Also, for a brief period around 1838, bricks and tiles may have been transported from a brickyard near Bickley Coppice. (No pit remains since the most suitable weathered clay would come only from shallow surface diggings - but a field name gives a clue to its whereabouts).

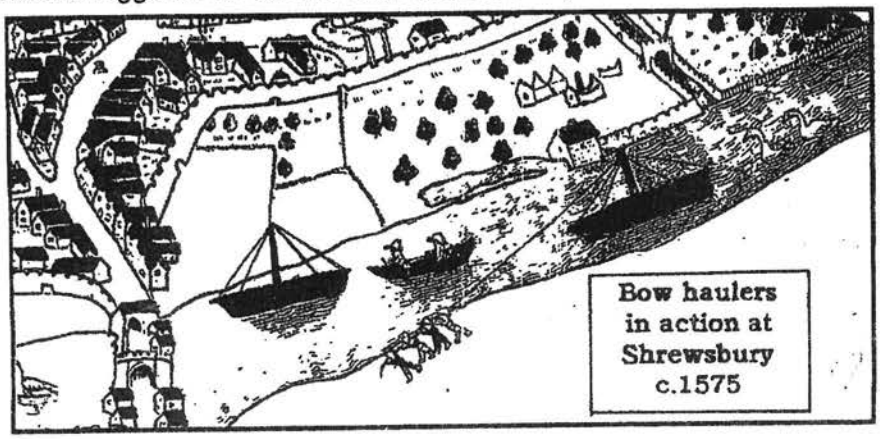
The variation in flow and size of the Severn channel made it impossible to build conventional water mills like those on the nearby River Perry and other tributaries. Significantly, throughout the Middle Ages, the Isle estate was linked to Yeaton Mill on the Perry. The Isle was, however, later on, the site of an exceptional textile mill powered by the Severn via a tunnel across the neck of the great loop.

Shrewsbury had for a long time been the centre of a textile trade, marketing the woollens woven by numerous 'domestic' workers in Wales. (Montford Bidge was also home to John Griffiths, a weaver, in 1610 and, probably, to 'Richard the Weaver' drowned in that 1582 accident). Samuel Adderton, who built Preston Montford Hall, was but one of the Shrewsbury drapers profiting from such trade. By the late eighteenth century, the new factory system was developing nationally and locally with the famous flax mill at Ditherington (1797) being one example.

About the same time, the woollen mill was built at the Isle. It lasted until 1824 when the owner, Edward Holt, died. A corn mill continued on the site until the 1850's since when all traces of industrial buildings have disappeared, leaving only the owner's house.

A row of six mill-workers cottages once stood in the Isle Lane, significantly just across the Bicton boundary. They were replaced by other estate cottages, which likewise illustrate the typical habit of estates, keeping their workers well away from 'the big house' (cf Preston Montford).

Perhaps we should keep quiet about the history of this mill in case another correspondent suggests we build a 'carbon neutral' hydroelectric station here!



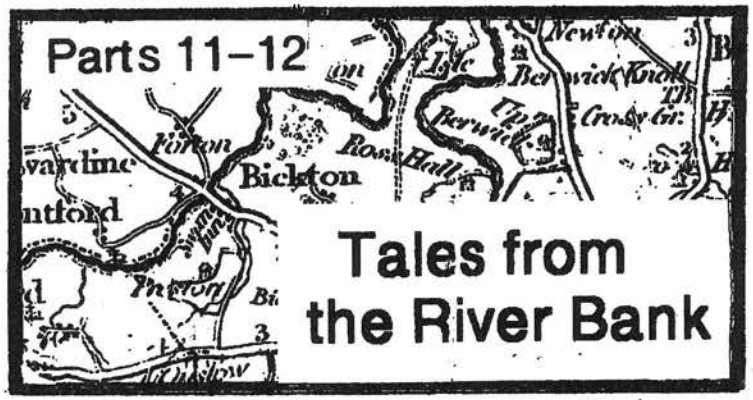
Bow haulers in action at Shrewsbury c.1575

Offprint from
Numbers 498–9
JAN–FEB 2008

Bicton Village News

HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett



Road plan to prevent flooding

The West Midlands summer flooding in 2007 affected more than 450 businesses and 184,000 households, with an estimated cost of up to £372 million.

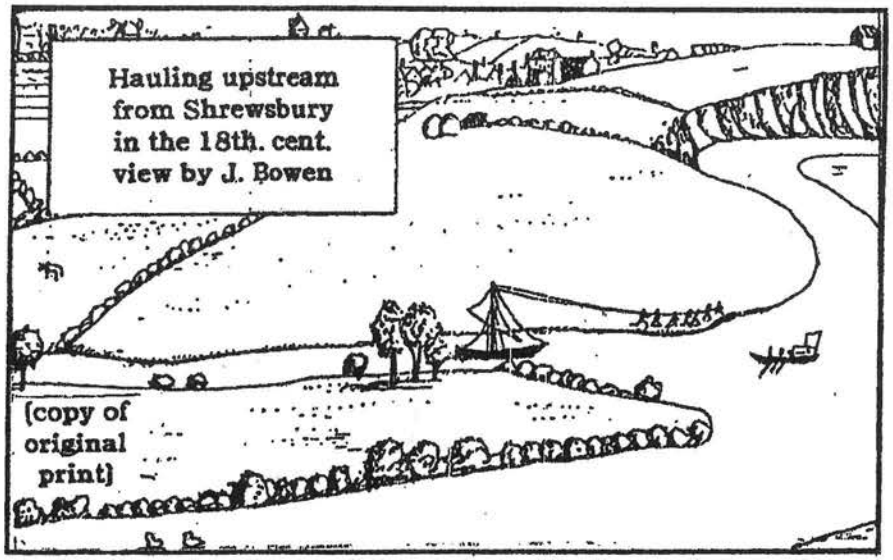
Due to climate change the River Severn is likely to flood more often and more severely in the future, while the roads will become vulnerable to structural surface deformation due to melting. And carbon emissions must be reduced.

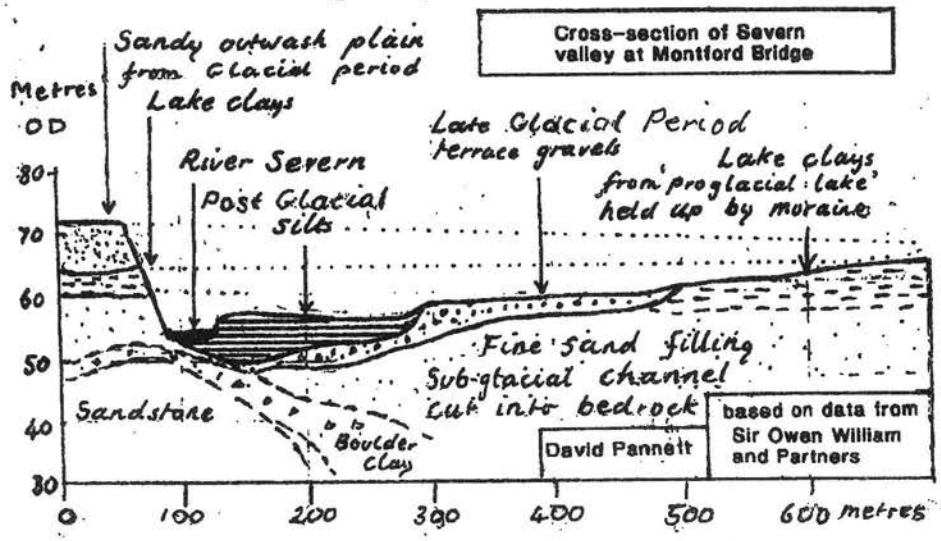
Therefore, Shrewsbury's North West Relief Road should cross the River Severn on top of a flood prevention barrier, with an excavated reservoir and silt settlement sump upstream.

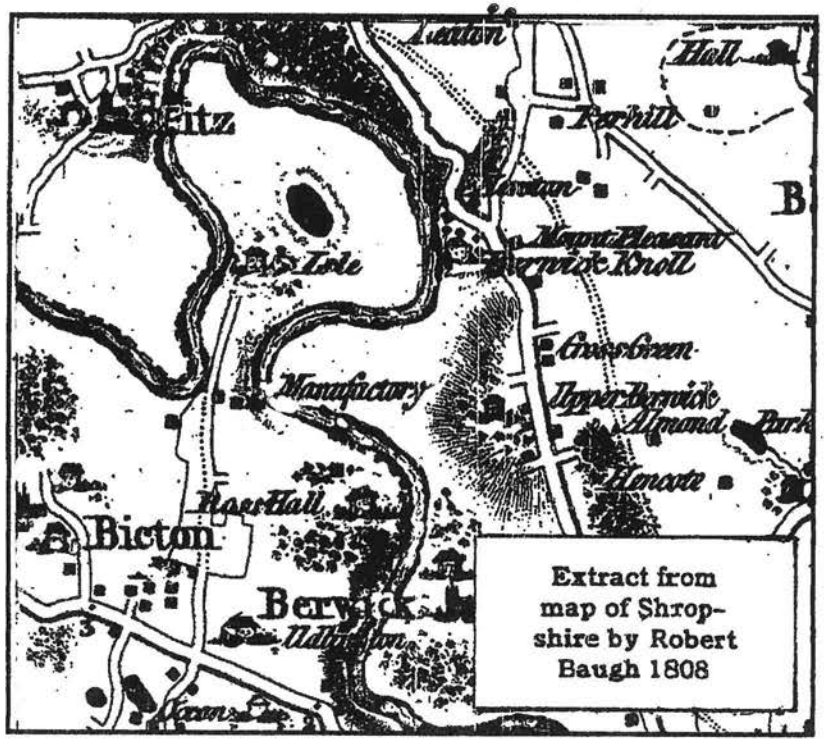
Then Shropshire County Council and Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council would not have to fiddle, tinker and pose with silt banks by the English Bridge and Welsh Bridge, flood prevention barriers for Frankwell and Coleham Head, and a 12 mile long U-shaped ring road with 10 roundabouts.

