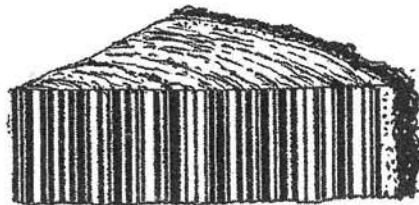
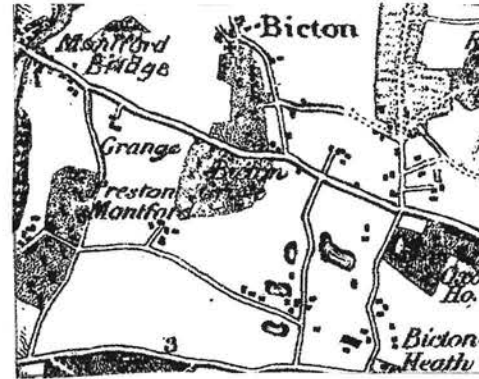


In our own lifetimes we have also experienced a similar range of weather, but not so many cold spells recently. Now we are part of a global economy it is the long drought in Australia which has indirectly affected the price of bread in our local shop. Climate indeed rules our lives in so many ways. Life may be becoming harder, but not as tough as in the sixteenth century, so cheer up!



TREE RINGS ARE LIKE BAR CODES RECORDING THE CLIMATE VARIATIONS DURING RECENT HISTORY



January 2009
No 510

**HISTORY
of BICTON**
by David Pannett

Bicton Village News

Offprint



*David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 21
Our Changing Climate*

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 21

Our Changing Climate

Almost every day somebody in the media will mention 'climate change'. Even unrelated events seem to get that extra 'climate change' spin, so that critics fear the issue is almost becoming a new state religion. So here we are discussing the topic too.

The landscape of Bicton has already been explained as a product of the last Ice Age and the subsequent warming in the current 'Interglacial' period (Sept 07). As the earth's orbit continues its pattern of slow changes, cold conditions are sure to return. By that time, we would have faced another crisis as fossil fuels run out. The first hints of this have already appeared as demand is exceeding supply and prices creep up.

Some critics of climate change fears point out that current trends reflect natural recovery from the 'Little Ice Age'. This was the period between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries when average temperature was lower and severe weather more common, although there were also some better years in between. At this time glaciers advanced in the Alps and Iceland, pushing up ridges of moraine from which they can now be seen to be shrinking.

In the earlier centuries, calmer, warmer conditions allowed the medieval population and settlement to expand and prosper. The climate change of the fourteenth century, not only gave bad harvests but may have triggered the migration of Middle Eastern rats bringing the 'Black Death' to Europe via the trade routes. The disease greatly reduced the population and undermined the old 'feudal system' which once so controlled the villages and towns. It may even have been a blessing in disguise in those areas experiencing over population and shortage of productive land.

Population numbers probably did not recover until the early eighteenth century, by which time the social and economic 'climate' had changed. This story of growth, contraction and slow recovery is reflected in the development of the Bicton landscape and the shape of Shrewsbury. (April and December 07)

Each Christmas we may receive cards which use old paintings of snow and ice. The 17th century Dutch painters depicted many crowded scenes on frozen canals, as if fascinated by their severe winters, while more recent scenes show a romantic image of a 'white Christmas' in Victorian England. Dramatic examples of such bad weather appear in the history of our area. For instance, the great flood of 1795 caused by melting snow put Telford's new Montford Bridge to the test, while damaging many others in the county. He was then kept busy rebuilding them.

One interesting record of past weather can be found in a 'chronicle' of Shrewsbury written by a schoolmaster in the sixteenth century. In between recording political events, murders, accidents etc, he noted some effects of extreme weather. The following extracts illustrate them (with modern spelling, otherwise the computer spellchecker might have blown a fuse!)

1525 "it rained from the seventh day of April to the third of June day and night continually, this year was such a scarcity of all things in England by reason of unseasonal weather..... that many died for default of bread".

1572 "this year the Winter and Springtime was very long, cold, hard and dry so that it was far in the month of May before any leaf or blossom appeared upon any tree".

