael Moulder described, or rather dismissed Bicton as a *'decayed village off the Holyhead Road near Shrewsbury. A white stuccoed manor house, a ruined and overgrown eighteenth century church, a red-brick Georgian farmhouse with a monkey-puzzle tree make up what there is. The new church (1866) has a very ugly tower....'*

The church is actually 1886. I like the tower - the monkey puzzle tree was cut down years ago. However, one must agree with the writer that the visitor would find Bicton a rather dull village without an old church, a picturesque house or even a central focus like a green. On the other hand this 'ordinary' village illustrates very well some typical features of the Shropshire rural landscape and by studying it we can learn more about the ways in which this developed.

Historically Bicton lies in the ancient township of Bicton and Calcot which was an outlying part of the parish of St. Chad, Shrewsbury. It did not therefore have its own parish church in the Middle Ages, although a chapel was referred to in the fourteenth century and another was built here in the sixteenth century and rebuilt in the eighteenth. Bicton did not become an Independent parish until the present church was built in 1886. This story is, of course, not unusual in this county where most of the medieval parishes embraced wide areas containing many separate townships of other small farms and hamlets. (The name 'Ruyton-XI-Towns' is a well-known example of this). The adjacent township of Preston Montford, since joined to Bicton Parish, similarly belonged to St. Alkmunds, Shrewsbury.

The Ice Age and after

The township area embraces some distinctive landforms produced by the glacial and post-glacial history of the Shropshire plain and these have greatly influenced the development of the man-made landscape. The actual village site, for instance, stands on a north-south ridge of sand, clay and stones, built up as a 'terminal moraine' by the Severn Valley Glacier over 20,000 years ago. At its maximum this ice had previously reached as far east as Shrewsbury where it had met other ice from the Irish Sea resulting in many detached ice blocks becoming buried in each other's deposits.

continued on next page.....

HISTORY OF BICTON contd....

As the ice front melted back to the Bicton line, those blocks of ice also slowly melted resulting in a surface deeply pitted with hollows termed 'kettle holes' some of which became filled with water to form Oxon Pool and Calcott Moss.

Bore holes for the new road and an old well at the Four Crosses Inn show the deposits to be over 100 feet thick in places especially in a deep trench in the underlying solid rock running from west to east towards Shrewsbury along which the deepest 'kettle holes' can now be seen

As the ice front finally melted back even further, its waters fed the new River Severn, which cut a narrow winding valley through the moraine, leaving crescent shaped cliffs on the outside of its bends and level terraces of gravel on the inside. The last 10,000 years have brought warmer and drier climates which have caused the river to shrink and fill parts of the old channel with silt to form the flood plain. The stream flowing through the village also incised its lower valley to keep pace.

The Bicton soils and natural drainage therefore present a complex mixture of stiff 'boulder-clay' and sands laid down by the glaciers and melt waters and together they really constitute an 'arctic landscape covered with grass'. To understand it further we must arrange a visit to Iceland or Spitzbergen!

The link between history and these landforms lies in their varied suitability to early cultivation. The sloping sides of the moraine, especially around the river valley, provided the best natural drainage and helped determine the site of the village and its medieval arable fields. The uneven and ill-drained zone of kettle holes on the other hand was left as wasteland, only suitable for rough grazing and some peat cutting and therefore became known as Bicton Heath. The 'Calcott' part of the township likewise followed this same pattern but on a small scale with Upper Calcott Farm atop the ridge and Lower Calcott on the edge of the heathland.

Almost by accident, the long-distance route of the Shrewsbury-Oswestry Road, later the Holyhead Road, also crosses the township, experiencing its own problems with the relief and contributing its own influence on settlement patterns, all of which will be discussed in later instalments.

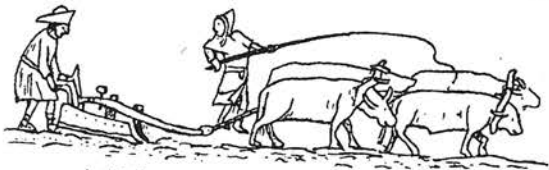
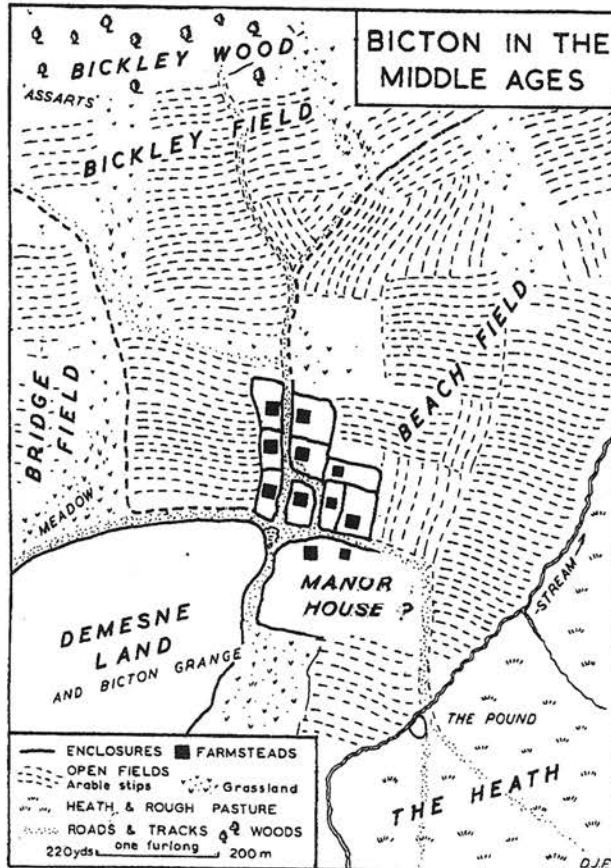
David Pannett

David Pannett has kindly agreed to re-write our local history. Editor.

HISTORY OF BICTON contd.....

Analogy with other 'cot' settlements suggest it would have consisted of two or three small peasant farms which later became amalgamated to form only one modern farm. Or, could it have been the home of that 'free man' recorded at Domesday? After the dissolution it passed to a succession of lay owners before becoming part of the Wingfield estate in the late nineteenth century. The family named Calcott held land in the adjacent township of Preston Montford in the seventeenth century

To be continued.....



A Medieval illustration of ploughing

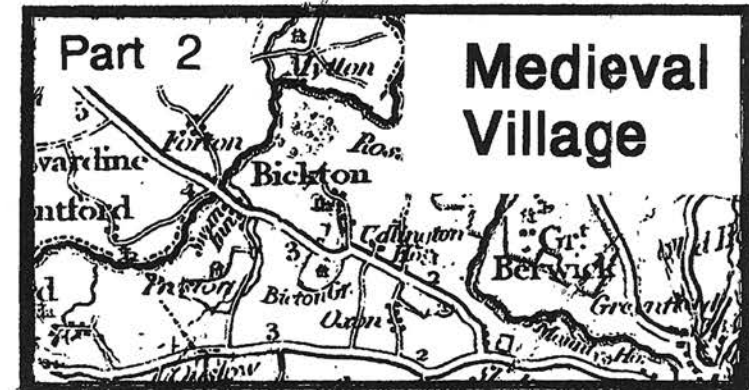
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Bicton

Village

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett



News

Part 2 of David Pannett's HISTORY OF THE BICTON LANDSCAPE

THE MEDIEVAL VILLAGE AND ITS FIELDS

The name Bicton or 'Bicca's tun' (Bicca's farm), reflects the founding of the settlement by Anglo Saxon times, although earlier settlements could also have existed here. It is mentioned in the Domesday Book 1086, when it was held by a man called Wigor. For tax purposes it was assessed as '2 hides' and of its 3 plough teams one was used on the lord's demesne land' while two were held by four villeins and one free man. There was thought to be room for 2 more ploughs. By this time and for the rest of the Middle Ages it probably consisted of a group of small peasant farms lining a street around which lay their land as intermixed narrow strips in the 'open fields'. For convenience of ploughing and draining the land, these strips were ploughed into broad ridges some seven to ten yards broad and about a furlong or 'furrow long' in length. Many were also curved with a reversed S-shape for the convenience of turning an ox team into the headland with a driver walking on unploughed land on the left hand of the team. Such shapes predate the age of stronger, better-trained horses who turned right at the headland and are therefore a distinctly medieval feature.

The ridges were grouped in blocks called furlongs and lay in the best direction for drainage down the slope. Thanks to the heaviness of the soil some have survived into the present and can still be recognised on the ground or in aerial photographs. A light covering of snow can pick them out particularly well.

As was typical of much of Midland England, these fields of open strips were divided into three units for rotation of (1) bare fallow, (2) winter wheat and (3) spring barley, oats or beans. Each farmer was obliged to keep his cropping in step with his neighbours since stock grazed the fields after each harvest and throughout a fallow year. Such fallows served several purposes at once; heavy land could be cleansed of squitch by a summer ploughing, the plough teams were kept busy in an otherwise slack time and the land was prepared for autumn sowing. At the same time the stock could graze the land and contribute manure and even when ploughing broke up the old stubbles, could still use the grassy headlands and furrows or 'reans' between each ridge. The alluvial soils by the Severn, enriched by floods and moist even in dry springs, were exploited as hay meadows and only grazed after Lammas (August 11th) Stock were also turned out on the heath.