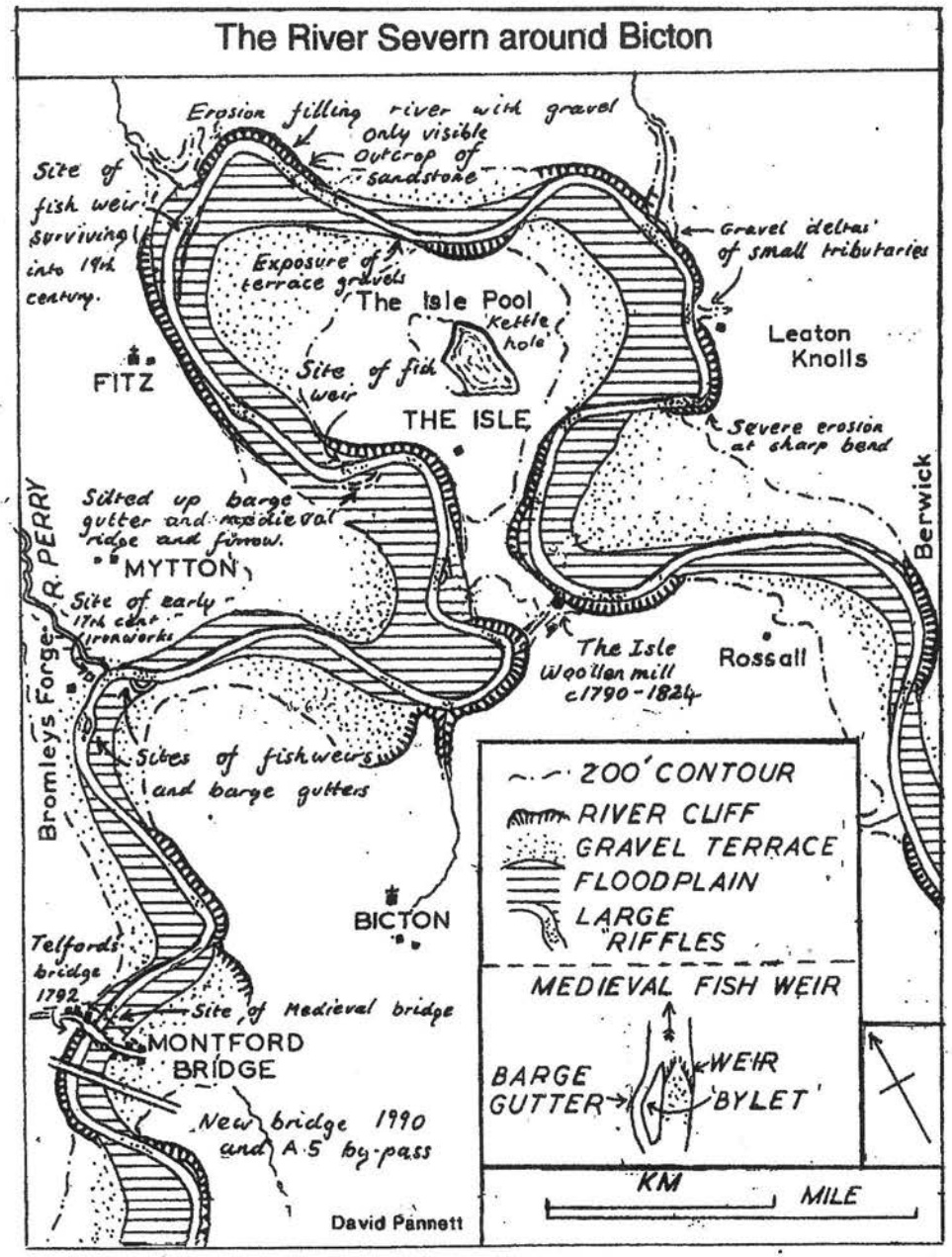
Name and address supplied

Example of wild ideas appearing in the press







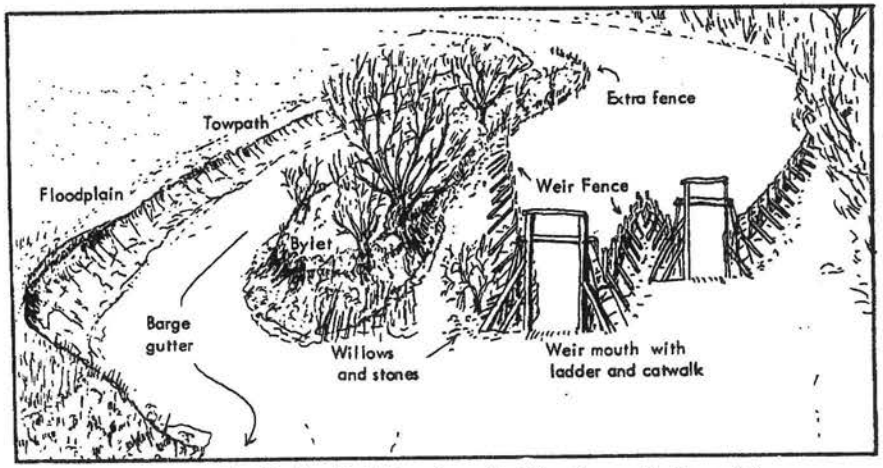


its bed

deposits. Instead, it simply deforms A into shallower 'riffles' and deeper pools, providing contrasting habitats for fish, which anglers know all about. Their positions are fairly stable, being related in part to deposits of gravel introduced from cliffs and tributaries, which the river cannot move on. As a result, they provided sites for fords and fish weirs over the centuries, as well as barriers to navigation during low summer flows.

In the Middle Ages some estates built timber and hurdle fences in a funnel shape across the river in order to catch migrating eels. However, since these blocked the 'free navigation', barge gutters were cut to bypass them. Parish and property boundaries followed the same route and their lines have survived even though the weirs have long since decayed and many gutters silted up. This explains the odd river pattern near Bickley Coppice associated with the weirs at Bromley's Forge and Mytton. Legally a patch of woodland near the scout camp is still part of Mytton! A part of Fitz is likewise attached to the Isle. The Fitz weir survived into the nineteenth century, but otherwise many in the county disappeared in the seventeenth century following damaging floods, typical of the 'Little Ice Age'. We were then experiencing four centuries of more frequent severe weather, including frozen rivers, from which we are now recovering (climate change again).

The Severn is indeed an interesting river to explore, providing you have suitable craft and plenty of time to paddle around all those bends. The commercial boat traffic of the past is another tale, which we must leave until another month.



Sketch of typical fish weir on the River Severn (not to scale)

Bicton Village News
no.499 FEB. 2008

David Pannett's History of Bicton part 12 - 'Further Tales from the River Bank' - Continued from the January newsletter

In spite of all the bends and gravel banks discussed last month, the Severn was once an important trade route linking Shropshire with Gloucester and beyond. It was, and still is, a 'free navigation'. The inns at Montford Bridge could serve both road and river traveller and were often an important interchange for both. For instance, in the seventeenth century there was even a warehouse linked to the iron industry dispersed along the Welsh border and in the Forest of Dean.

The barges would drift or sail downstream with the current, but upstream they were pulled by gangs of 'bow haulers', which are shown in several illustrations. Timber from Wales was floated down as rafts or 'floats'.

The fluctuating flow of the river, fed by rapid run-off from the Welsh hills, was both help and hindrance to navigation. Prolonged low flow in dry spells often made it difficult to maintain traffic and perhaps for this reason, many barge owners had several craft of different sizes, which could be used as appropriate. The penalty for misjudging the situation could be to have a cargo 'stuck in the mud', going nowhere for a long time - as was the recorded case of a load of charcoal at Montford Bridge urgently needed for the forge at Eardington in 1853.

Another episode, which illustrates this problem, was recorded by Thomas Telford when he was rebuilding Montford Bridge in 1792. A barge had been laid up at Shrawardine, but when the water rose, the crew prepared to set sail. However, their Captain had gone off to secure another of this boats, leaving them with the problem of waiting for him or setting off on their own. Such was the importance of catching the 'spate', they chose the latter but then found they lacked the skill to pass through Telford's temporary bridge without wrecking it!

By this date, such barges were carrying timber, which at an earlier time might have been floated. Such, 'floats' could be difficult to handle and one was the probable cause of another accident at Montford Bridge in 1582 when three local men were drowned.

River trade all but finished by the 1850's, as better roads and railways proved more reliable. Some of the last local traffic may have been the distribution of 'Criggion' road stone from the Belam Bank quarry at Crewe Green.

Bicton Village News
no.498 JAN. 2008

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 11
Tales from the River Bank

The old township of Bicton was bounded by two and a half miles of the River Severn, but now that the modern parish includes Preston Montford, the Isle and Rossall, the figure rises to 9 miles. The 'Severn Way' long distance path avoids all the bends by taking a short cut through the village.
From time to time, correspondents in the local press express their views on the management of the river, ranging from damming it to protect Shrewsbury from floods, to dredging it to allow the passage of pleasure boats. In doing so, they betray ignorance of the local environment and therefore we need to clarify some aspects now, since the landscape of Bicton and its history is deeply involved.
'Climate Change' is also frequently mentioned and it is significant that the character of the valley is the product of dramatic changes during the last 15,000 years. The relationship between the different elements forming the surface of the landscape can also be understood from the boreholes made by the engineers at Montford Bridge.
The present river channel is bordered by a thick layer of 'silt' building up the floodplain, which actually fills an older river channel created during the closing stages of the last 'Ice Age'. It was this super 'meltwater' channel, heavily charged with sediment and vast amounts of water from the ice and snow, which cut the wide meandering valley around the parish. Even today during a severe flood, when over 200 cubic metres per second pass under Montford Bridge, we can get an impression of its size as it covers the floodplain.
Like all meandering rivers, it cut steep banks on the outside of each bend, while depositing on the inside, where its level spreads of gravel now form 'terraces'. (The flat site of the Bicton half of Montford Bridge is a good example). The bends became particularly sinuous around the Isle, because here the river could easily erode the fine, soft, sandy filling of yet another deep 'sub glacial' channel running from Walford to Shrewsbury.
This was cut by meltwater trapped under a thick ice sheet and then backfilled with sand as this thinned.
Below Rossall the river actually runs along this feature and, as a result, engineers will have quite enough trouble designing foundations for a new bridge for the proposed North West Relief Road, without getting mixed up with 'flood barrages'! More reliable solid rock (sandstone) appears at only two places in these nine miles of river.
The present river, much shrunken in our drier, warmer, 'interglacial' climate should now create its own smaller scale meanders, but instead is obliged to follow those old bends as they are so deeply cut down into thick glacial

Bicton Village News
no.500 MARCH 2008

History of Bicton

David Pannett's history of Bicton (Part 13) Chapel, Church and Clergy

The present ecclesiastical parish of Bicton only dates from 1855, when it was formed out of several local "townships", which had been only detached parts of Shrewsbury parishes. (Bicton, the Isle and Rossall - St Chads, Preston Montford - St Alkmond) at most, each had been a mere "chapelry" dependant upon the mother church.
A chaplain is mentioned in a Bicton deed of 1368.

This was naturally inconvenient to people in these rural hamlets and for this reason William Fisher of Bicton petitioned the Pope, in 1453, to be allowed a Chaplain for his new chapel. He played up the difficulties of the journey, especially for women and even claimed some had been drowned in flood water half way to St Chads. There is no other record of his chapel, dedicated to St Catherine, nor evidence on the ground and indeed the later chapel was dedicated to the Holy Trinity.

This building, which appears from it's brick and stone design, to be late seventeenth century, stands near Bicton Hall, perhaps on land taken from that estate or from the adjacent village green. Significantly, the earliest surviving reference to it is in 1676 when Richard Taylor of Bicton, left money for a teacher at a school in the chapel. Nevertheless, Richard himself was buried at St Chads beside his daughter.

During the eighteenth century this simple building was altered in several ways: repairs were needed in 1741 and then in 1754, a north west side chapel was added over the burial vaults of the Sandford family, owners of the Isle. When, in 1788, old St Chads collapsed (as predicted by Thomas Telford) its beautiful wooden alter piece was moved here, requiring an extension of the East end to accommodate it.