1573 "this year from beginning of November until within nine days of candlemas (Feb.2) the season was so pleasant and fair without frost or any snow that there appeared leaves upon hawthorn and plum trees before Christmas and the cuckoo was heard sing and also seen ten days before Christmas".

1590 "this year was by the means of the hardness of Winter and dryness which caused hay and fodder to be very dear and caused many cattle to perish for want....."

These are but some of the extreme events mentioned, which show how varied they were. As trees grow, the width of their annual growth rings reflect such variations, so that a group of years can acquire a unique pattern rather like a barcode. Researchers can trace these patterns back from recent trees to successively older structures and thereby accurately calculate their ages. For instance, we now know that the Kings Head in Mardol was built in 1404.

**HISTORY
of BICTON**
by David Pannett

February 2009
No 511

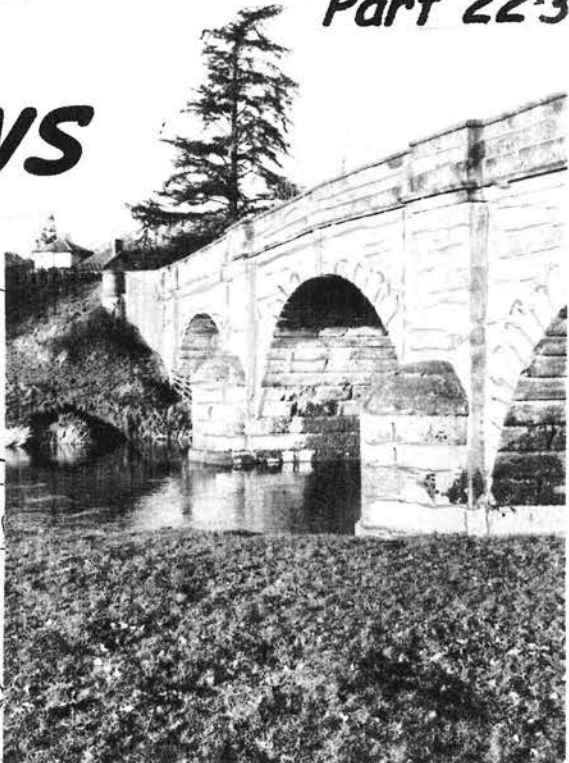
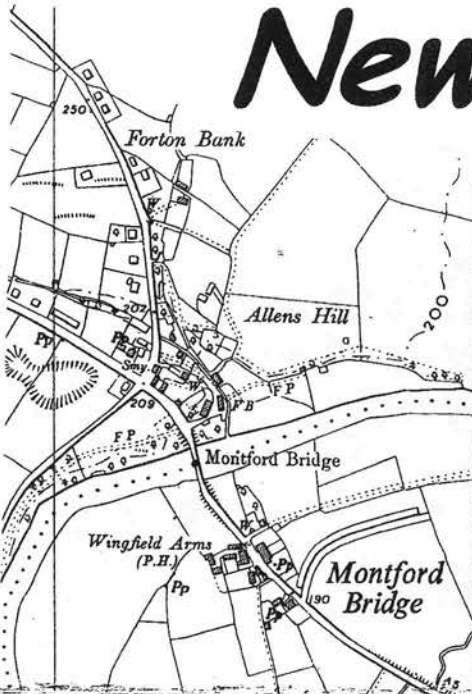
March 2009
No 512

Offprint

*Montford Bridge
at your service*

Part 22-3

Bicton Village News



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 22
Montford Bridge at your service (part 1)

The closure of Montford Bridge Post Office as we know it, prompts us to reflect upon the varied services which also once occupied this important convergence of roads and river.

Roadside inns were always important on this major route. The 'Pheasant' stood on the Montford side, occupied by Elizabeth Jones in 1728, while 'The Swan' occupied by Thomas Griffiths in 1763, stood on the other. Here the building certainly gives the impression of being far older than the eighteenth century. Moreover, it is not exactly aligned along the main road, but on the former lane branching off to Preston Montford and was also part of a small farm. Inn keeping was not necessarily a full time occupation, while land for the cow; horses and supplies of hay was always useful to the business.