The rigid control of grazing on these arable fields was probably the main mechanism by which this old system could resist any changes in routine. In parts of the Midlands some open fields lasted until the eighteenth century and nineteenth century when they were finally 'enclosed' with the help of Acts of Parliament to produce the modern pattern of separate farms within hedged fields.

In the West Midlands and Borderland, however, this process had generally already taken place by 1700. Here there was a more gradual and informal process in which landowners exchanged their scattered strips in order to group them together and allow them to be enclosed by a hedge. This could take place because the regular rotations of the field, especially the strict control of fallow grazing, were beginning to break down for various reasons. Firstly stock had access to the heath, grass fields enclosed from it, or cleared from Bickley Coppice ('assarts') so that animals were less dependent upon grazing within arable fields. Secondly, stock farming was probably becoming more profitable in this area anyway; as part of the national trend towards regional specialisation made possible by improving communications and trade. Drier eastern counties could therefore grow corn more profitably while stock farming expanded in the west. In Bicton at least the four estates who held land in the village could also amalgamate their tenant farms so that by 1700 their properties each consisted of one farm. Until then much of the history can only be inferred from a few surviving deeds and leases. Later documentary evidence is much clearer, showing that exchanges of land continued in order to further consolidate and simplify farm boundaries. The farmsteads nevertheless stayed in the village street in a way very typical of many Shropshire villages. The writer of the Board of Agriculture report in 1813 in fact complained of the inconvenience of such villages. In the nineteenth century and even today the boundaries of the farms, trackways and fields therefore reflect patterns inherited from the open fields.

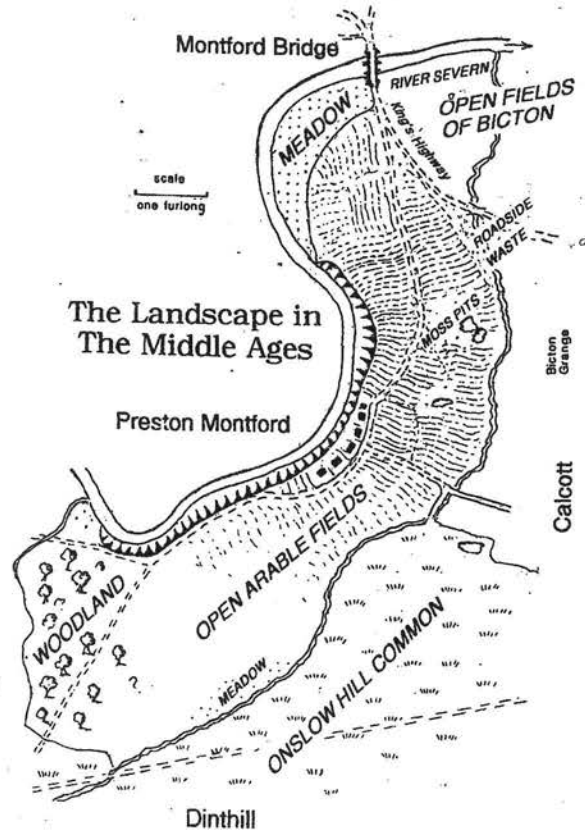
The field and farm pattern in the remaining south west corner of the township is completely different from the rest of the area as a reflection of its own particular history. During the Middle Ages much of Bicton had been granted to Buildwas Abbey and the term 'grange' signifies a monastic farm, typical of the Cistercian Order. Although at first the monks may have run this directly as a "demesne" they were later content to collect rents and tythes only. Significantly, evidence for open fields is ambiguous in this area and it is separated from the more obvious field land by a very old hedge. 17th and 18th century deeds do however suggest that 'Grange Field' was divided amongst different farms like an extra 'open field'. Details of this story, including the founding of Bicton House Farm must remain guesswork at the moment.

Calcott represents a distinct unit of land which was also once given as an endowment to a religious house, namely St. John's Hospital, Frankwell founded in the 13th century. It was most probably not a 'grange' but a normal hamlet or miniature 'village'.

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Preston Montford Hall c.1705,
also rebuilt kitchen wing 1890
and classroom 1957

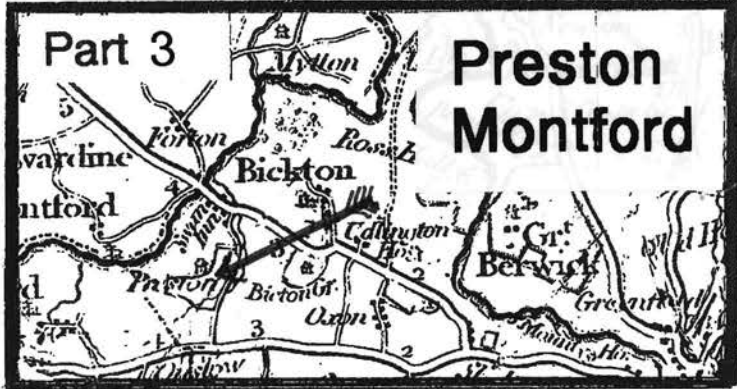


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Bickton

Village

**HISTORY
of BICTON**
by David Pannett



News

Part 3 of David Pannett's HISTORY OF BICTON

Amongst anniversaries to be celebrated in 2007 are three which involve Bicton Parish, especially that part comprising Preston Montford and Montford Bridge:

1. Samuel Adderton died on 22nd May 1707—300 years ago and was buried in Shrewsbury Abbey (slab near communion rail)
2. Thomas Telford the great civil engineer was born in 1757—250 years ago.
3. The Field Studies Council, pioneers of outdoor education, opened their Shropshire Centre in the Spring of 1957, 50 years ago.

For explanation of the connections read on:-

Although Preston Montford is now part of the parish of Bicton it originally formed, together with Dinthill, a detached township of the parish of St. Alkmund, Shrewsbury.. It also formed part of that church's endowments and indeed the name suggests ownership by priests. The suffix 'Montford' distinguishes it from all the other Prestons). Although smaller in scale its history and landscape shows many parallels with those of Bicton itself.

It was mentioned in Domesday Book, had the usual open fields, meadows, woodland and common pasture. In 1145 it was likewise granted to a new monastery, Lilleshal Abbey, but was not worked as a grange, but continued as a normal village, albeit small.

A rare deed of 1308 refers to land in the open fields and in 1327 there were eleven taxpayers before the population crash at the Black Death. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, after the reformation, it was owned and occupied by the Calcot family. At the same time the Borough of Shrewsbury became 'Lords of the Manor' and through their records we learn of the first craftsmen occupying roadside waste near Montford Bridge. At what stage the open field system was enclosed is not clear.

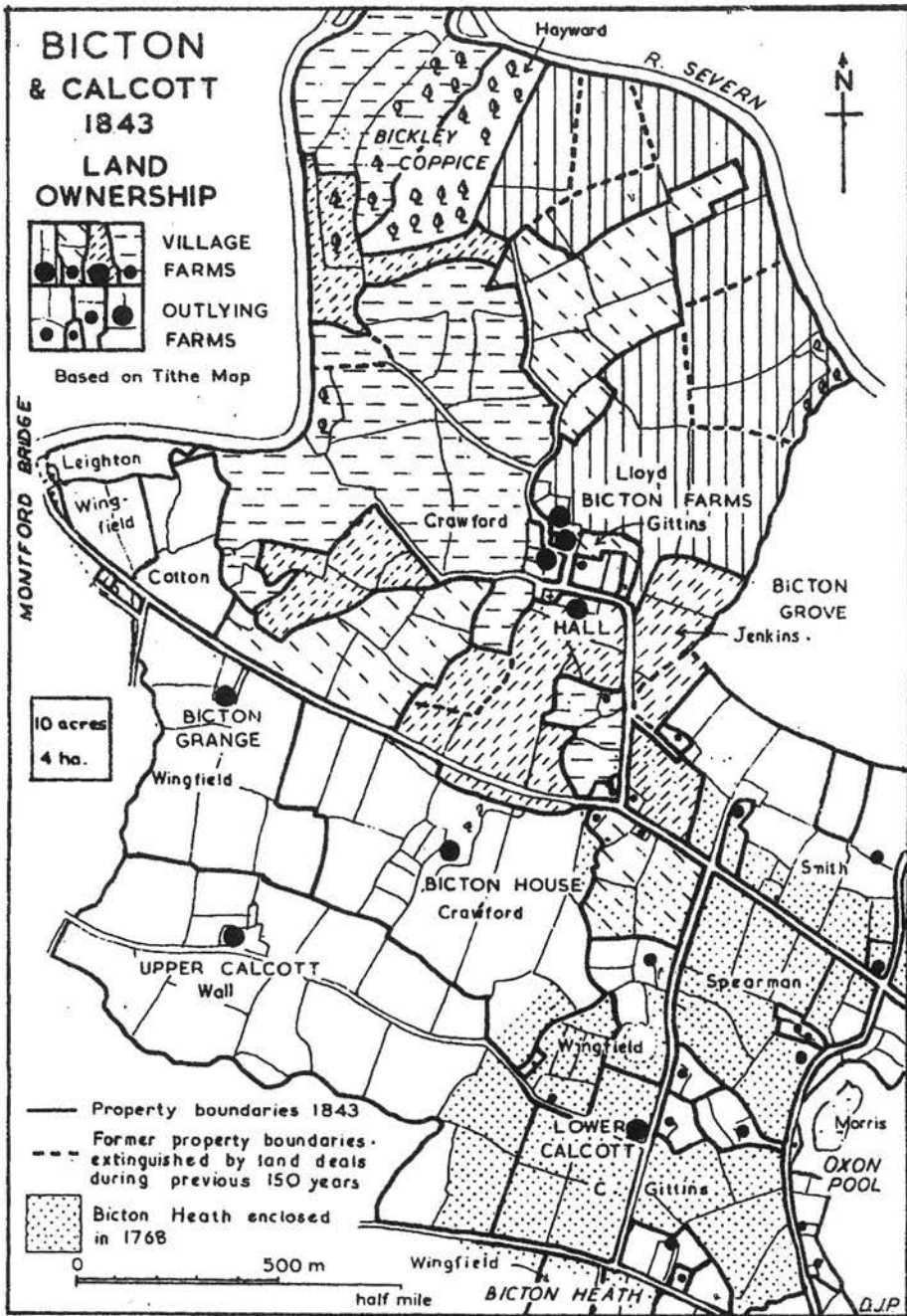
Meanwhile, the reformation also united Abbey Foregate with the borough of Shrewsbury, after a life of separate control under the Abbey, so that its citizens could participate in the trade and politics of the whole town. One such family were the Addertons who built up their fortunes as tailors and drapers through successive generations and involved themselves in public duties, such as being Church Wardens. Eventually one Samuel Adderton even became Mayor of Shrewsbury in 1694. In 1696 he would have witnessed the building of Newport House (later the Gulldhal) which introduced the very latest fashion of brick building which we know as the Queen Anne style. Indeed quite a sensation in such a 'timber frame' town. Could this have been the stimulus for him to purchase land at Preston Montford and build one for himself; sort of 'keeping up with the Joneses?'