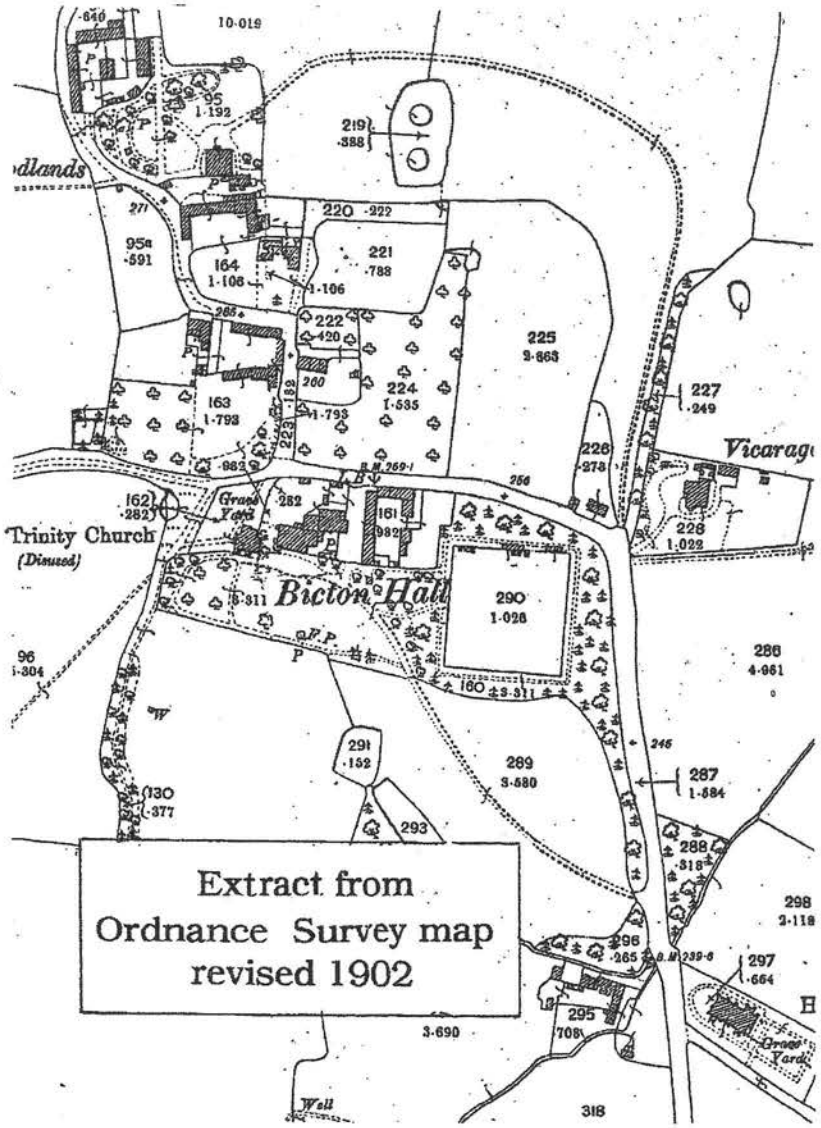
In the nineteenth century, as the Wingfield family of Onslow were extending their land holding in the parish, they built another side chapel on the north east side over their own burial vault. Associated memorial tablets line the walls.

While under the management of St Chads, several chaplains were also masters of Shrewsbury school, whose endowments happen to include the tithes of Bicton. Then, in the years 1816 to 1851, Humphrey Sandford of the Isle was incumbent, followed by his son Edward, 1851-1853 and then another son William, who thus became the first independent vicar of Bicton. As they were already resident local gentry, there was no need for a vicarage.

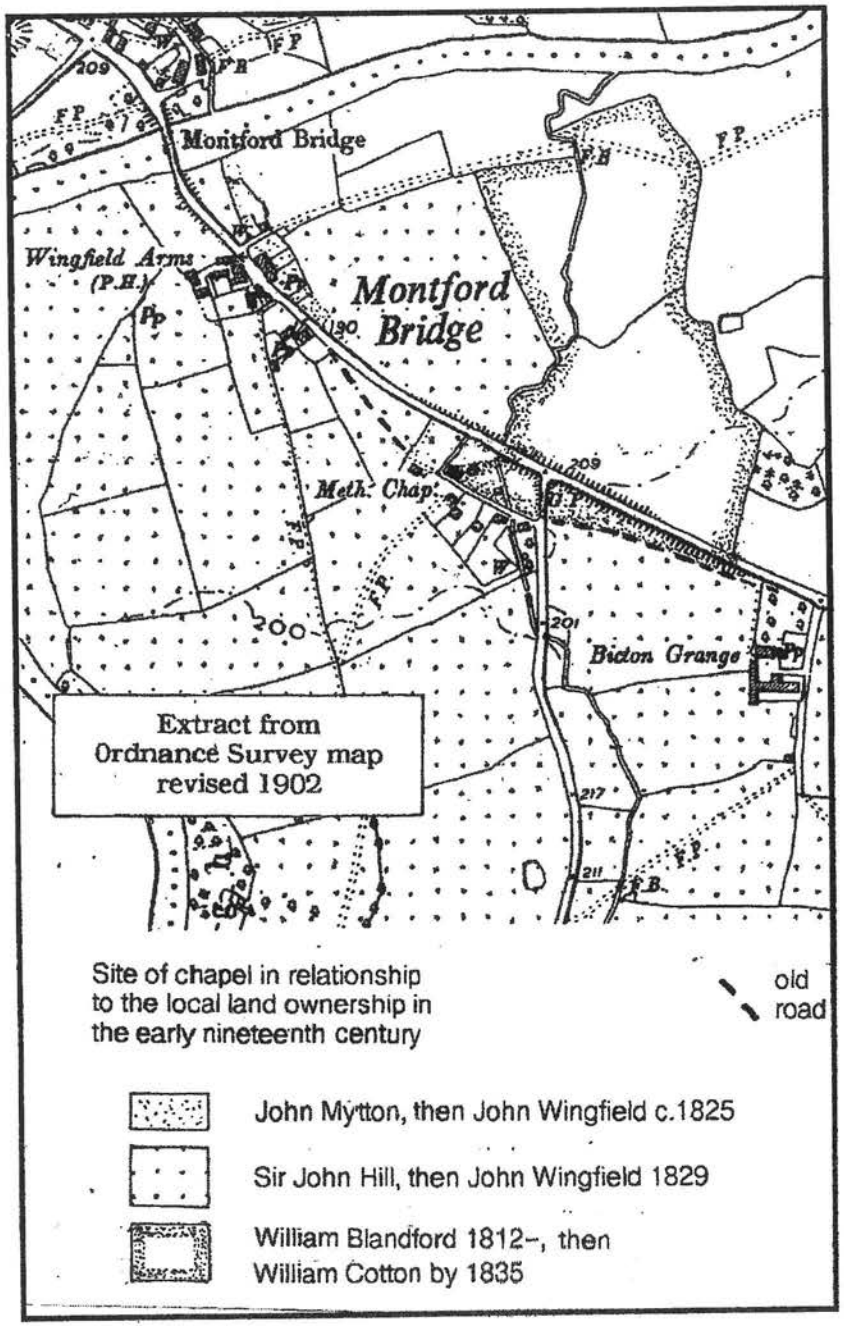
It was not uncommon for sons of landed gentry to enter the church in this way. According to an old joke, dim sons joined the army while clever ones joined the church, each having a career appropriate to his social status and ability. (Trade and commerce were generally looked down upon!)

Eventually a vicarage was needed when George Newton Lloyd was appointed in 1869. He was provided with a spacious "Victorian" villa with room for both family and living in staff. (Cook, maid and gardener/groom in 1881 census). Typical Victorian exotic trees, now quite mature, almost hide the building from view.

With such domestic help and usually only one parish, Victorian clergy often had leisure to follow other interests or put their scholarly education to good use. We have no information about the Rev Lloyd, but around the same time several local clergy were making great contributions to anitquarian research. The Reverends Blakeway, Cranage and Drinkwater transcribed and published many historical documents, which help us study our local history, including that of Bicton. Significantly, the young Charles Darwin turned to "Divinity" at Cambridge when he gave up medical studies at Edinburgh, thinking that life as a country parson would give him more time for natural history. The Reverend Lloyd died soon after and was therefore one of the first to occupy the new burial ground (more about this church later).



The old church was not totally abandoned straight away, as it still held so many family vaults and was indeed restored for the funeral of Humphrey Sandford in 1907. Now it is but a ruin. Do visit if you have not seen it already and see the sad state of this corner of the village.



David Pannett's History of Bicton -

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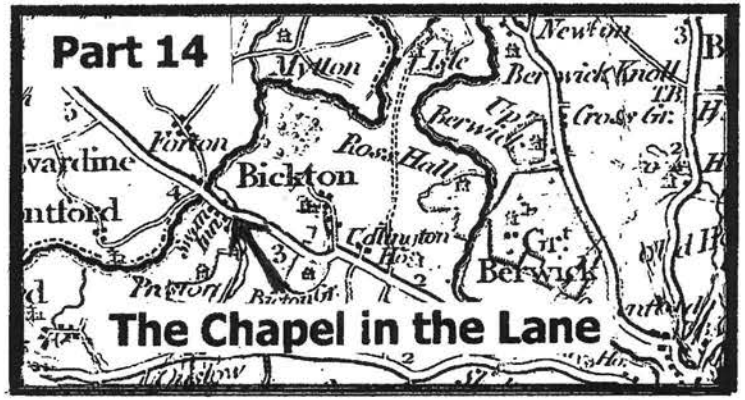
Bicton Village News

HISTORY of BICTON
by David Pannett



by Lawrie Bloomfield in collaboration with Da

Bicton Village News
no.501 APRIL 2008

History of Bicton

David Pannett's History of Bicton - Part 14

The Chapel in the Lane

Researched and writtenby Lawrie Bloomfield in collaboration with David Pannett.

Like most chapels that have been converted into homes, there is still a distinct 'Wesleyan' look to the chapel in Drury Lane at Montford Bridge.

The chapel has been a home since the late 1980's but the building was centre for the local Methodists from the early nineteenth century. The engraved stone on its western end records that it was built in 1826 and replaced in 1881. Another wall plaque listing benefactors has been lost.

Given that the existing bridge over the River Severn was built in 1792, you may wonder what they were doing building a chapel at the end of a cul-de-sac. However, in 1826 Drury Lane was still the Holyhead Road and linked directly to the bridge. Its route can still be traced along the field opposite The Crescent and then in front of the former Post Office and blacksmiths (The Yews) and The Swan public house as it was. Only in 1835 the chapel found itself at a dead end (see July and August instalments).

It is not at all surprising that a chapel was built at Montford Bridge. The Methodist movement has a history of "springing up" where industry and trades prospered, especially away from the established parish centres, as seen around Oakengates, Dawley, Ironbridge and the Stiperstones. Montford Bridge at the time was a busy service centre for both the agricultural community on either side of the river (Montford & Bicton) and many travellers on the main road. There were tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths, retailers and innkeepers. All could lend a hand with their individual talents to build the chapel right on their doorstep.

These tradesmen, usually literate and able to read the bible themselves, owed little or no allegiance to the large landowners whose workers felt obliged to be C of E in deference to their lord and master. They welcomed a movement that did not "talk down" to them, but which allowed them to become more involved. Such "non conformists" therefore provided their own "House of God", the chapel.

Although John Wesley and his brother Charles had started the movement in the mid eighteenth century, it had become weakened by the division by the early nineteenth century (such are the result of so much freedom and democracy). However, this in turn, provoked some local "revivals" which may have led to our local chapel at this particular time.

Methodists are well known for preaching temperance, which was then in response to alcohol abuse amongst thirsty industrial workers. Ironically it turned out that this chapel had a link with the local Inn. The Swan was then run by William Blandford as tenant of the Preston Montford estate, but this William also owned a piece of land called "Grange Field" or "Cobblers Piece" opposite the end of Preston Montford Lane. Before the ..... new Holyhead Road was built in 1835, this bordered on Drury Lane with a very sharp corner. By then he had sold it to William Cotton, tenant of the Grange Farm, who probably built Brook House here for his own use, or for his relative Thomas.

It is not clear which came first, land sale, Brook House or chapel. Was it Cotton or Blandford who provided the site? In a way it does not matter, as both were small proprietors, who at least would be sympathetic, while all around the land was held by large estates more likely to support C of E, Preston Montford (Hill-Wingfield) and Montford (Earl of Powys) across the river. All this determined the only available site.

One is reminded of the well-known situation at Snailbeach. The Marquis of Bath would not allow the miners to have their chapel on his land, but the Earl of Tankerville was more helpful, providing land at Lord's Hill just across the boundary.

It is significant that most other local chapels were also margins of a parish at Bicton Head, Ford's Heath, Forton Heath and Bomere Heath. Indeed there was an abundance of centres of worship for what was a minority denomination. The total number of chapels was also a reflection of divisions in the movement and it was necessary to specify 'Wesleyan' in the case of our local chapel. Others could be 'Primitive' or 'New Connection'.

A religious census carried out in 1851 records that 52 met at Drury Lane Sunday on March 30th. Otherwise, records are lacking, including those, which show the date of the last service. Maureen Everall remembers attending soon after she moved to Broomfields Farm in 1968. There was still a regular congregation then and long-term residents of Drury Lane recall cars parked along the lane and the sounds of hymn singing drifting across their gardens.