Significantly, when Lord Clive, the new owner of the Montford Estate, reorganised the farms in 1771, he gave some extra land to the 'Pheasant', then occupied by Mary Gough, widow. The bridge by Thomas Telford, 1792 (July 02) then almost by-passed the inn, but at the same time may have released a strip of roadside waste on the Bicton side for further development, which included yet another inn, the 'Nags Head'. It was probably built by John Mytton, lord of the manor and technically owner of that waste, but later in 1824, his wayward son Jack was obliged to sell it to settle his debts. It was bought by John Wingfield of Onslow while the tenant was then George Whitehorn and, soon after, in 1829 he also acquired the 'Swan' as part of the Preston Montford estate. Its tenant was William Blandford, who held it until the 1840's, to be followed by William Jones.

Montford Bridge was now also gaining more residents, after the sale of the Powys Estate had opened up land development at a time when planning regulations were still rather weak. 'Ribbon development' thus spread towards Forton. On the Bicton side, by contrast, following the 1919 'Local Authority Housing Act' Atcham R.D.C built its new 'Rural Cottages' on the new crescent. Nationally, the thirties saw great expansion of such house and road building

and it is no surprise that the company of E&E Rogers first exploited the local glacial sand (behind PO) and then found Montford Bridge to be a good site for a depot and focus its distribution network between scattered pits.

Fast forward to modern times, we have the growth of traffic on the A5 becoming so great that a new bypass became necessary. Now, within the settlement many of the commercial services and activities have been replaced with yet more houses. On the plus side, it is now better for

campers and caravanners to enjoy the peace of the countryside as it might have been in the thirties.

Throughout these times, one local function has been quietly expanding, the telephone. The '850' automatic exchange once occupied a little 'hut' by Drury Lane, but as demand increased, it moved to a bigger 'shed' by the Crescent. Now electronics have replaced the bulky 'Showger' switches, it has been able to move back leaving the 'shed' to be converted to yet more housing. With broadband it carries a lot more traffic, some of which has been undermining traditional work of a Post Office! In addition, mobile masts now appear on the local skyline. Local tradesmen for instance can be contacted wherever they are and do not need an obvious 'shop' in Montford Bridge.



David Pannett's history of Bicton no 23
Montford Bridge at our service (part 2)