He built it on farmland beside the old settlement and laid out a small park. And in doing so ensured the survival of some older ploughing patterns under the grass. For greater privacy the old road from Montford Bridge to Ford was later closed and replaced by the present lane and no doubt at the same time further cottage settlement was encouraged by the main road, well away from the house. His enjoyment of the new 'Hall' was however short lived as he died in 1707. His son Samuel, now a landed gentleman, married into another local landed family and his children did likewise. The downside of all this however was that various marriage settlements transferred some interest in this property to those families, so that the grandchildren found themselves with less. In this way the Hill, Chambre and Vernon families took over the house and used it as a spare home, 'dower house' or rented it out to other gentry. The significance of this story is that it escaped major alteration, preserving many original features to this day. The wider estate was however improved, including the enclosure of Onslow Hill. The service wing at the rear burnt down in the 1890s, but the replacement was carefully blended with the old. By this time the whole estate had passed to the Wingfields who were expanding their estate in Bicton and they continued to use the house in the same way, before setting it on while retaining surrounding farmland. To cut a long story short, in 1947 (is this another anniversary?) it was given to a charity which ran it as a probation home for boys who carried out small scale farming as part of their education/treatment. This closed down just when the Field Studies Council were seeking to expand their activities in response to the rising demand from schools and colleges for environmental education out of doors. Since then the new 'Field Centre' has gone from strength to strength providing a wide variety of weekly and weekend courses for 'students of all ages from eight to eighty'. Over the years thousands have experienced the natural history and landscape of this area and many more distant locations in the county. In various ways the centre has also contributed to the local economy.

The original Hall was soon too small for the various activities so that several extra buildings have arisen around the site. At one time an old Land Army hostel near the main road was also used and this helped to prolong the life of a wartime relic with its own contribution to recent local history.

The remaining anniversary concerns Thomas Telford. Countless places in Britain (and even Sweden) were touched by the work of this great engineer, Bicton, on his 'Holyhead Road' but one of them. The details we must leave for a further instalment.

see pictures on next page.



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Bickton

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HISTORY
of BICTON
 by David Pannett



News

HISTORY OF BICTON by David Pannett- Part 4.

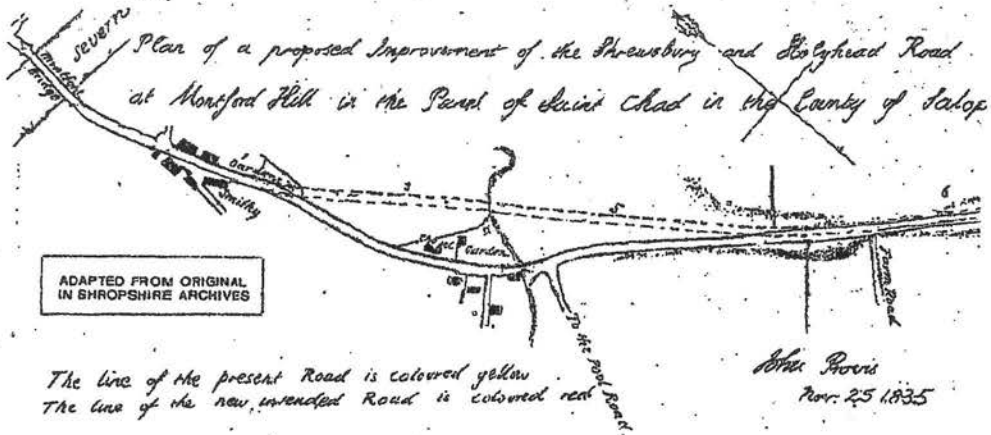
THE AGE OF IMPROVEMENT

As already discussed in a previous instalment, the field and farm pattern developed by a process of numerous exchanges of land which first eliminated the medieval open fields but then continued into the nineteenth century in order to simplify the irregular boundaries produced. Throughout, the farmsteads continued to occupy the medieval sites. However the farm houses themselves are no longer medieval but all reflect the investment in new building made during the prosperous years of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. New methods and high wartime prices thereby made Georgian architecture a very common feature of the Shropshire countryside. Otherwise, each reflects the individual history of the estate to which it belonged. For instance, Bicton Hall Passed from the Muckeston to the Jenkins family by marriage around 1730 and thereafter "Junior" members of that family lived here in Bicton while the senior branch used Charlton Hall near Wroxeter. It therefore remained a modest mansion even experiencing decline in status, rather than expansion, as a result of the new ownership. The land was often let to adjacent farms. The farm, later known as 'The Woodlands' was bought by John Lloyd, a gentleman farmer, in 1811 and no doubt he rebuilt around this date. Its fine portico and separate carriage drive are good symbols of a small country mansion. The other two farms, by contrast, are always held by tenants and lack such pretentious architecture. Bicton Farm appears to be an early 18 century building, while Red House looks as if it could have been rebuilt following a change of ownership in 1800. Similar Rebuilding also took place at the outlying farms judging by their architecture. Meanwhile, the heathland had also changed. Once it must have formed part of a continuous open waste of several hundred acres stretching from Bowbrook to Rossall, but by the seventeenth century at least, encroachments were being made. Those at Rossall Heath led to the building of Bicton Grove Farm while in Bicton they probably included a planned set of narrow fields between Bicton Villa and the Isle Lane. Otherwise, encroachments were made by 'squatters', here and there, all over the heath, wherever the land was suitably dry between the pools. They included cottages at the end of Bicton Lane as well as larger-holdings such as 'The Moss'. Squatters generally paid a 'fine' or ground rent to the Lords of the Manor who, in the eighteenth century, were the well known Mytton family.

HISTORY OF BICTON contd.....

In 1768 owners with an interest in the heath formally agreed to enclose it and a pattern of new straight field boundaries and roads including part of the main road, were laid out between the irregular outlines of the existing smallholdings. Thereafter many marshy pools were also drained and land sales added their own contribution to a very complex and distinctive boundary pattern. For instance, the former Mytton property, acquired at the enclosure in recognition of their manorial rights, was bought by Morris Eyton of Oxon Hall in the nineteenth century. This estate later passed to the county council who managed it as smallholdings. Other new holdings developing after enclosure, included the Four Crosses Inn and the Blacksmith's Shop, both conveniently located on the main road, which was becoming busier in the 'Turnpike Age' This long straight section of road so typical of those on former heathlands is a daily reminder of this story as speeding modern traffic proves more dangerous than stage coaches. In similar way, encroachments on roadside waste had already been taking place at Montford Bridge, forming a new community of craftsmen, traders and inn-keepers deserves a special study of its own as another instalment of this history. In 1835 the road across Grange Bank then, known to travellers as 'Montford Hill' was rebuilt with a better gradient for the fast mail coaches along Telford's new Holyhead Road. Its embankments were probably built up from sand dug from a pit behind Bicton House and from the cutting at the summit. Houses lining the old road near Montford Bridge were then bypassed and left as Drury Lane while another section of old road survives as the drive to Bicton House. One result of all these stories was the expansion of population away from the original medieval village whereby in the nineteenth century most people lived elsewhere in the township. Significantly the new church and school built in the 1880s were built nearer to the main road and therefore more centrally placed for this population. By this time the Tithe Maps and Census Returns give us a clearer picture of the population and its activities which will be discussed in a further instalment.