The chapel was eventually sold for development to Harry Kirk of Pontesbury, who not only turned it into a house, but cleared away the Sunday Schoolroom ro provide a garden and parking bounded by a brick wall against Brook House.

Now we only have memories such as the one provided by Alma Hotchkiss of Forton Bank who was a 'land girl' at the hostel in Preston Montford Lane.

"I and some girls went to chapel because John Brassy Jones from Shrawardine was preaching. He was one of the leading preachers. We all got the giggles because he said he had come all the way on his horst, but because of his broad accent pronounced it as 'arse'.

ERRATUM

In last months instalment the sentence about Charles Darwin should be read as follows:
"However, while there, he came under the influence of Reverand Charles Henslow (professor of Botany) and Reverand Adam Sedgewick (professor of Geology) and the rest is history".
It is important to remember that many nineteenth century churchmen had no problems with accepting the conclusions of scientific observations.

Such rough stone still needed to be complimented with finer 'freestone' which could be cut in any direction to form window and door casing and corners. This is where Grinshill Stone was still the obvious choice. Its qualities come from the uniform size of grains originating in sand dunes in that same desert basin. Once it may have been little different from Nescliffe stone, but about 50 million years ago hot groundwater removed its typical red desert iron oxide and allowed the sand grains to really lock together to form this durable stone resistant to weathering. Altogether this was a wise choice of materials. Nevertheless pale red stone from Shelvock near Ruyton-XI-Towns was also used.

A parallel movement in the nineteenth century was the rediscovery of medieval techniques of staining and mounting window glass. The company of Kempe was one of the most prolific producers of such windows and examples of their work compliment the medieval style here.

The architect Arthur Lloyd Oswell of Shrewsbury also designed parts of Holy Trinity, Belle Vue, but Bicton's new church is considered to be one of his finest works. It is, however, not only a monument to this man and the traditional craftsment who built it, but also to wider aspects of the Victorian era. Even the churchyard trees reflect this age - no 'medieval' yews but giant sequoias from California, which also decorate so many English country parks.

Giant Sequoia (California) popular with Victorians

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Bicton Village News

HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Part 15 **A Sermon in Stone:**

Bicton Village News
no.502 MAY 2008

History of Bicton

David Pannett's History of Bicton - Part 15
A Sermon in Stone: the new church at Bicton

In spite of enlargement, the old church (March Instalment) was felt to be too small and dilapidated for the new enlarged parish created in 1855 and a new one was clearly needed. The new building, we now see, stands on a fresh site given by Colonel Wingfield of Onslow not long after acquiring it from the Bicton Hall estate (Jenkins family). It cost £3,400 and was consecrated in September 1887. Sadly the vicar Revd Lloyd died only a few months later and was therefore one of the first to occupy the new burial ground. Frederick Stephen Edwards, a former solicitor then took over.

The building of a new church at this time and in the particular style is not altogether a surprise. Through the nineteenth century the Church of England was experiencing some competition from various 'non-conformist' denominations (April instalment) and therefore many church leaders felt some revival was needed. One way was to promote new church building to keep pace with the growth and changing distribution of population. Another aspect was represented by the 'Oxford Movement', which sought a return to medieval liturgy, perhaps wishing to 'put on a better show' than the non-conformists. (It may be no coincidence that Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford was a vocal critic of Darwin and also urged clergy to boycott the government's census of church attendance in 1851, perhaps because it might reveal poor numbers).

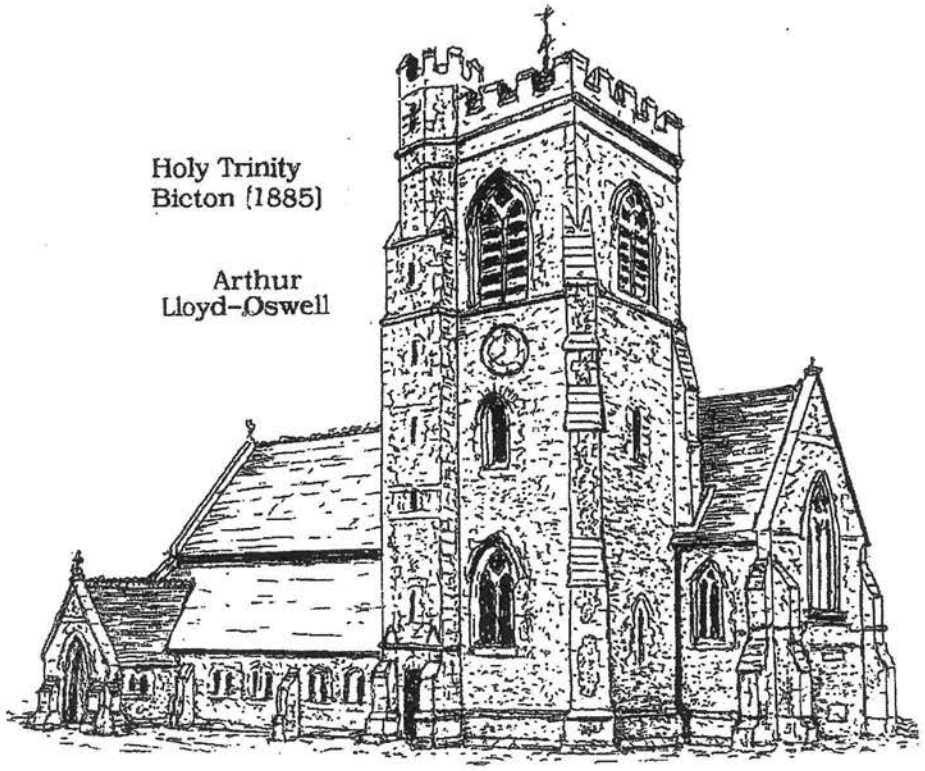
Related to all this, a fresh appreciation of medieval architecture and décor led to a 'Gothic Revival', in which many old churches were restored and new one built in a medieval style (eg Meole Brace 1868). Secular buildings were also treated this way, such as the rebuilt Houses of Parliament associated with the work of Augustus Pugin, one of the greatest enthusiasts for this style. Locally we one had the Raven Hotel and Old Post Office in Shrewsbury, but we still have a 'late gothic' railway station.

Some architects favoured the simple lines of the early Gothic as seen at Oxon church 1854, but others, especially later in the century, preferred the more ornate 'Decorated' style of the fourteenth century as at Bicton. Architects generally took a scholarly interest in the shapes and patterns of original features, such as window tracery, in order to reproduce them faithfully in 'restored' or totally new work, so that the differences between 'old' and 'new' are not always obvious.

Medieval church architecture normally meant stonework. Bicton's old chapel had been built of brick, with only stone dressings, in the seventeenth century, when all around would have been timber, plaster and thatch. It therefore stood out as something special (c.f Minsterley 1689). However, as brick became almost universal in this village, even for humble barns, stone would once again assume that 'special' status.

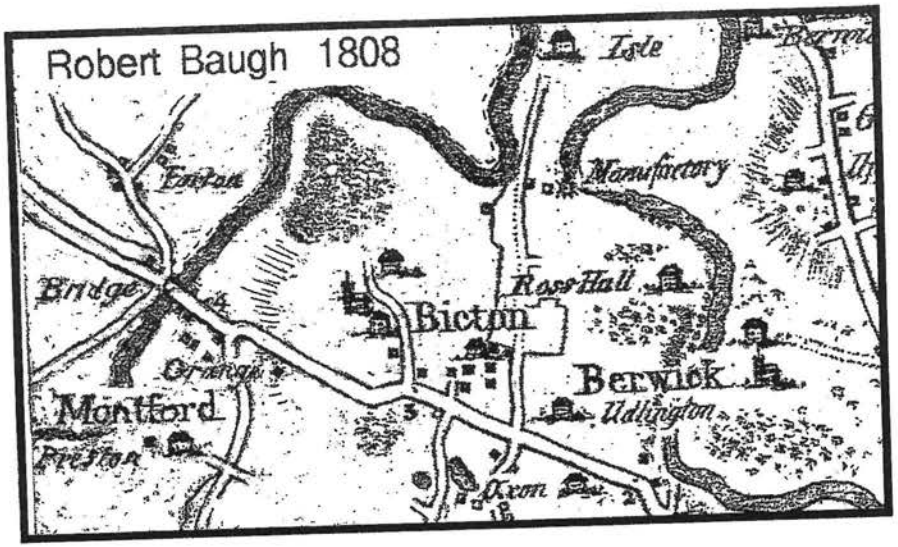
In the Shrewsbury area from the fifteenth century onwards the pale sandstone from Grinshill was the most popular stone for high class work, either blending with new brickwork, as at Bicton Chapel, or facing whole buildings such as the Grammer School (now library). In earlier centuries local churches and Shrewsbury Castle had used the more widely available red sandstones, which were normally rendered and colour washed to protect them from the weather (eg 'Whitehall'). By the nineteenth century, however, much of this render had fallen off, so that people began associating 'antiquity' with redness. Architects seeking to mimic the old styles now looked for redstone, even though the pale Grinshill stone was of superior quality (the new church at Grinshill itself was actually built in the 'Norman' style using red stone in 1840!)

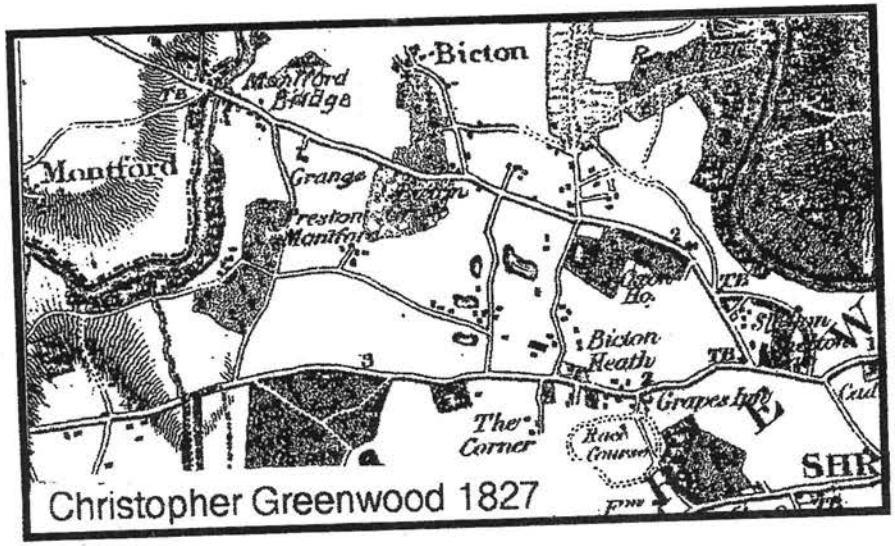
The exposed stone of old walls generally showed a rough weathered surface or irregular sizes of blocks, but all this could be mimicked by deliberate rough tooling or 'rustication' if necessary. Poorer quality stone, which could not be dressed to a smooth finish anyway, then became useful, such as the 'Keele' sandstone from Red Hill near Hook-a-Gate (Holy Trinity, Meole Brace 1867 and Shrewsbury School Chapel). An even better stone for this purpose, as used at Oxon and Bicton, came from Cardeston and Alberbury. It Is a 'breccia' consisting of broken fragments of hard limestone set in a red sandy matrix, forming a sort of natural 'concrete'. It was originally laid down by flash floods running off the hills, where limestone lay exposed to erosion. At that time, 270 million years ago, the Shropshire plain was rather like one of those desert basins in the American South West.