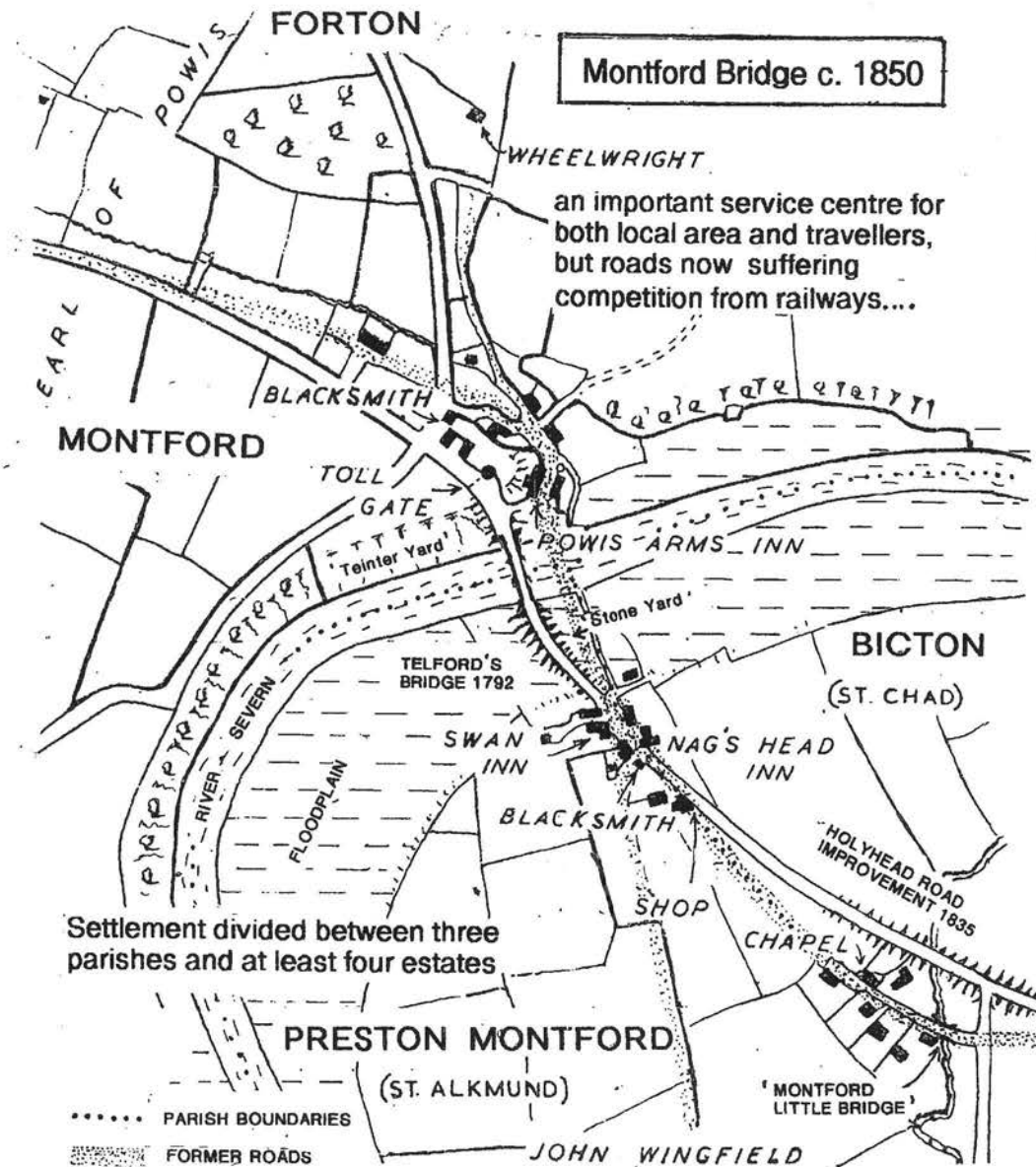
Although the inn trade in Montford Bridge contracted during the late nineteenth century as railways reduced road traffic, local tradesmen continued to serve the local community: two Blacksmiths, two shoemakers, a tailor and a Carpenter. On the Bicton side, the Thomas family opened a shop and Post Office, which William, in particular, ran for over forty years before his death in 1922, when Elizabeth carried on the business for a few more years. Their shop. Like the 'Nags Head', has since been adapted to purely residential use after the post office moved to the Montford side with Walter Griffiths.

By this time, after the 'Great War', many aspects of country life were changing. On the roads, smooth 'tarmacadam' was steadily replacing the traditional dusty gravel and the number of private cars, buses and bicycles increased to make contact with town much easier for everyone. By 1926, for instance, 'Midland Red' were running a daily service from Shrewsbury, allowing local people to access the shops there and bypass local tradesmen. Morris & Co could even deliver groceries to order (Vaggs later took over the bus routes).

In the other direction, new motorists and cyclists could enjoy the delights of our river or ride on further to Wales. Nationally many city dwellers were discovering the countryside for the first ever time, a situation illustrated by the covers on colourful 'Popular' maps of the Ordnance Survey.

Such activities along the road obviously needed servicing and it is significant that by 1929 the peoples refreshment room association had taken over the Wingfield Arms occupied by Reginald Deacin and then Alfred Hinksman. Meanwhile, on the Montford side, SJ Hayward and Co, who had originally set up as a steam haulage business, now developed it as 'Montford Bridge Garage'. It's property also included 'Severn House', the late 'Powys Arms' which it ran briefly as a private hotel.