(see diagram on next page)



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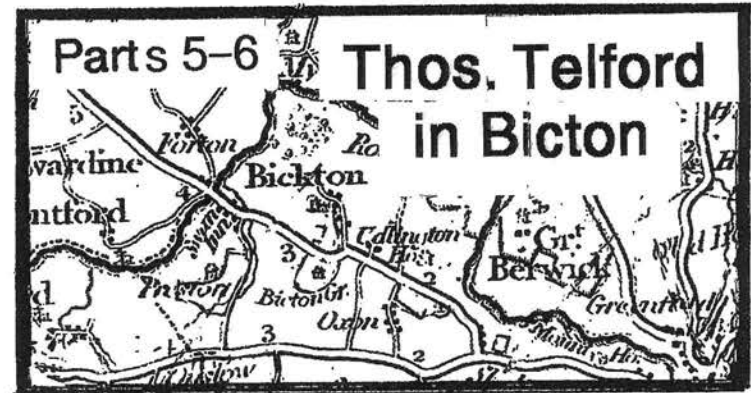
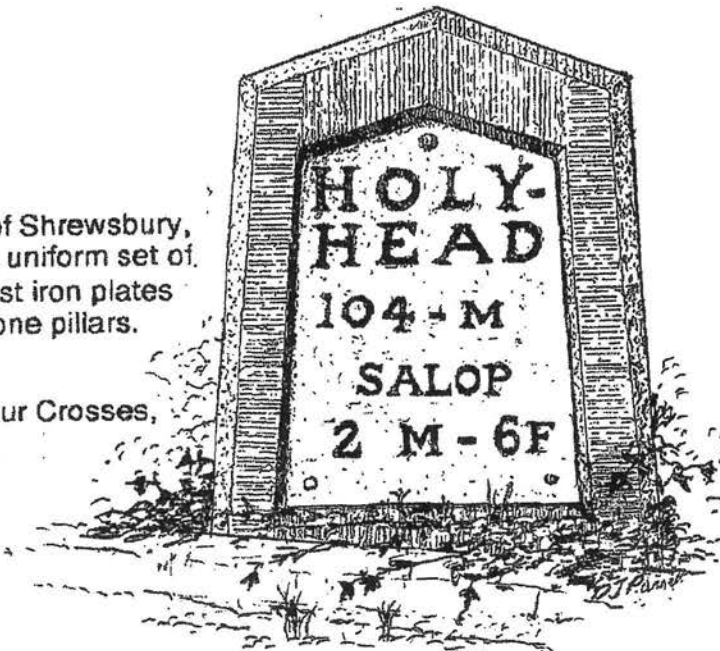
Bicton

Village

**HISTORY
of BICTON**
by David Pannett

For his road west of Shrewsbury, Telford designed a uniform set of mile stones with cast iron plates mounted on limestone pillars.

Example near Four Crosses, Bicton.



News

THOMAS TELFORD IN BICTON

As already mentioned in previous instalments, this year we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Telford who made his own contribution to our local landscape.

After leaving his native Scotland, he worked as a mason in London gaining skills and experience before being invited to Shrewsbury by its MP Sir William Pulteney in 1787. The initial project was the restoration of the castle but he soon got involved with other public works, such as the prison. This led to his appointment as County Surveyor and thereby the task of rebuilding Montford Bridge.

Throughout its 500 year life, it needed regular repairs, perhaps because of flood damage, as well as decay. Between 1245 and 1412 the crown granted the right to levy tolls for this purpose on several occasions. In 1538 Leland reported that 'the fine stone bridge had been lately renewed'. Later, the borough of Shrewsbury, now responsible for the bridge, ordered minor repairs in 1608 and levied a special tax in the town for major work in 1628. By 1792 it was no longer a question of repairs but total replacement to meet the demands of increasing traffic in the 'Turnpike Age'.

To avoid floods, Telford sprung his new bridge from the high cliff on the Montford side and built a large approach ramp across the floodplain on the Bicton side. The old bridge was completely removed and was no doubt 'recycled' to build this ramp and also provide rubble infilling around the arches. It was therefore necessary to erect a temporary wooden bridge during construction. About the only relic of the old bridge is a stone dated 1630 inserted into the rear of the new toll house a reminder of that 1628 repair order.

For both bridge and toll house, Telford used red sandstone from Nesscliffe, as it was more conveniently accessible than the more popular and better quality stone from Grinshill. Perhaps he had been introduced to this stone by his work on the castle where a colour match had been important. Anyway, authorities kept him on a tight budget.

Nearby on the main road 'Montford Little Bridge' was at some stage well built with similar stone. The bridge over this same brook on Preston Montford Lane is identical and both may have been part of this same project but records are lacking.

On the Montford site, the new approaches bypassed the small community in the valley around the original bridgehead. Nevertheless the Clive Arms Inn, formerly the Pheasant, later the Powis Arms, was still accessible. On the Bicton side, on a level terrace beyond the floodplain, some surplus road space appears to have been built over with blacksmiths' shops, a fine new brick house and the Nags Head Inn. The Swan, now hiding its 16th Century timber framing under stucco, still stood at an angle where the Preston Montford road once branched off. Its barn once almost projected into Telford's new road until within living memory.

THOMAS TELFORD IN BICTON contd.

In 1800 the Irish and British parliament were united and soon Irish MP's were lobbying the government to improve the road between. After many surveys, reports and delays, money was allocated and Telford, by now a national rather than local figure was appointed to oversee improvement of the Holyhead Road. He chose the direct route through the Dee valley rather than the long way around by Chester and so our local road became part of that system. Bit by bit improvements were made and eventually in 1835 it was the turn of 'Montford Hill', where the steep gradients needed reducing. A combination of higher embankments and a deeper cutting still takes the road smoothly between Bicton and Montford Bridge, bypassing the little community around 'Montford Little Bridge'. The final work was actually directed by John Provis, since Telford had just died. He always had a reputation for leading a good team of engineers, but perhaps they tend to get overlooked because of the fame of their chief.

Montford Bridge settlement now became a more important service centre with inns and tradesmen, well recorded by the maps and directions around the middle of the century. By this time, however, the rail network was expanding and offering a new way to reach Holyhead and decline was inevitable.

How the settlement developed later is a whole new story, sufficient now is to comments on the bridge itself. It stood firm through high and low water, but in 1963 suffered damage from water freezing between the road and the stone parapet.

Since the bridge was also proving too narrow for both footway and modern traffic the opportunity was seized to replace the whole deck with a wider overhanging structure. For speed, a system of prefabricated concrete beams were laid, held together with a quick setting 'high alumina cement'.

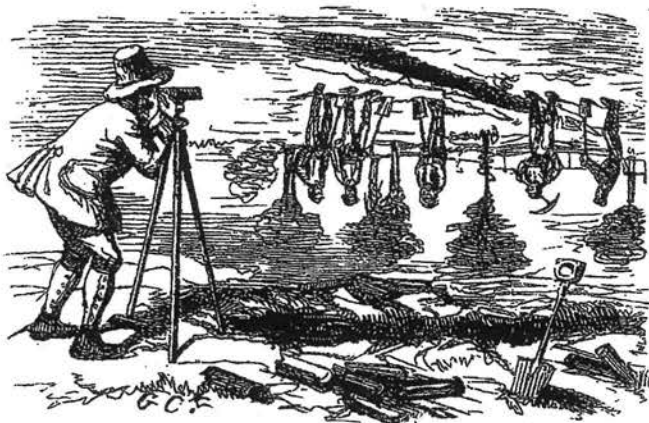
Unfortunately, this new untried material proved a disaster here and elsewhere as it decayed to powder! As a result, after the new bridge on the A5 was opened in 1991, engineers built a new concrete deck, this time slowly casting in situ. The necessary long closure of the road certainly encouraged travellers to use the new route with obvious impact on several roadside businesses. Telford's bridge is still underneath, but more out of sight—so please take the trouble to lean over and take a look rather than just drive over.



Thomas Telford C.E., F.R.S.

John Mytton, Lord of the Manor, may have created the Eel Pool using Calcott Lane causeway as a dam, to augment the natural shape of the hollow. Reference to the eels reminds us that they could inhabit such isolated pools since, unlike normal fish, they could slither through small ditches to reach them. During the Middle Ages great numbers were caught in 'weirs' along the River Severn during migrations, but now the population has been in sharp decline, partly because of the loss of such habitat.

Following enclosure, work could start on improving the drainage to allow better farming as recommended by the agricultural writers of the day. Bit by bit, the main ditches were cut deeper and even buried stone culverts dug to lower the level of Oxon Pool and drain the Eel Pool. The peat of Calcott Moss was now exposed, so that it developed a 'raised bog' profile. The centre continued to grow as a dome of sphagnum moss fed only by acid rain water, surrounded by a moat of willow 'fen' in contact with ground water.



Laying field drains
in the 19th. century :

Farmer confused by
the inverted image
through a new
surveyor's level

cartoon by
George Cruikshank, 1852.

In the surrounding fields under draining could take place with newly available 'horseshoe' drain tiles. Some small ponds were however retained in some field corners for watering stock, but in modern times these have been filled in as piped water and drinking troughs became available.

One of the effects of the wet Summer of 2007 has been the revival of the debate about drainage basin management. Clearly improved systems, which quickly remove water from farmland 'upstream' then pass it on quickly to lowlands 'downstream'.