Holy Trinity
Bicton (1885)

Arthur
Lloyd-Oswell





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Bicton Village News

HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Putting Bicton on the Map

Bicton Village News
no.503 JUNE 2008

David Pannett's History of Bicton part 16
Putting Bicton on the Map

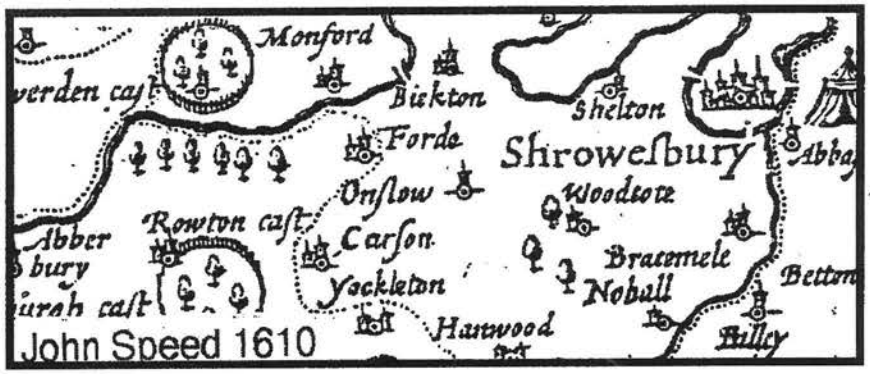
Old maps are full of interest for two reasons: firstly, they reveal the story of cartography through progressive improvements in surveying and printing. Secondly, they provide valuable clues to the changes in the landscape and have already been used in previous instalments (February) The enlarged extracts from the most important maps should therefore be of interest to all in the area.

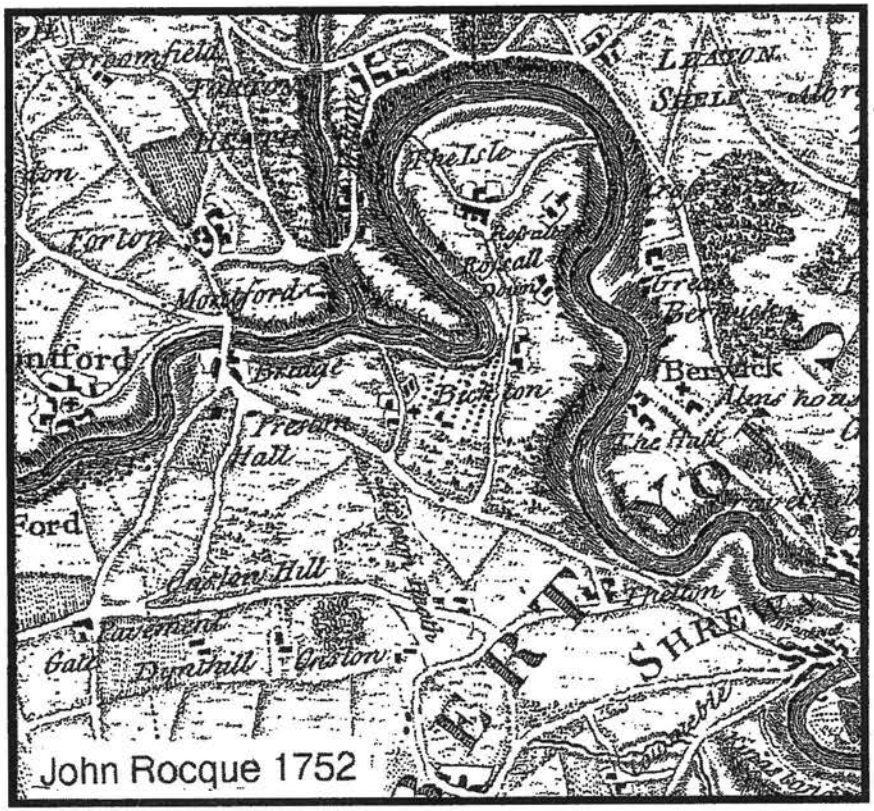
Bicton or 'Bickton' first appeared on the map by Christopher Saxton, who have been commissioned by Queen Elizabeth and chief minister Cecil to produce an atlas of the kingdom in 1575. John Speed, a commercial map publisher, copied much of this work for his own atlas of the English counties in 1610. He made use of uniform symbols for the villages and woodland in a way followed by many later map makers. The printing plates were probably engraved (in reverse!) by Dutch experts and were put to use for further editions through the rest of the century.

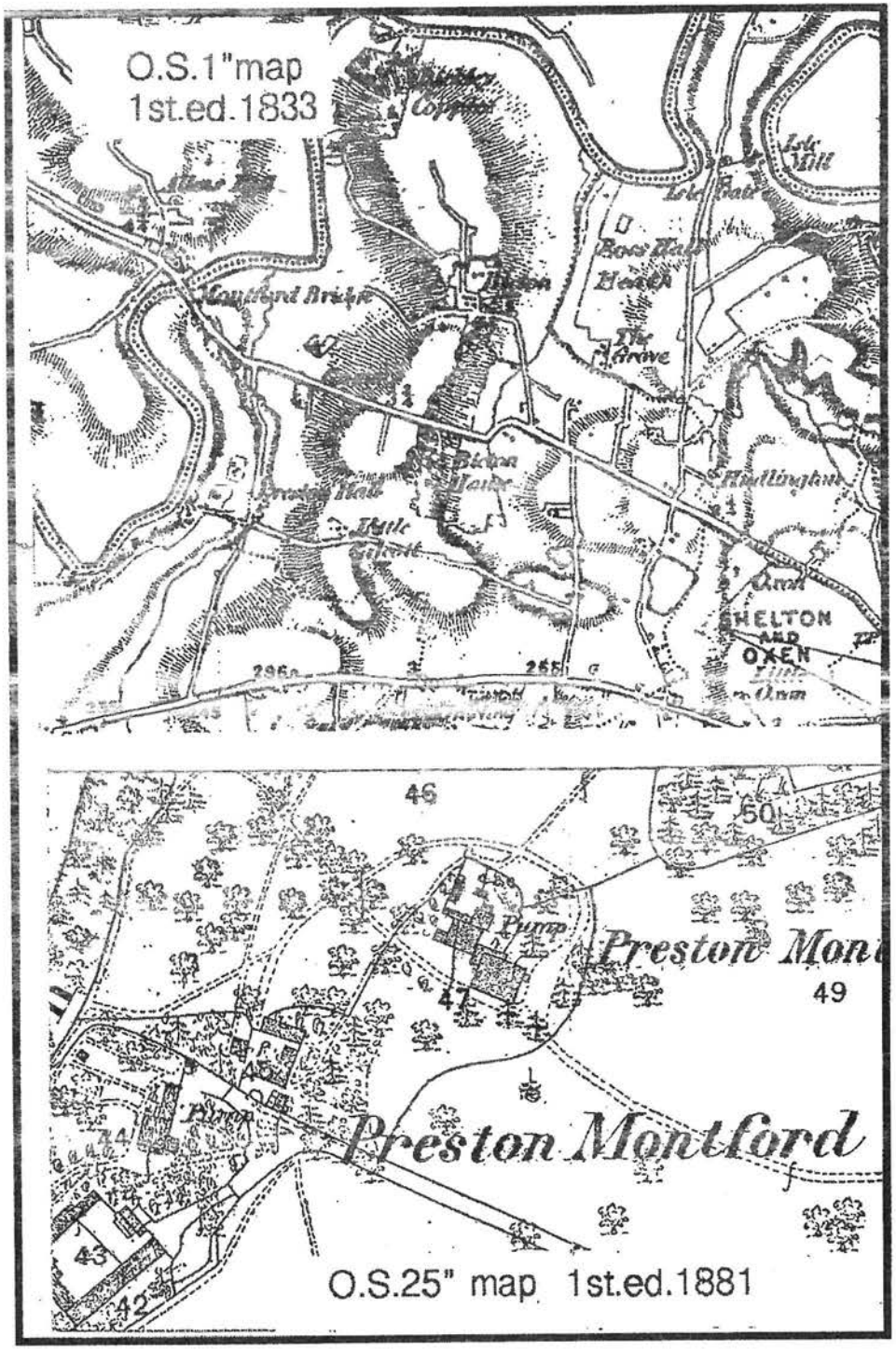
While the atlas gave a good impression of the general Geography of the counties, maps showing roads would be more useful to travellers. Other cartographers such as John Ogilby and Emanuel Bow-en provided these.

The greatest advances in map making came in the second half of the eighteenth century. Better surveying and printing at larger scales led to more detailed maps of whole counties. Such larger maps could be made up of four or six printed sheets pasted together. One of the most successful map makers at this time was John Rocque, a French immigrant, who produced very accurate plans of several towns, including Shrewsbury, and expanded his work to cover whole counties. The details which he portrayed include both hard facts and very rough estimates. Locally his map shows the older road system at Preston Montford and also a stange symbol at Bicton Grove. Does this represent the actual 'grove of trees' which gave the name, or did Rocque insert a symbolic pattern suggested by the name?

One stimulus to improvement at this time came from the 'society of Arts', which offered prizes for the best county maps at the scale of one inch to one mile. Many fine new maps of Midland counties were produced as a result, but locally one by Robert Baugh in 1808, appears to be still rather 'old fashioned' and simple. His main work had been with surveying new Turnpike Roads, including those planned by Thomas Telford and in view of this, his map can be appreciated as a very practical road map. Other features were reduced to 'conventional signs' rather than true portraits of 'big houses' and churches. The more 'mainstream' trends in cartography are better represented by the work of Christopher Greenwood and his brother. They ran a family business producing such maps of counties. They were very ambitious, but not always commercially successful and some of their long term plans for national coverage and repeated revisions were by then being overtaken by the work of the Ord nance Survey. At the time of their Shropshire map in 1827, such 'government' surveyors had already passed through Bicton. What happened next must wait for another instalment.







The Ordnance Survey comes to Bicton

Offprint from
Number 504
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Bicton Village News