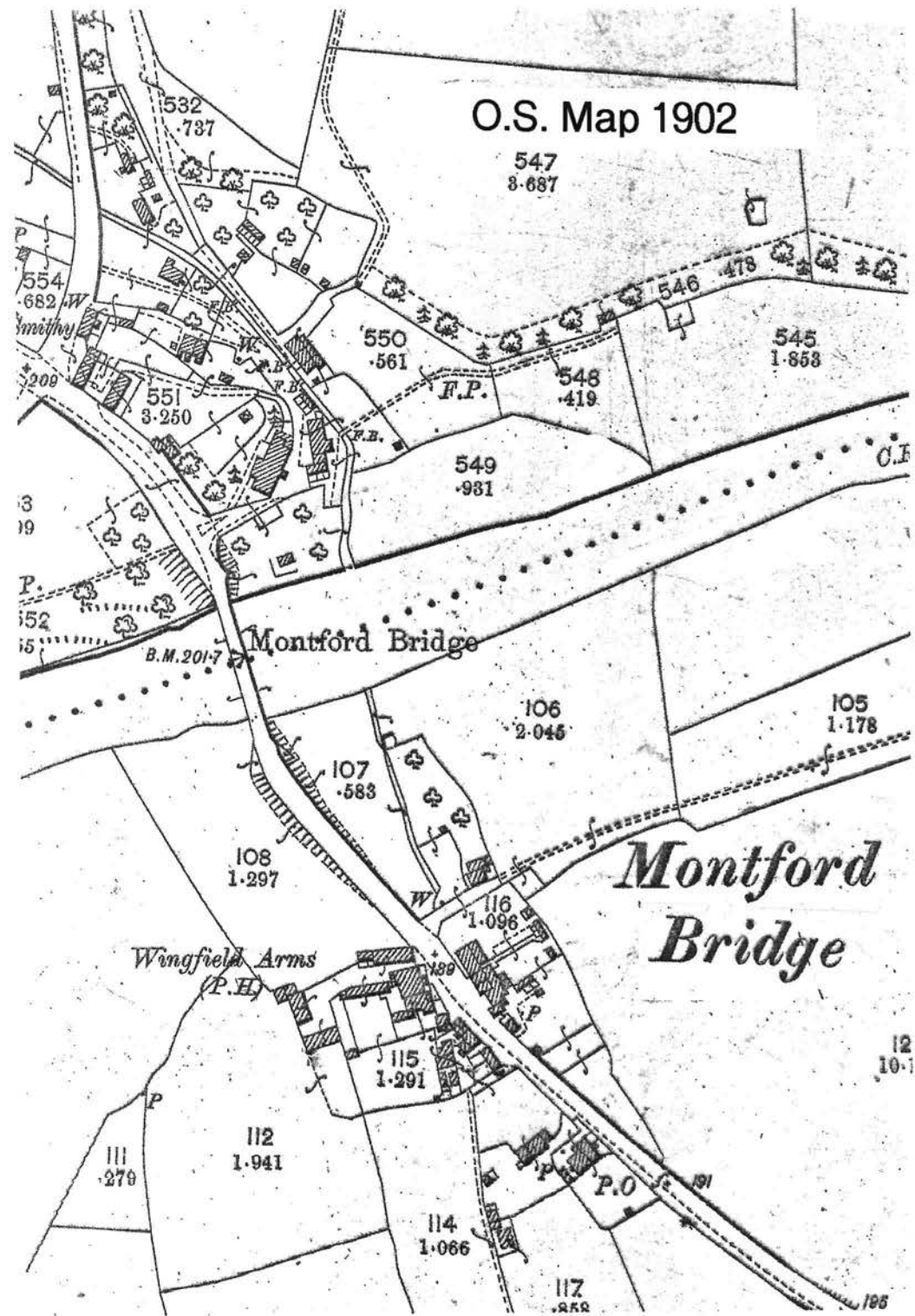
Some traditional tradesmen remained throughout this period, notably Henry Kynaston, who combined the duties of Blacksmith, Carpenter and Undertaker in a way typical of many rural areas. Also, Francis Welford continued to repair boots for many years.