Traditional pools, millponds, natural wetlands can absorb some of the shock of excess rainfall and are even more important where land has also been developed with hard surfaces. A related debate is the value of the little pockets of land for nature conservation under new ideas of countryside management and farm support. Indeed food for thought as you explore the fascinating landscape through its lanes and footpaths. Also note the role of 'climate change' in forming it in the first place.

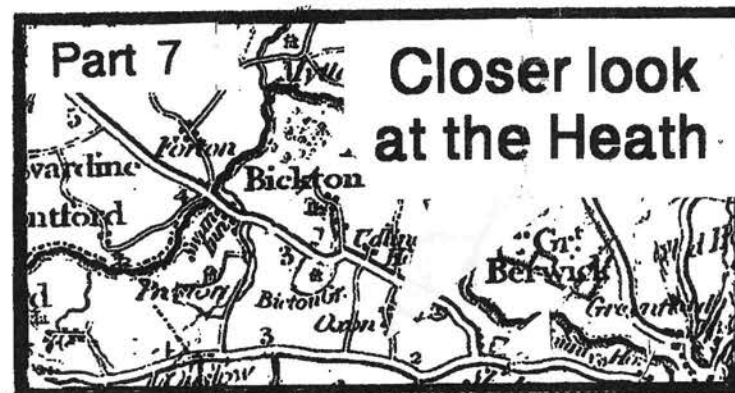
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Bicton

Village

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett



News

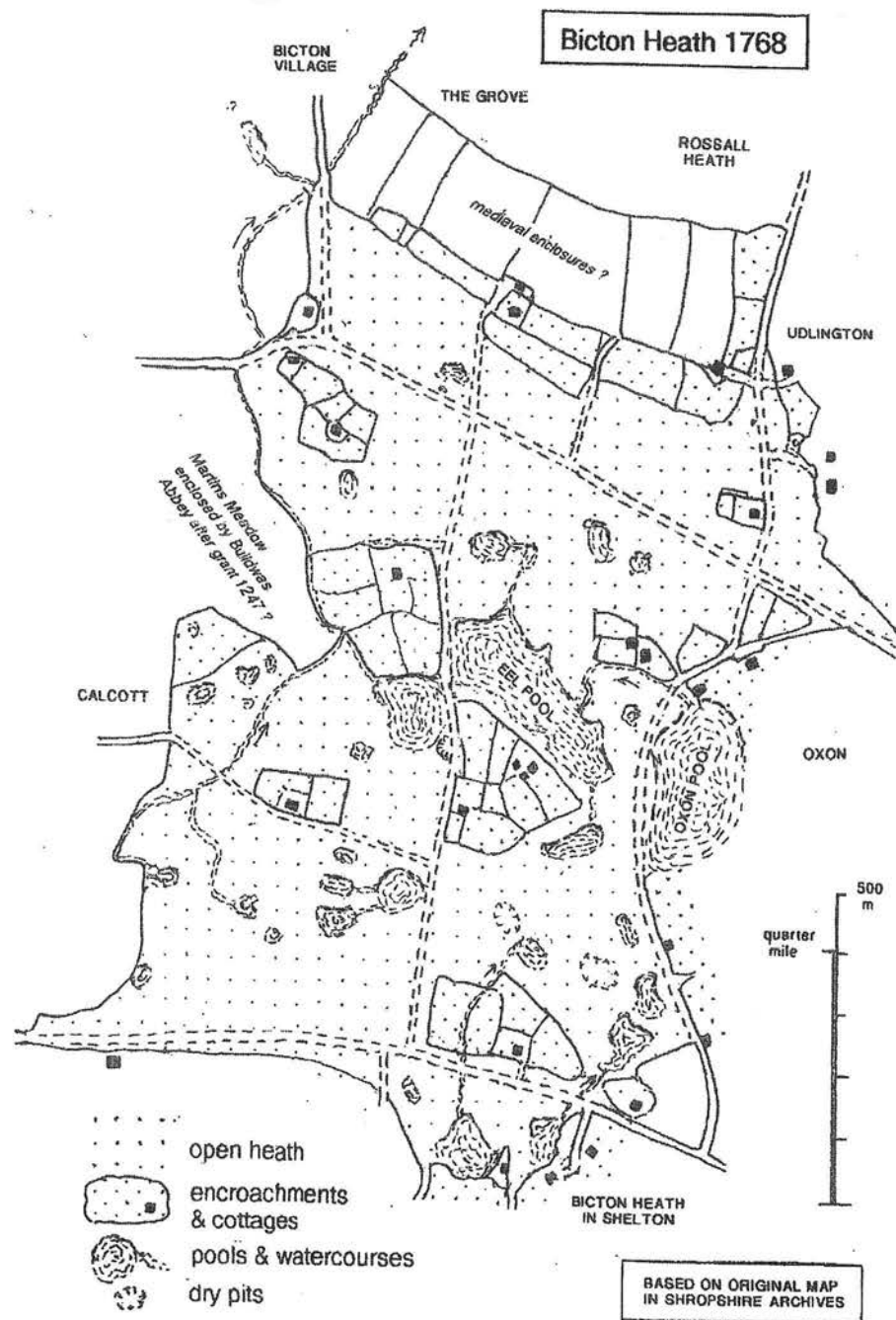
David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 7 A closer look at Bicton Heath

The general location and history of this area have been discussed in previous instalments, but there are still details which deserve a closer look.

The 'Meres and Mosses' of the Ellesmere area are a well known feature of the Shropshire landscape, but few realise we have a small scale version in Bicton. Here, deposits of glacial boulder clay, sand and gravel are particularly thick, thanks to the convergence of two ice streams from the Irish Sea and Wales. In addition, a hidden network of channels cut into the bedrock by meltwater under that ice allowed detached blocks to fall in and become buried. As these melted later, after surface ice had disappeared, the ground collapsed in a series of hollows called 'kettle holes' (named after the traditional cooking pot rather than our familiar kettle). Their location provides clues to the buried channels, otherwise only known from boreholes. Locally, the piles supporting the South end of the new Montford Bridge have been sunk deeper than those on the North end as engineers had stumbled upon the sharp lip of the channel leading from Shrawardine towards Shrewsbury. Along this route is the severely deformed ground of Bicton Heath and the Western suburbs of Shrewsbury.

The typical 'post glacial' development of such 'kettle holes' suggested by sections revealed by building development is as follows; As they began sinking in the newly exposed bare 'tundra' landscape, wind and water blew and washed in fine dust. This provided a sticky mud lining which allowed pools to form (and also trap passing mammoths at Condover). With warmer climates forest clothed the land, while lush pool vegetation grew and died to leave peat, which even filled in some of the shallow depressions, perhaps only leaving Oxon Pool as a true 'mere'. With the arrival of the Neolithic and Bronze Age farmers the forests were steadily thinned out, allowing renewed erosion, washing soil into hollows and floodplains. This often buried the peat, so it remained hidden, sometimes until some unsuspecting builder came across it, with inevitable results. When the route of the new A5 bypass crossed a pool at Preston Montford, engineers had to remove many tons of soft mud and peat before building their embankment. They had to backfill the hole with many more tons of rough stone to keep the subsoil free draining (and then excavate a replacement pond nearby since the old one had been a teaching resource for the field centre).

The old name of this pool 'Moss Pit' and others near the Welshpool Road in Bicton Heath, reminds us that peat was dug from these hollows in the Middle Ages, no doubt for fuel. The grant of Bicton Grange to Buildwas abbey in 1247 included the right to dig 'turves' commonly called 'peth' from parts of the heath. In this way pools of open water would again appear in the landscape and are therefore a marked feature on the map made for the 'inclosure' of the heath in 1768. Most overflowed through a network of ditches converging on the stream at the Northwest corner of the heath. This area may have been the 'Martins Meadow' which Buildwas Abbey was allowed to enclose in 1247; it is the only patch of level wetland suitable for traditional hay meadow in the area of the grange.



Continued.....