HISTORY of BICTON

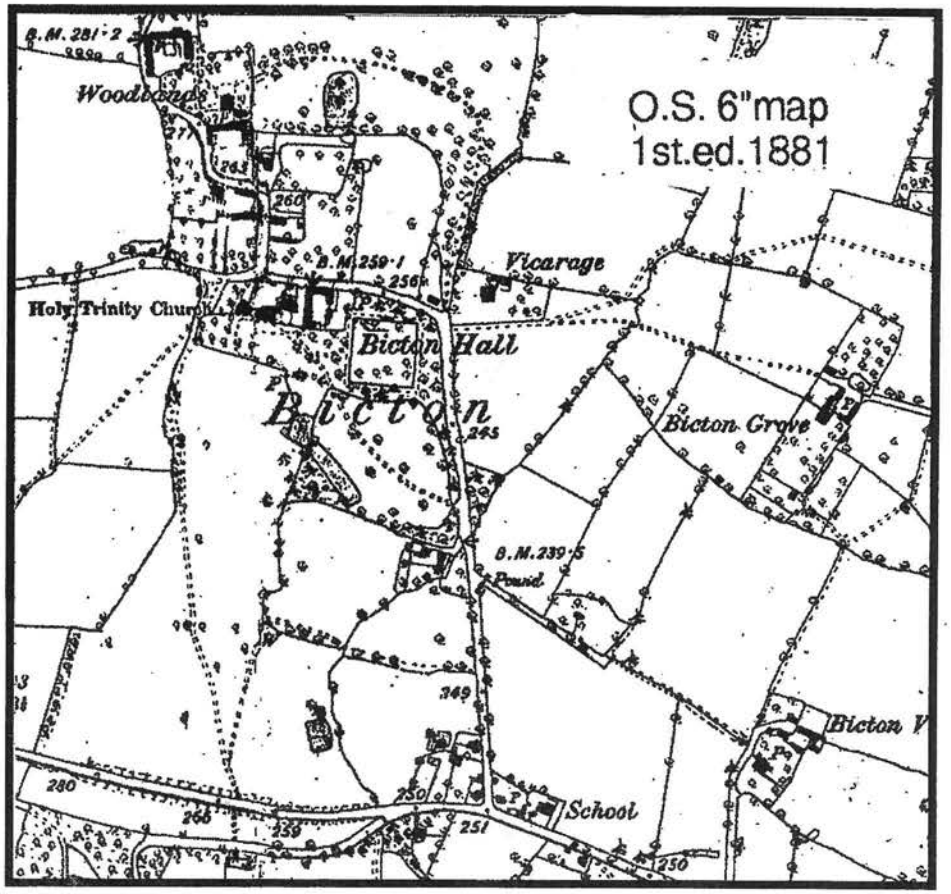
by David Pannett

Bicton Village News
no.504 JULY 2008

David Pannett's History of Bicton part 17
The Ordnance Survey comes to Bicton

Last month we discussed how John Rocque, a French immigrant, (one of the many protestant 'Huguenot' refugees to come here over the years) brought fresh ideas to British map making. This was not to be the only French contribution to our story!
In the 1780's the astronomers of Greenwich and Paris Observatories, the leading institutions of the time, asked for help in measuring the distance between them. With this they could then calculate the size of the earth or even the distance to the moon! The respective governments therefore agreed to co-operate in the interests of science.
The French Team under Cassini were very good surveyors and therefore with our national pride at stake, the British Government provided all the necessary funds to equip a matching team led by William Roy of the Royal Engineers. Roy already had established a good reputation mapping the Highlands of Scotland after the '45' rebellion and many military installations afterwards, while steadily rising in rank.
The method chosen was 'triangulation', that is measuring angles between lines of sight across both land and channel, after first measuring the 'base line' for one side of the initial 'triangle'. This was laid out across four miles of Hounslow Heath, where a small monument to it still stands amid the hustle and bustle at the entrance to Heathrow airport.
When this project was finished, our survey team put their new 'theodolite' to good use by extending the network of triangles across the rest of the country as a framework for future detailed mapping.
As so often happened in history, we did not stay friends with the French for very long as their revolution and the rise of Napolean brought threats of invasion. The government now appreciated good maps for the organisation of troop movements, so the Duke of Richmond, Lord Master of the Ordnance, in 1790, took Roy's original 'corp of engineers' and set them up as the 'Ordnance Survey'. Significantly their first maps were of Kent and Essex, nearest the French coast.
From then on, surveyors worked systematically across England and eventually covered Shropshire about 1816, producing 'field drawings' at the 2 inches to one mile.
The next stage should have been a published map at one inch to one mile, but politics got in the way and delayed this until 1833. As already discussed regarding the Holyhead Road (August Instalment), the Union with Ireland took place and surveyors were sent over there to improve the maps, leaving only a skeleton staff behind. Soon after, railways started to cover much of the country and to keep pace they were added to the old printing plates and maps re-issued.
While in Ireland, surveyors developed mapping at the scale of 6 inches to one mile in order to help authorities plot ownership and assess taxes. When the survey teams returned in the 1850's, it was decided to use this scale for the remaining unmapped areas of northern Britain, before returning to the South. In this way the surveyors once again passed through Bicton in the 1880's, by which time they were also mapping at an even larger scale of 25 inches to one mile.

Published maps then appeared at both 25" and 6" scales. The result is a wealth of amazing detail, in which even small features of buildings appear and clear differences between crooked and straight hedges are obvious.
Indeed, all this is of great value to the historian, both in showing up ancient shapes and in enabling comparison with later editions, which reveal subsequent changes (March and April instalments). More of this in future months.
Such is the interest in old maps, several companies have been reproducing them in recent years. The latest available are by a publishing company called 'Cassini'.
Meanwhile, since these early days, the ordnance survey have gradually adopted the metric system invented by scholars under Napolean!
Come to think of it, I wonder where the unusual name of Pannett originated.



Bicton Village News
no.506 SEPT. 2008

Memories of Bicton School
by Dorothy Lewis

Dorothy Lewis was born at Milnsbridge, Shepherd's Lane in 1920. She is almost certainly the oldest Bicton resident who attended Bicton School, as recognised by the plaque which was unveiled when the new school was formally opened in 2007. Recently she reminisced about her time at the old school which she entered in 1925.

"My eldest sister, Mary, three years older, was already a pupil there as had been my brothers Walter, Herbert and Alan. I have very fond memories of my first teacher, Miss Helen Davies who was a very young teacher indeed. Miss Dutton was Headteacher but I don't have such fond memories of her! She used to cane 'naughty' children across the hand. She lived in the Headteachers house and had a maid. If children were feeling unwell, they'd be sent to the maid for a spoonful of ginger in hot water! I also remember Miss Bradfield who used to cycle from Shrewsbury. Every morning we had to recite the Catechism and there were regular visits from the Vicar, Mr Lawson who had a large family - but they didn't attend the village school. Miss Davies taught us to read and luckily I was quick to learn to read. We were given beads to thread and there was a sand tray for us to play with. We learned to knit and to sew with coloured wools and coarse hessian. We used to go home for dinner and I remember on one occasion we were asked to see who could bring back the biggest spray of blackberries. I was very proud when mine was adjudged the biggest and I was very flattered when Miss Davies asked if I minded if she took of the blackberries - I'd never been asked before if I minded about anything.

We used to have milk from bottles with a real piece of straw, not a plastic one. It was 1/3rd pint and cost a penny (an old one that is)! The milk was delivered by the farmer, Mr Alf Clarke, who also had the job of collecting and returning children from Isle Park, for which he was paid £2 a week by the council - big money in those days. I can remember to, my big disappointment at Christmas when we were lined up to be given an orange each by Miss Dutton. When she got to me, last in the line, the box was empty and she said "I'm sorry, they've all gone"! One was found for me subsequently. The classmates I can remember were Margaret Bailey, Phyllis Morris and Denis Brown (who, poor man, was drowned when HMS Hood was sunk by the German battleship Bismarck in 1941)

In 1927 I was placed in Standard One. We started every piece of work with the date - and I still start my letters as I was taught. We wrote with scratch pens with ink which was made with water on powder ink wells.

It was the job of the ink monitor to fill the ink wells. We had to moisten the pen nibs and we got mucky hands. We had PT, drill and we played rounders.

The boys sometimes went up to Mr Buckley at the blacksmiths shop for some tuition. One memorable occasion was when a student teacher, Miss Turner took two of us to the West Midlands Show and my mother made me a dress of Green voile for the occasion. Some years ago, Miss Turner, aged 90, returned to the school for a special occasion. She was now Mrs Garside and had become headteacher. After Miss Dutton left, Miss Chidley became Headteacher and I didn't like her! I remember still when she said to me "You'll never be a lady like your mother", which was very hurtful. There were special days eg Empire Day and there was a Sunday School party on Holy Innocents Day when we had bread and butter, a piece of plain of slab cake and a cracker. We also received a present from Miss Millbank of Bicton Hall. The school was used for whist drives (organised by the Sandfords of Udlington) and any sandwiches that were left over were eaten by the children the next day. Traffic was light in those days, of course, and we used to play 'whips and tops' on the main road. My whip and top used to be hidden in the hedge because I might have been told off if my parents knew!

There were visits from the Medical Officer which was quite something because we couldn't afford to have a doctor at home (hurrah for the National Health Service!); and twice a year a dentist came to school and carried out treatment at the school, including extractions. He was a nice man and I used to enjoy his visits because of the attention I received! Other visitors included Mrs Davey to inspect PT and drill, the Attendance Officer and Mr Richard Sandford who was, I think, a Governor.

The other 'medical event' I can vividly remember has nothing to do with school apart from the fact I was away for a time. I was admitted to the Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital in 1927 to have my tonsils out. My mother took me on the 3 o' clock bus from the Four Crosses armed with a towel and a slab of carbolic soap. This was on the Wednesday. The operation was on the Thursday and on Friday morning my mother and sister came to collect me, still seeping a little blood. They brought a little drop of milk for me to sip in a whiskey bottle of granny's. We went home on the bus because we couldn't afford a taxi.

I failed the scholarship for the Priory where my sister went (Mathematics let me down) and I went to the Lancasterian School which has no fond memories for me. I envied the Priory girls in their uniform and with their longer holidays. To this day I feel bitter about the separation of children into sheep and goats at eleven. I felt a sense of shame because I didn't go to the Priory.

After I left school in 1934, I stayed at home for a time helping my mother, but in 1937 I started training at The Royal Salop Infirmary to become a nurse.....but that's another story."

Perhaps, private surveyors marked what they saw, or copied from others, while the Ordnance Survey took greater care with its legal definition That map of Humphrey Sandfords 50 acres incidentally show adjacent buildings on the site of Grove Farm and Rossall Heath Farm (business park), suggesting some of Sturry's encroachments had become permanent.

The eighteenth century saw the UP ROSSALL Sandford Estate absorbing the other properties on the peninsula, while shedding Udlington. DOWN ROSSALL saw the amalgamation of farms and the dominance of the "Ross Hall" estate. In this way, fewer interested parties were now involved in the heath and it became much easier to reach an agreement for formal enclosure and division of its 112 acres. (In the case of that 50 acres it was remarked that it was being enclosed for the second time).

The resulting pattern of "allotments" and roads now stand out with their typical straight hawthorne hedges, contrasting with the surrounding "old enclosures" with less straight hedges of elm and blackthorn (Oct 07). Sheep were banned from new fields for eight years to allow the "quick" to become established. Against the old Rossall Estate, exchanges of land and subsequent improvements have since blurred the distinction between the old and new field patterns, however.

At the entrance to the heath the two encroachments of Morris and Tipton were "tidied up" to become the present terrace of cottages and their long gardens. Nearby, the lodges that once stood at the entrance to "Ross Hall" drive were likewise replaced by new ones on the Isle Lane. "Fir Trees", already lining that drive, were mentioned in the agreement, but have since disappeared with age. They were probably Scotts Pine, like those nearby at Udlington. Another curious feature mentioned in the agreement was the tunnel across the neck of the Isle. (Feb 08) to which Sir Richard Jenkins was to be allowed access for maintenance, since his "ancestor" (father?) had built it. By this time he was living at Bicton Hall after returning from eventful service in India between 1807 and 1826. He continued his busy life as MP for Shrewsbury and when he died in 1853 was buried in the old church. His memorial tablet was later transferred to the new church where the words "Buried under the floor of this church" are now misleading. Towards the end of his life responsibility for the tunnel was transferred to the Isle Estate, after which tunnel and mill do not appeared to have survived much longer. There is a story here which needs further investigation; likewise there is more to be discussed about his property at Bicton Grove. Watch this space.

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No 507
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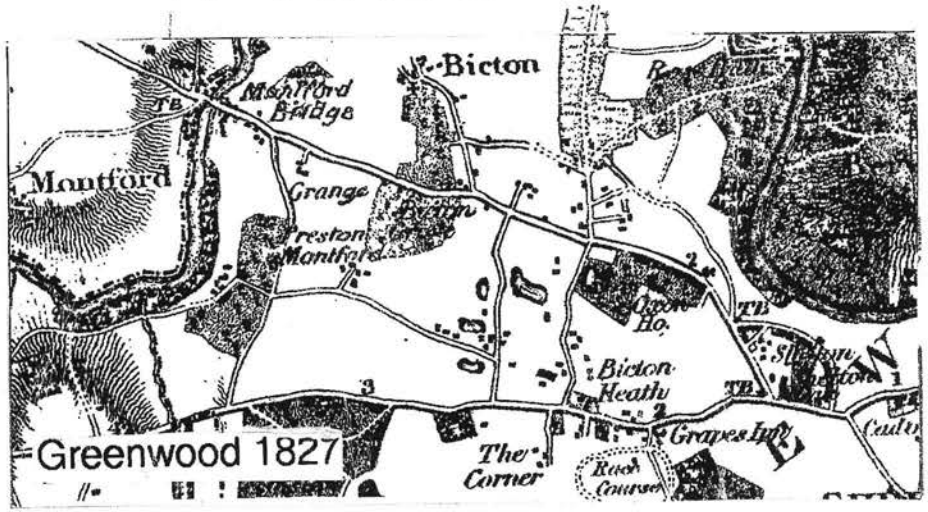
HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Bicton Village News

Rossall Heath



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 18
The Ups and Downs of Rossall Heath

The early nineteenth century maps discussed in June and July all showed Rossall Heath, albeit with differing outlines, before its enclosure (inclosure) in 1829-30. As with Bicton Heath (Sept 07), this was carried out by agreement between the principle landowners, in this case Folliot Sandford (The Isle), Henry Wentworth Powys ('Ross Hall'), Lady Boyne (Udlington) and Sir Richard Jenkins (Grove and part of Rossall). Otherwise there were great differences between the two areas.