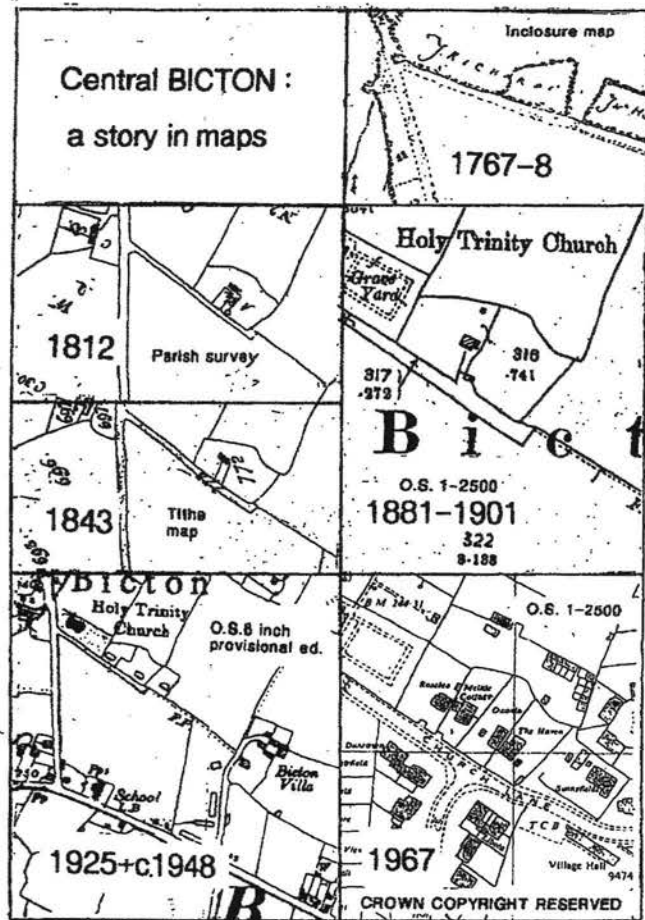


Meanwhile John Gough still ran the 'Pheasant', but its name changed to 'Clive Arms' in recognition of its owners. With further fortunate marriages, The Clives then became the Earls of Powys and so the name changed yet again.

In this period traffic was reaching its peak, boosted by the Holyhead Road project, (August 2007) so that there was enough trade to go round. Associated blacksmiths shops, William Lewis on the Montford side and Francis Cotton and later John Randles on the other could also help the travellers.

All this was not to last, however, as in 1848 the Shrewsbury-Chester railway opened and steadily reduced the long distance road traffic passing this way. The 'Swan' closed down soon after 1851, when William Jones, by then age 67, was still employing his own brewer. Between 1863 and 1870, the 'Powys Arms' run by Mary Dawson (Thomas' widow?) also closed, Meanwhile the 'Nags Head' continued with successive members of the Whitehorn family; George, John and James, but this too closed in 1870's when James crossed the road to revive the old 'Swan' as the 'Wingfield Arms'. As both houses belonged to this estate, such a move would have been easy to arrange and also made economic sense. It was also not uncommon for such businesses to stay in one family for several generations. Thus, when James died in 1885, he was succeeded by yet another John until 1905, when Charles Blake took over until 1922.





April 2009
No 513

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

*Bickton
Village
News*

offprint

**THE
EDITOR'S
HOUSE**

A Little of the Past 1967

My first and lasting impression of Mothering Sunday here in Bickton, was when my dear late mother-in-law, lived in the village called to take my children to church on Mothering Sunday. Having just moved into our house the day before, everything was upside down and here and there, and she kindly got them ready and proudly took them off to church. When she returned with them one hour later, the four of them clutching their posies for our neighbours who had no children. I knew we were going to like it here. We have now celebrated 42 years living here this Mothering Sunday and have made lots of very good friends over the years and wouldn't change a thing. Sometimes in life, you do get it right. I hope everyone had a Happy Mothers Day.