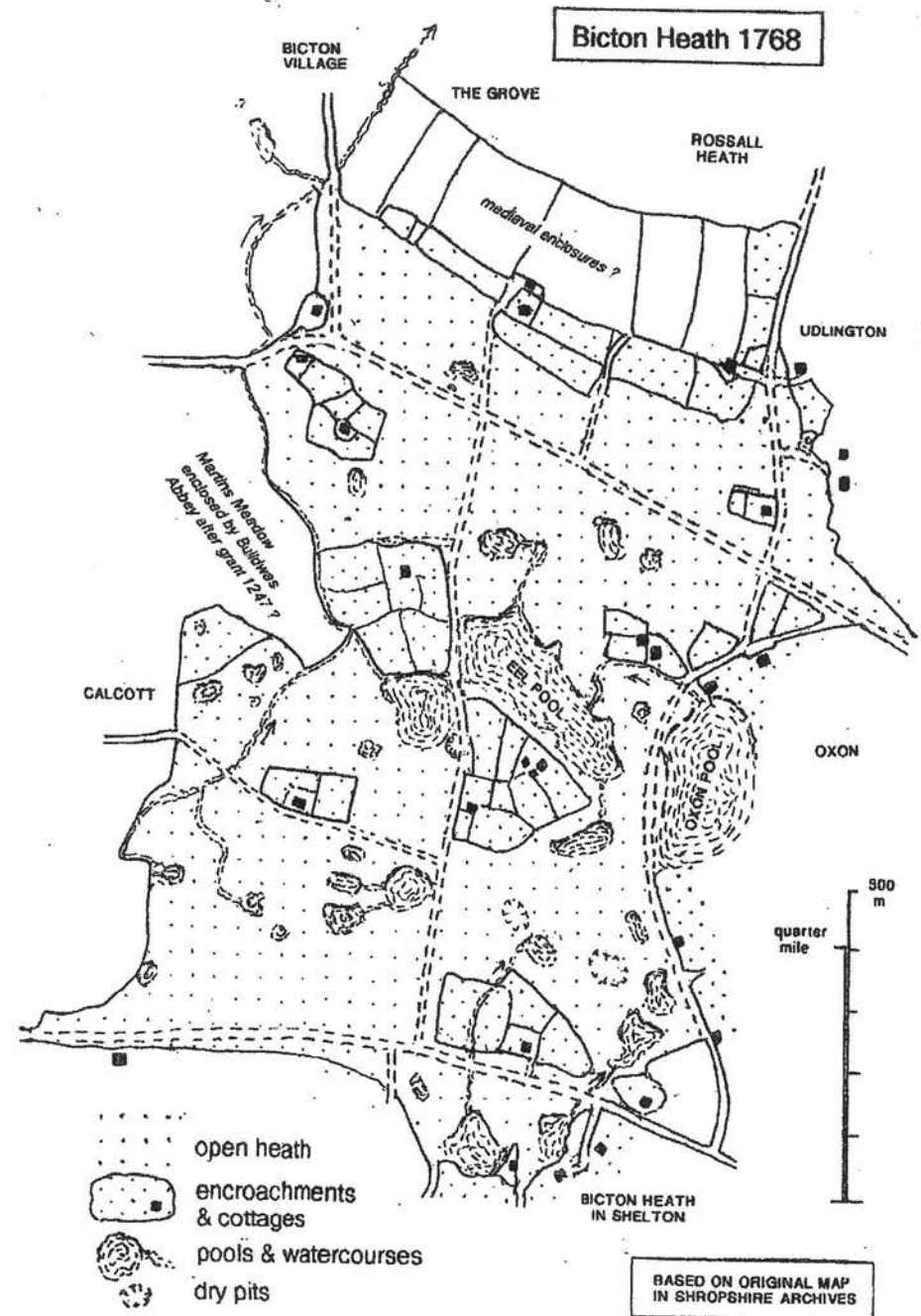
David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 7 A closer look at Bicton Heath

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Continued.....

David Pannetts' history of Bicton - Part 8

Hedgerow shrubs and landscape history

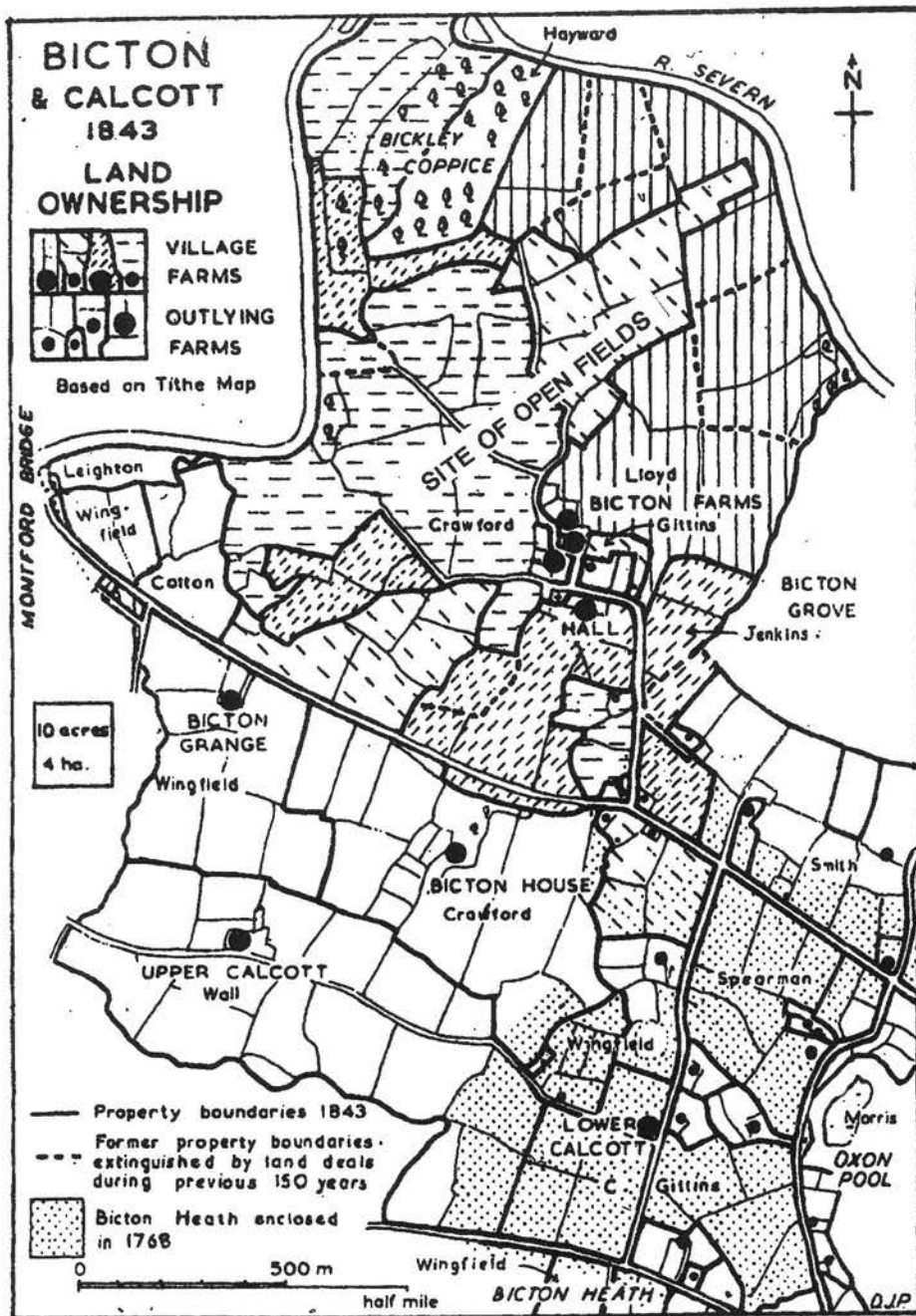
Earlier instalments have explained the development of our local field pattern in terms of the enclosure of the open fields and heath, cottage encroachments and the improvement of the main roads. The actual plants forming the hedges, however, have not been discussed and this omission must now be corrected, before they shed their leaves this Autumn.

Many years ago a professor of 'Local history' collaborated with an ecologist to explore the relationship between various hedges of known date and the trees and shrubs which they contained. They found that old hedges usually contained many more species than newer ones. In spite of the many variations in detail, they drew a straight line through their 'graph' of data which suggested that, on average, a hedge would gain a new species about every hundred years. One would just count the number in a sample 30 yard stretch and 'hey presto' you have a date! Such a simple 'rule' was welcomed by the general public, reproduced in books, quoted by 'Jennifer Archer', Alan Titchmarsh and even by other presenters this very year. It is for this reason we must mention it, if only to chop it down a bit.

Detailed local studies, including some around Bicton, certainly confirm that old hedges are richer in species, but also reveal that the actual ones present are more significant than crude total numbers. Each has its own biological character which has influenced its place as a relic of the past, selected barrier or invading weed.

The most common hedgerow trees and shrubs around Bicton illustrate this principle well, as follows:

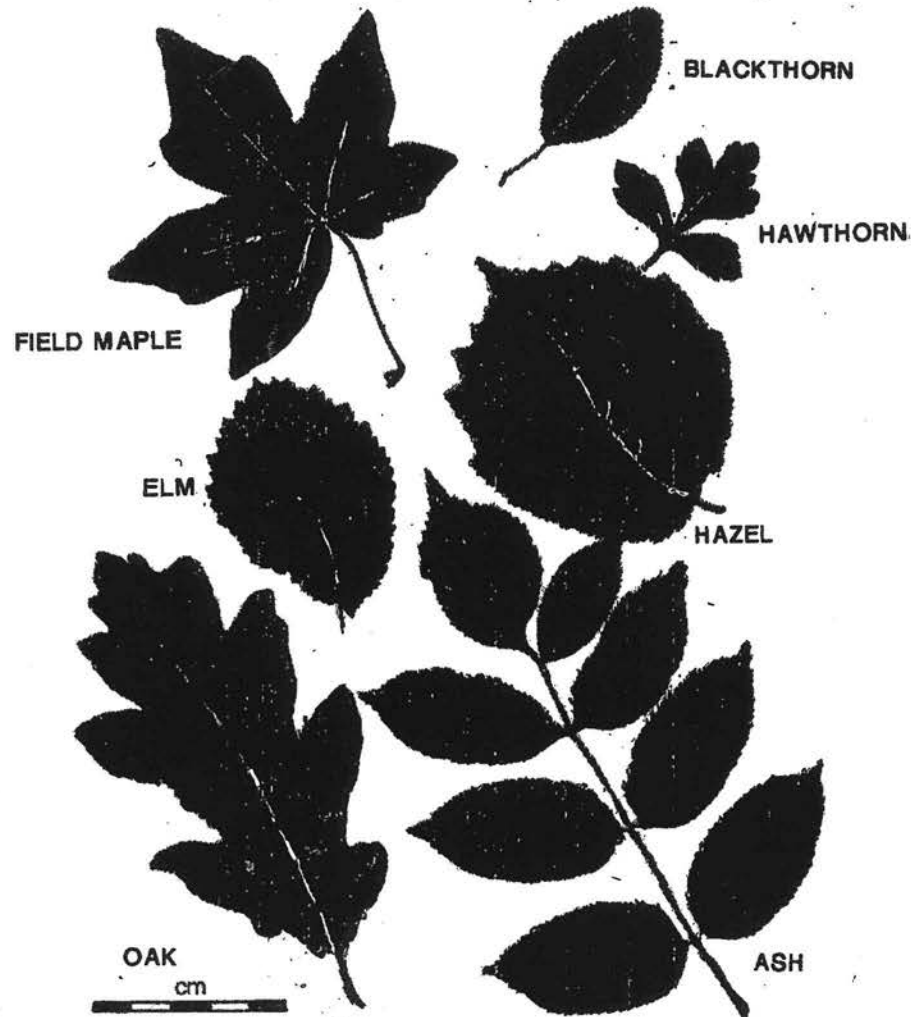
Field Maple - our only native acer, and Hazel, do not spread very easily, but were important elements in the original wild woodland. They can be good clues to 'assarts', fields created directly from cleared woodland, and are found in hedges close to Bickley Coppice.



map first used for part 4

They also occur in the very ancient boundary winding westwards from the old church towards Bicton Grange, which separated the grange and demense land from the open fields. (where Telford's new road cuts this line there is a lone Hazel bush incorporated into the new road hedge). Similar old Hazel hedges mark the boundary of Calcott, the old lane to Preston Montford and the further Parish boundary with Ford.

Some hedgerow shrubs in Bicton



Blackthorn - propagated by suckers, was the preferred stockproof hedging plant used for the new enclosures from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Its relatives amongst the Prunus family include Sloe, Wild Plum and the cultivated Damson, an important source of fruit for cottage gardens.

Elm also grows from suckers and once planted, can aggressively dominate whole lengths of hedge as can be seen in the heath area. Sadly, many show signs of Dutch Elm disease, but as old tops die the rootstocks continue to throw up new shoots, whose smoother bark is first uninviting to the dreaded beetle.

Planting such a mixture of suckers dug from local woodland and wasteland was typical of this 'enclosure' period and was actually described by an agricultural writer c1800. This certainly undermines that one species per century 'rule'.

Hawthorn, or 'quick', by contrast, is raised from seed and became the preferred material once commercial nurseries became established in the nineteenth-century, (including one on the Welshpool Road, known to have supplied plants to many gardens around Shrewsbury). Now mass planting of this simple species could take place, as along the new road towards Montford Bridge. It was also used to repair gaps in older hedges, while birds did their bit to spread seeds around.

Holly, also spread by seeds, appears widely for the same reason. Along parts of Calcott Lane it may also have been deliberately planted as an alternative to thorn.

Oak usually appears as standard trees, planted in hedges of many dates because of its timber. They often stand at regular intervals. Fine old specimens line Shepherds Lane, but where is the next generation?

Ash and Sycamore spread with winged seeds and can invade any hedge, the latter being a particular 'weed' shading out other species. Birds also spread Elder making hedges of all dates more diverse.

The latest hedge planting, apart from that around new 'suburban' gardens, has been along the new A5. Now with thoughts on nature conservation, mixed planting has been returned, even including Field Maple. So we are back to the 'middle ages'

The population structure also shows a marked female bias, produced largely by the number of domestic servants "living in" the large farms and the Hall. Even the odd cottage had such help! Most were young girls coming from different parts of Shropshire and Wales. "Going into service" and escaping the crowded rural cottages was a typical career option for girls and the "big houses" always needed a large staff to run them. Even so, Bickton Hall must have been crowded with three spinster ladies and 9 servants. Fewer boys appeared to have moved around in this way, staying locally for the available farm work and even living at home while their sisters may have left.

The recorded place of birth also reflect such movements; their parents are quite likely to have met near the workplace (no doubt unofficial liaisons also occurred in this environment; nobody talked about them, but the evidence can turn up in family trees!)

One result is that while the youngest children are listed as Bickton born, only one adult is recorded as Bickton born in the census. As already observed, older children may have moved, leaving a gap in the population structure between these youngsters and their parents generation. Total family size is difficult to judge. Odd extras in the village were the four boarders at Miss Jellicoes school. Frances Bowker also ran the school at what became known as Old School House. Was there a difference in the two schools based on age, sex or social status? Lucy Jellicoe, unmarried at 60 and Frances Bowker a widow aged 54 had both economic necessity and opportunity to follow their careers in a world where the modern type of working wife was unknown. For so many it was either domestic servant or housewife!

There must be many individual stories if we had time to probe; any volunteers?

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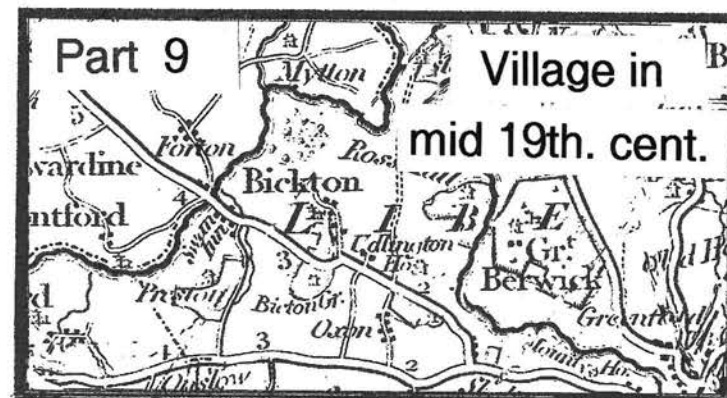
NOV. 2007

Bickton

Village

**HISTORY
of BICKTON**

by David Pannett



News

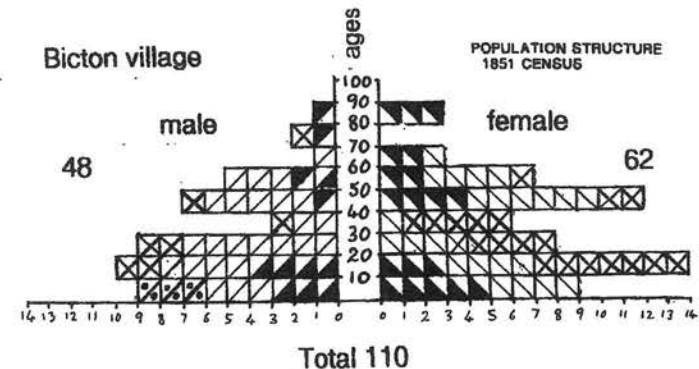
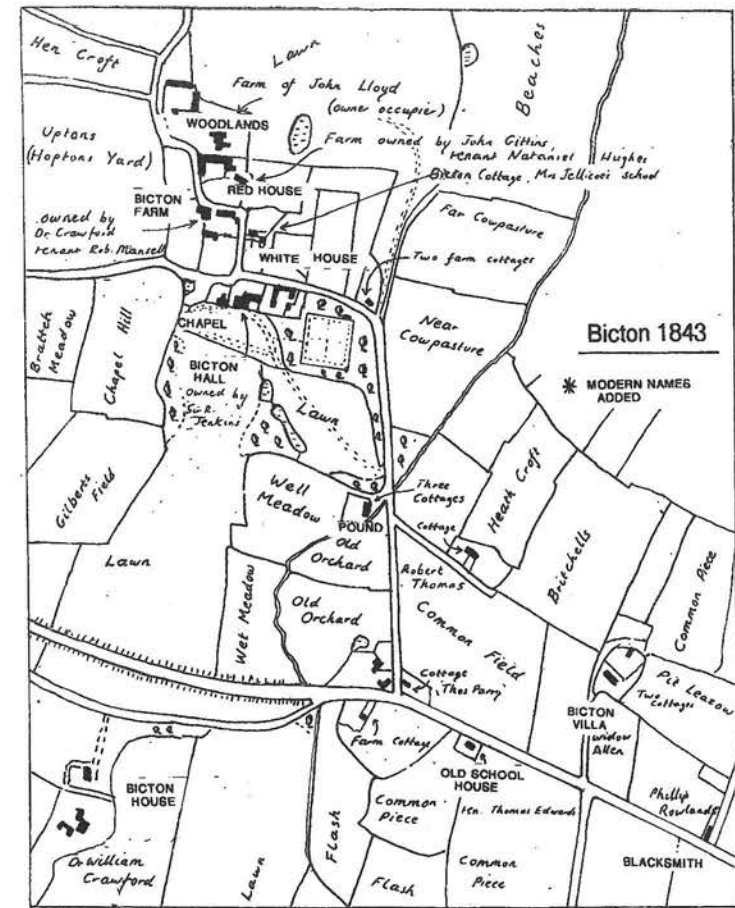
David Pannetts' history of Bicton - Part 9 Bicton in the mid 19th century

In the middle ages Farmers were obliged to give a tenth of their produce to the church or a related institution which had required the right to it. Such "tithes" were an unpopular burden, difficult to administer and therefore parliament eventually passed an act in 1837 changing them to money payments. As these were based upon the extent and value of each property, calculations required accurate maps, which have since become valuable sources for study of our local history. The regular census returns which started in 1801 were now collecting much more information and can add to the knowledge of our local communities and individual families in the same period. The early trade directories also give some information.