Firstly, the site of Rossall Heath is a fairly flat plateau of 'boulder clay' overlying glacial sand and lacks any 'kettle hole' deformation, which is such a feature of Bicton Heath (Sept 07).

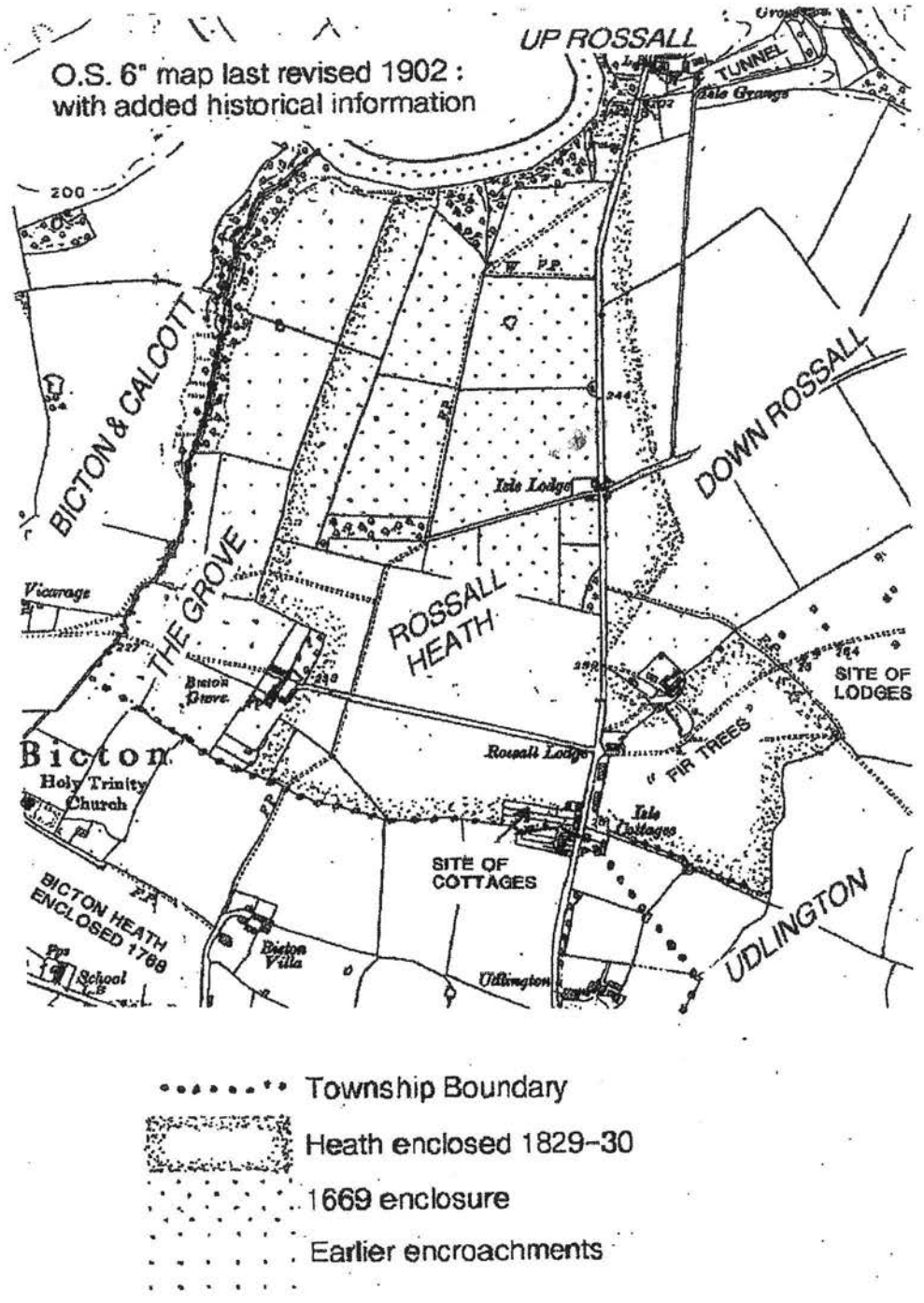
Secondly, its outline was more regular, without the typical cottage encroachments, except those of Messrs Morris and Tipton just inside its southern entrance. Other apparent encroachments seem to have been better planned, as around Grove Farm. Otherwise the river and township boundaries marked other sides. Anciently it may have joined Bicton Heath, but at some stage it became separated by that regular pattern of fields laid out near Bicton Villa.

With no obvious problems of soil or drainage, one might well wonder why it had not become normal farmland much earlier. One explanation may be the many disputes between the local estates, each defending a right to use it, especially in the seventeenth century when medieval subsistence farming was giving way to modern forms of commercial management.

'Lordship of the Manor' and therefore ownership of the 'soil' was then claimed by the owners of Rossall (Down Rossall), especially the long established Sturry family. The attempts of their tenents to plough the heath were challenged by the owners of the Isle (Up Rossall) including the Sandfords, who claimed that their own tenents had always grazed their cattle and pigs there, as well as cuf 'furze' or gorse (one of the best fuels for preheating traditional bread ovens, thanks to the wax coating on its spiny leaves).

To complicate matters, the Borough Corporation also claimed jurisdiction, as it was waste ground within the 'Liberties of Shrewsbury' and ordered the heath to be 'thrown open in 1667. Just at this time, the Sturry family were running out of male heirs to continue their control and it may be significant that, soon after, a surviving map shows 50 acres taken out of the heath for the use of Humphrey Sandford and William Emerton. Then, in 1679, the Borough gave the inhabitants of "UP ROSSALL" permission to plough the heath, by which time DOWN ROSSALL was under new ownership, which also continued some litigation.

With all this going on, it is no surprise later map markers confused by the actual area of the heath.



The holding in question was originally a cottage encroachment on the heath near the Welshpool Road, occupied by Mr Wright*, which at the enclosure of the heath in 1768 became part of the Mytton estate, (the Lord of the manor) and its boundaries improved. In 1812 it was worked by Isaac Mullock, although Margaret Wright still lived there. In 1817 the Shrewsbury Chronicle advertised a 'sale of nursery stock' perhaps suggesting the closure of Mullock's business. Significantly at the great auction of the Mytton property in 1825 (to pay of Jack's debts), John Tudor was now running the nursery while 'Widow Wright' still lived in the cottage there.
As a result of this sale, the holding was added to the Wingfield Estate under whom a succession of only three tenants ran the nursery for the rest of the century: John Millman, John Wilson and his grandson John Davidson.
The ordnance survey of 1881 well illustrates the nursery with a version of that 'grove' symbol.
There must have been a good business for such a local nursery at this time, as more and more suburban villas were built around Shrewsbury, such as along The Mount and also Bicton Vicarage. New exotic plants were becoming available to fill fashionable shrubberies and flower beds. There was correspondingly a demand for 'gardeners'. Census returns record 3 living in cottages around the 'heath' area in 1851 and this number had doubled around 1881.
By 1900, however, the maps show only normal farmland on this holding and the word 'nurseryman' disappeared from the local 'trade directories', nevertheless the name remained as Calcott Nursery for this address.
Just think, in modern times it might have been a good site for a retail nursery and garden centre. This role was later to be taken over by Merton Nurseries on the old A5 - but that is another story.

(I must thank Roger Ratcliffe for sharing results of research he had commissioned, Ernie Jenk s for browsing the old Shrewsbury Chronicles and Paul Stamper for his study of Shropshire Gardens).

* John Wright buried 1809

November 2008
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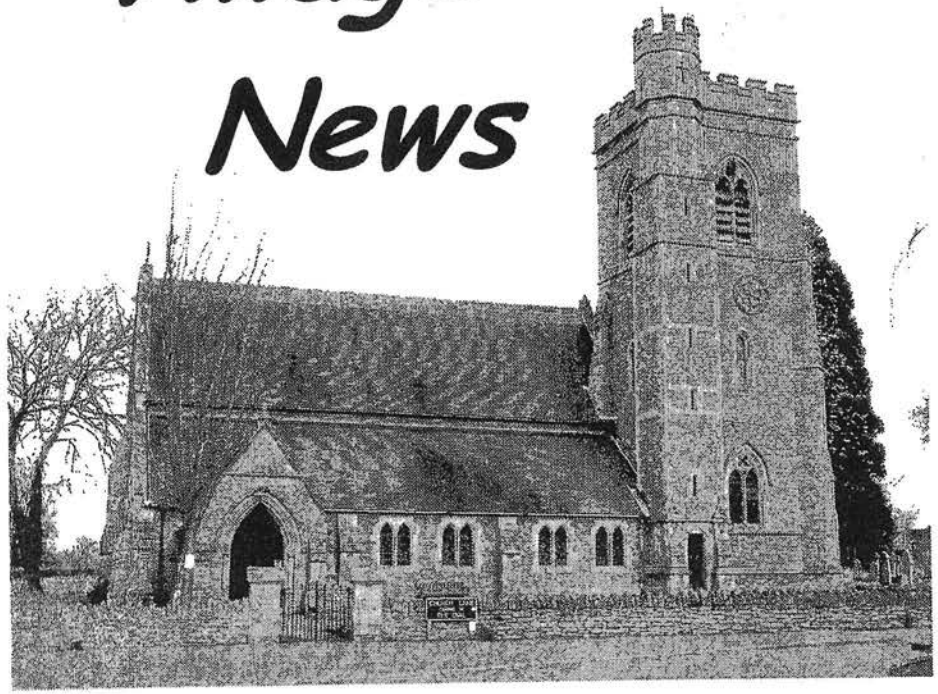
HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Bicton Village News