The Bicton tithe map of 1843 shows a mixture of properties making up the central village area: two "gentleman" farmers, John Lloyd at The Woodlands and William Crawford at Bicton House; two tenant farmers Nathaniel Hughes at Red House owned by John Gittins and Robert Mansell; Bicton Farm which was also owned by William Crawford, Bicton Hall, owned by the Jenkins family of Charlton, was let to another member of the gentry, whilst its land was worked with Bicton farm. The Whitehouse, in two parts, was owned by Mrs Jellicoe whose daughter ran a school there. The rest of the cottages and smallholdings had originated around the former edge of the heath. Significantly Phillip Rowlands had his Blacksmith shop on the main road.

In trying to match the 1851 census return with this map it soon became clear that there had been a continued turnover of population. The landed proprietors John Lloyd, William Crawford and Mrs Jellicoe remain, but almost all other households had moved on, thanks to their short term farm leases and cottages tied to work. The population structure therefore shows a sharp cut off at the end of normal working life, which also reflects the poor life expectancy of the manual workers at the time.

Significantly, few remaining beyond these years came from the ranks of the self employed and "gentle folk" employing staff, such as the Cotes sisters at Bicton Hall and those named above. The oldest inhabitants were Phillip Rowlands, the Blacksmith (85) and his wife (82). Helped by their grandson.



- born in Bicton
- ▣ self employed and 'gentlefolk'
- ⊗ 'living in' domestic and farm staff
- ⊞ school boarders
- ◻ other family and visitors

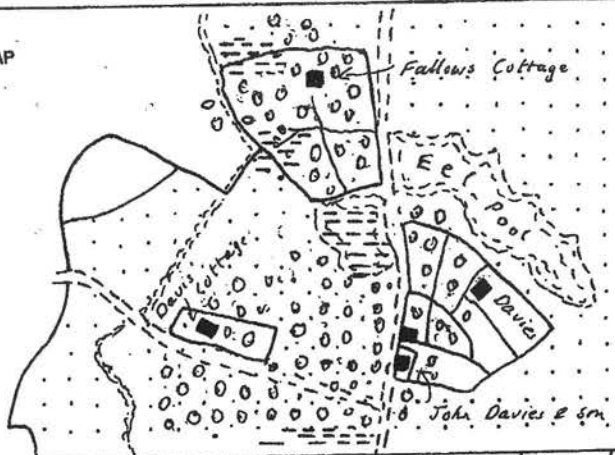
LOWER CALCOTT

a settlement on Bickton Heath

1768 INCLOSURE MAP

Cottages on the heath

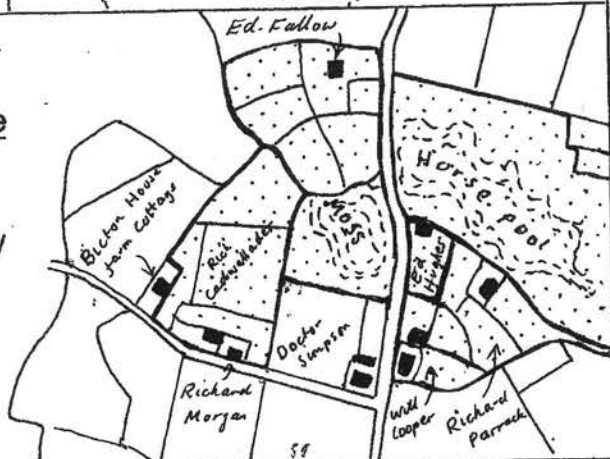
- open heath
 - sand & gravel
 - peat
- (GEOLOGICAL MAP)



1812 SURVEY

The 'enclosed' landscape

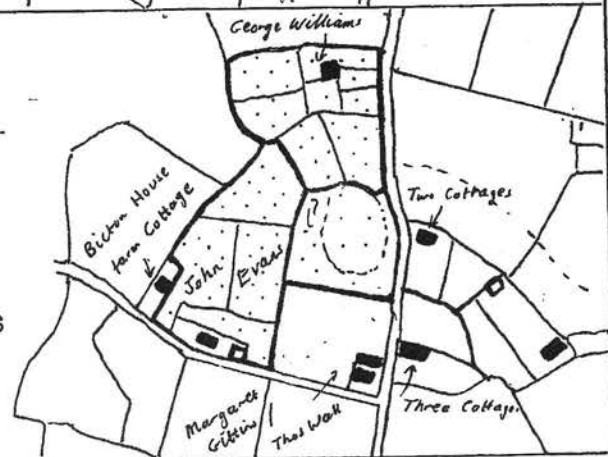
- Mytton property



1843 TITHE MAP

Landlords' improvements

- Wingfield property
- former cottages



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Bickton

HISTORY of BICKTON

by David Pannett

Village



News

Landlord and Tenant on the Heath

David Pannetts' history of Bicton - Part 10 Landlord and Tenant on the Heath

By the mid nineteenth century the majority of Bicton's population lived in cottages and smallholdings scattered around the former edge of the heath (September instalment). Here, some enjoyed additional land for gardens and even a few acres for part-time farming.

The 1851 census, records over twenty agricultural labourers, three gardeners, four bricklayers and at least 28 associated housewives. A basket maker probably worked from home, as well as launderers, and a nurseryman. Other miscellaneous categories included a retired farmer.

Such was the turnover of the population it is hard to relate this census to the Tithe Map of 1843. This map does however, show that half of the thirty odd cottages and smallholdings now belonged to the Wingfield Estate, now expanding its holding in Bicton. (June instalment).

How did this pattern come about?

The story starts with 'squatting' on the heath by which people built a cottage, enclosed some land around, and then paid a 'fine' to the 'Lord of the manor'. Locally, the Borough of Shrewsbury had most manorial rights within the Liberties of Shrewsbury (the outlying parts of the town parishes) and through their records we learn of several encroachments from the sixteenth century onwards. The roadside waste at Preston Montford, for instance, was first occupied in 1580 and by 1770 had been filled up with five cottages (May instalment). By contrast, Rossall Heath had no such cottages, but the landlords were allowed to enclose parts for crops on a temporary basis from time to time. In the 'Township of Bicton', however John Mytton of Halston successfully claimed these manorial rights from the Borough on the grounds that it was really part of his Manor of Crowmeole, (hence the significance of Mytton Oak!)

At the enclosure of the heath in 1768, (September instalment) John Mytton was allotted a share of the land in lieu of his manorial rights. It included most of the cottage encroachments lining Shepherds Lane, part of Gains Park and 'islands' of closes in Lower Calcott occupying a dry patch of sand and gravel between peaty hollows.

In another 'island' by the Welshpool Road, John Wright had been running a nursery. The new allotment boundaries were also arranged to tidy up the

irregular outlines and also include John Mytton's Eel Pool. (Much to the disgust of other landowners, John Mytton had nominated his own agent as one of the 'independent' arbitrators working all this out!)

There was now a new relationship between landlord and tenant. Originally cottages would have been 'self built' with only ground rent/fine due to the Lord of the Manor. Now, as a conventional landlord, Mytton would assume responsibility for the house as well. As a result, some adjustments took place, removing some older structures and replacing them on better sites nearer the road, as in the case of 'Old School House'.

This John Mytton was succeeded by his own son, who unfortunately died at the age of only thirty in 1798. The heir was now the grandson John, aged 2, who growing up without the steady influence of a father, turned into the famous 'Mad' Jack Mytton. After a troubled youth, he finally inherited the estate at the age of 21 and blew his fortune away, before the effects of drink caught up with him in 1834 at the age of 38. It is therefore no surprise to find the Mytton land in the hand of others by 1843, including John Wingfield of Onslow. By the same chain of events he had also acquired the Nag's Head Inn and adjacent shop at Montford Bridge built upon the Bicton share of roadside waste (July instalment).

In the early nineteenth century there was an active discussion about providing land with cottages as an answer to rural poverty. 'Too much' and the worker might be too tired to work properly for his employer, 'too little' he might not grow enough vegetables to feed his family. Significantly, landlords who were liable to pay poor rates had a vested interest in providing a measure of self-sufficiency to low paid workers and especially widows.

Three are recorded as tenants of the Mytton Estate in 1812, while Margaret Wright still occupied John's nursery, although it was worked by Issac Mullock. Clearly smallholdings were a form of social security and had a place in the rural economy.

Fast forward to modern times and a few more land sales later: Many small cottage enclosures, too big for a garden, too small for a specialised enterprise, have been infilled with houses, giving the mixture of old and new which characterises Lower Calcott and Shepherds Lane. In this way, considerable suburban growth has taken place without taking up normal farmland. At the same time, machines have replaced all those agricultural labourers and many 'housewives' go out to work!

1 Sale 1824

2 John Wright buried 1809