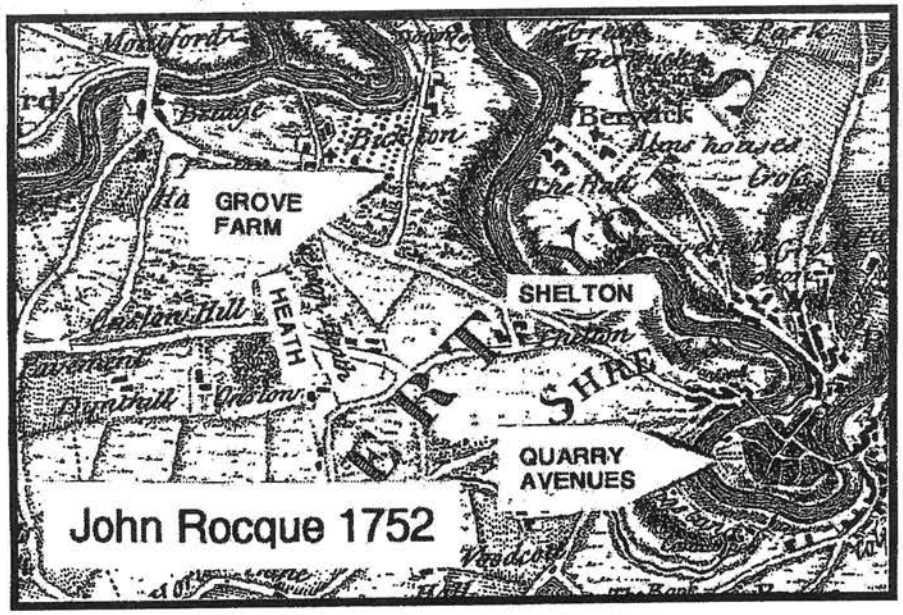
Nurserymen of Bicton

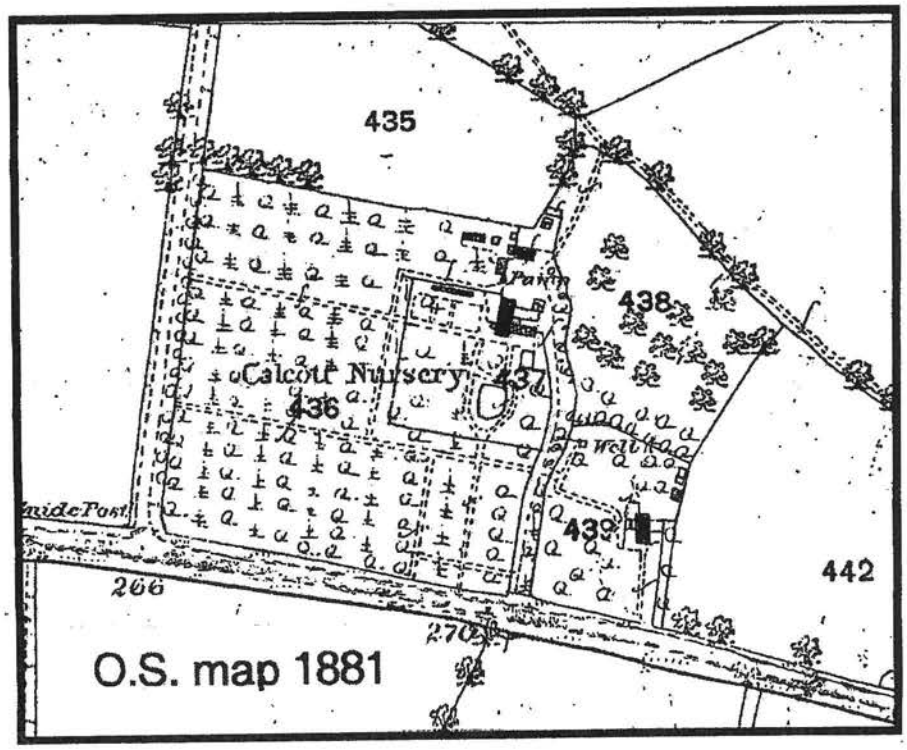


Nurserymen of Bicton

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 19

In 1719 'The Orders of the Borough of Shrewsbury' stated that walks to be planted in the Quarry in such a manner as Mr Mayer shall think fit.
In this way the authorities began changing the common pasture, bleaching grounds and drying space for the local washerwomen into the public park we know today.
One may wonder how 400 lime trees could be obtained at that time. Fortunately a nurseryman Thomas Wright was close at hand at Shelton to supply them. Around the same time other big gardens from Hawkstone to Castle Bromwich were also buying trees from him.
Little is known of his base, except that it may have been at his fathers house, the largest in Shelton when taxed for hearths in 1672. As Presbyteriam dissenter his birth records have not survived so well, but the St Chad's register records his marriage in 1720 to Abigail Griffiths (probably from Dinthill).
No doubt he then started looking for a suitable family home of his own and in 1729 bought Grove Farm from Edward Gosnell owner of Down Rossall. He did some improvements to the existing house, giving it the general appearance it has today.
One reason why this then survived so well was the sad loss of his three sons (2 in military service) so that after his own death in 1777, it was occupied by tenants and not further developed.
The new property offered more space for nursery enterprise and records show him supplying more trees to Castle Bromwich Hall in 1740. We can therefore understand the 'grove' symbol on John Rocques map of 1752 and the name it now acquired (June 08). Significantly, a detailed map made around the time of his death shows no clues to the business and merely conventional farmland. Clearly Thomas was a 'one off' enthusiast and his business died with him.
Thomas Wright's daughter-in-law Eleanor, twice widowed, lived here until 1822 and was buried in Bicton old churchyard. The remaining in-laws then sold the property to Sir Richard Jenkins on his return from India in 1827 (Oct 08). At first he lived at Bicton Hall, letting the farmland to the Peters family, but when his mother died he moved to London so the Hall was also let. For many years this was to be to Cotes sisters (Nov 07). He died in 1853 leaving no male heirs so the properties were also auctioned off and acquired by the expanding Wingfield Estate.
Meanwhile as this nursery was fading from their memory another one was developing in Bicton, which also involved the name Wright. The historian might be tempted to see a link, but there is no evidence of this. (Please delete my comments in Dec 07 instalment!)

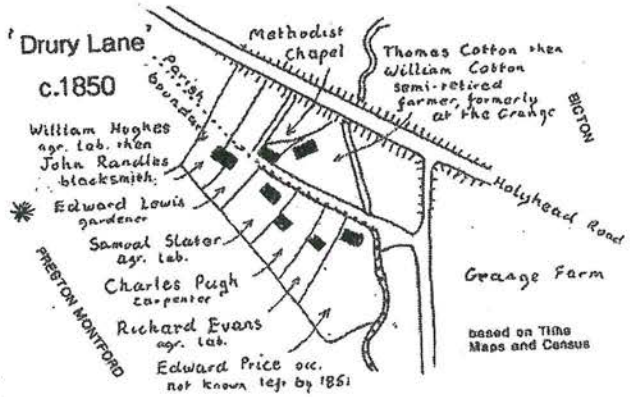




Now he had space in which to be a keen gardener and allow children to grow up with closer contact with nature. Otherwise, Ernest was very public spirited, winding clocks in Bicton and all over the town, acting as special constable, and joining in community life in the village here, and even more so in Frankwell.

As with Ernest himself, the children also made use of the opportunities for extra education and apprenticeships in Shrewsbury. Walter and Herbert attended the Allats School, a charity in Shrewsbury, and Herbert went on to be an apprentice grocer with Morris and Co, where he met Phyllis Ball, a regular customer. Walter later worked for JK Morris himself, who incidentally could also include a daughter of Edward Lewis amongst his *inlaws'* ancestors. Alan was apprenticed to a carpenter and furniture maker and entered the building trade in the spirit of William. Daughter Mary obtained a scholarship to the Priory School and became a teacher in the Rosier tradition, while Dorothy trained as a nurse at the R.S.I (Sept 08) and later became a successful Midwife like Mary Birch sen.

Herbert was the most passionate gardener and, to cut a long story short, eventually returned to the Milnsbridge site with wife Phyllis and a 'modern family' of two in order to develop Merton Nurseries with brother Alan. We can discuss the details of this some other time. Suffice to say, his daughter Jessica, a teacher, then met the new Geography tutor at Preston Montford Field Centre and 40 years ago this Christmas, started married life in a cottage there.....back to where we started!



Many thanks to Dorothy Lewis for family memories, putting 'flesh' on the bare bones of official records.

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HISTORY of BICTON

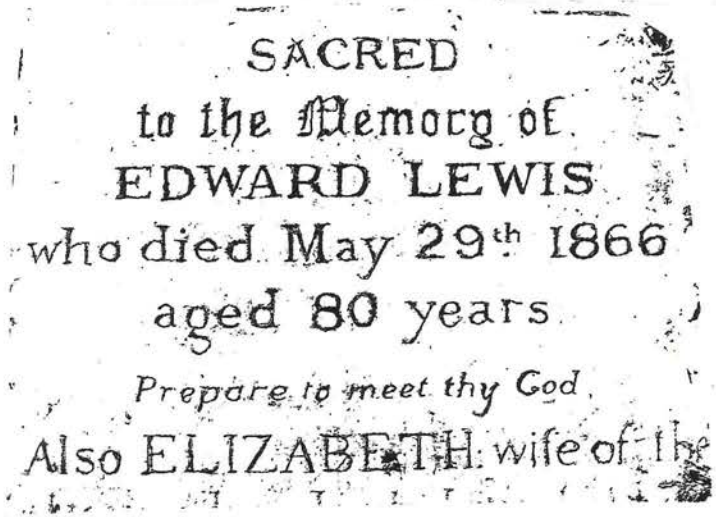
by David Pannett

Bicton Village News

Part 20

website www.bictonvillage.co.uk

Lewis Gardeners


SACRED
to the Memory of
EDWARD LEWIS
who died May 29th 1866
aged 80 years
Prepare to meet thy God.
Also ELIZABETH wife of the

David Pannett's History of Bicton No 20
The Lewis Gardeners have long roots

One feature of nineteenth century Bicton, which was typical of such rural villages, was the continuous turnover of population. Farm tenancies, tied cottages and 'living in' domestic service all contributed to this (Nov 07). Families remaining here through several generations, both witnessing and participating in the local social history, are indeed rare. One such has been the Lewis family, more recently associated with Merton nurseries.

Their local story started with Edward Lewis, born about 1790, becoming gardener at Preston Montford Hall. With his young wife and their four children he may have lived in a cottage annexe to Preston Montford Farm as part of his employment with Sir Francis Hall. Then in 1829 the Hill family of Hawkstone, the actual owners, passed the property to John Wingfield of Onslow, although Sir Francis remained as tenant (May 07).

By 1841, the growing Lewis family were living in an estate cottage in 'Drury Lane', Montford Bridge, which now had a larger garden following the diversion of the Holyhead Road in 1835. (Aug 07) Of the six daughters, Anne the eldest, had already left home by 1841 and her three sisters by 1851, probably going into service. It was a typical feature of the period, enabling large 'Victorian' families to grow up in small Victorian cottages. In this little community most neighbours were agricultural labourers, many of whom could not read or write.

Specialist retainers in country estates often had more permanent jobs than average farm labourers and it is significant that Edward and Elizabeth continued to live here until their respective deaths in 1866, aged 80, and 1872 age 75, when both were buried in the old Bicton churchyard.

By this time, the daughters had dispersed, two being married, but Anne, later returned unmarried and probably helped her parents in the later years. Families then had to provide their own social security and care. Anne herself died in 1914, age 91.

Long before this, William, the only son, born 1835, had married Mary Birch from Broomfields. Their respective families would have known one another in the rural community sharing the varied services at Montford Bridge. Her Mother; Mary was also the local midwife (Her brother John may have been the father of another John, who later became the head gardener at Styche Hall, Market Drayton, the ancestral home of the Clives who owned the Montford Estate).

Just as William and Mary started their own large family, the new Bicton school was opened, leaving the adjacent 'old' school house available for them to rent. Here, between 1865 and 1882 they raised four boys and four girls, although one of these died in infancy. Child deaths from common diseases were more frequent at this time.

While girls might escape crowded cottages to work 'in service', it was harder for the boys. Walter, the eldest emigrated to Chicago in 1882, while by contrast, Frederick went to New York, but returned ill and then remained at home until his death in 1937.

William himself was a bricklayer, who thereby left many 'monuments' to his skills around the neighbourhood: enlargement to old school house, the churchyard wall, a boundary wall at Onslow and no doubt many others. Ordinary farm work was clearly not in the family tradition and typically such independent tradesman did not need to move home very often.

Shrewsbury 'just down the road' was now offering more opportunities to the children, both in providing some limited secondary education and then apprenticeships with other trades. Son, Ernest was thus apprenticed to a jeweller and watchmaker in High Street in 1894, while still living at home. Then, in 1907, the same year in which his father died, he married Blanche Gertrude Rosier, from West Bromwich, the cook at the vicarage.

It was a typical case of far travelled domestic meeting a local lad (Nov 07). The Rosier family had included teachers, until the early death of Thomas Rosier, which forced his children to turn to domestic work. At this time, the long-distance professional and social contacts amongst gentry and clergy could often aid the various career moves of their staff and it was in this way two Rosier sisters came to Bicton.

At first, Ernest and Blanche lived in Frankwell, nearer to his work, but by 1912 they returned to Bicton, renting 'Milnsbridge' off Shepherds Lane. About the same time, he opened his own shop in Frankwell. This reflects a new aspect of Bicton, providing pleasant rural life to urban workers. Then they relied on walking and cycling, but by the 1920's motor buses were available too.