Muriel Morris
Editor

They all have the same 'conservative; cottage style, pre-dating the more typical 'suburban semi' style of the 1930's, so well seen in Shrewsbury. They were in fact built by John Paddock a local carpenter and builder during the latter years of his career. From now on, the ordnance survey abandoned regular revision for rural areas in order to keep pace with the expanding towns and therefore did not return to this area until 1967. By this time, the original plot contained four houses, while all around, Church Close and The Oval had been developed with such high density, with no room for orchards or vegetables, just at a time when we need them again.

After two years of reading about various other parts of Bicton, the editor asked 'What about my house', Roselea' in Church Lane"? So here we go!

Today, 'Roselea' stands amid a group of varied houses opposite the end of Church Close, which must be familiar to visitors to the village hall. The story of this whole group illustrates well the changes which have taken place in the village and the evidence which we can use to study them.

Their site was once one of the many small encroachments around the edge of the heath, which, until 1768, stretched from here to the Welshpool Road. At 'enclosure' it was therefore granted to John Mytton of Halston, who claimed to be the 'Lord of the manor'. By 1812, this 3/4 acre was the site of a small cottage occupied by Anne Randles (perhaps a relation of John Randles, Blacksmith at Montford Bridge for many years (Mar 09)).

Then, thanks to the wild behaviour of the later 'Jack' Mytton, much of the local Mytton property had to be sold in 1824. The new landlord was Sir Richard Jenkins of Bicton Hall, whose tenant at this cottage in 1843 was Robert Thomas, an agricultural labourer. The 1851 census also recorded his wife Elizabeth and their two sons and two daughters.

Following the death of Sir Richard Jenkins in 1853 (Nov 08), the Bicton Hall estate passed to John Wingfield of Onslow, who was steadily expanding his holdings in Bicton, including many of the cottages around the former heath.

At a time of low wages, cottages with large gardens provided some element of self sufficiency by way of compensation. Three quarters of an acre, ^{too small} for a cow, but certainly enough for a small orchard, vegetable patch and pigsty.

The traditional cottage pig would not only provide many meals from its varied parts (except the squeal!), but also help recycle domestic waste before 'green bins' were even dreamt of. Large families meant many mouths to feed, but also extra labour on the home plot.

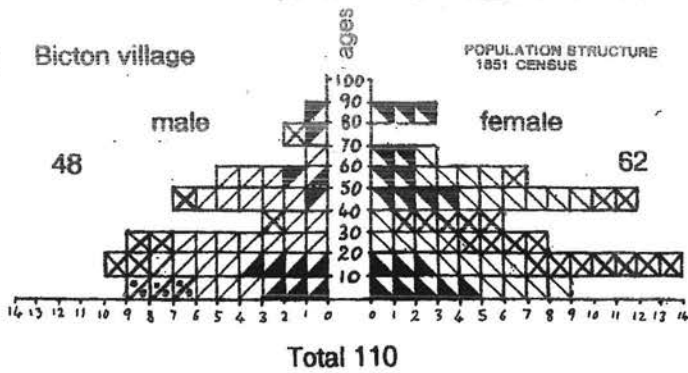
Since agricultural labourers tended to move their employment as well as homes tied to it, there is no surprise to find Mary Pritchard (69) and her friend occupying the cottage in 1881. By this time the story of this site is well recorded by successive ordnance survey maps.

The 1881 editions of 'Six inch to one mile' and 'twenty five inch' maps confirm what had already been shown by the Tithe map. Likewise, the revision of the 1901-2 showed no significant change, except the building of the new church on the adjacent plot. The next revision was delayed by the first world war until about 1925 and then only for the east side of Shrewsbury. While little change was shown to our cottage, there was now a new cottage by the Blacksmith's shop and others by Oxon Farm in Shepherds Lane.

This post-war period saw many estates shedding land and in this way changes came to our plot, although map markers were slow to catch up, since a second war disrupted their work yet again. In an attempt to catch up, the ordnance survey published a 'provisional edition' of the six inch map in the 1950's in which new features were sketched in with the help of aerial photographs. The technology had been developed during the war to photograph Germany, but was now turned towards Britain before being demobilised. In this way the new post-1925 houses appeared as ghostly outlines in approximately the right places, including on our plot, where two now replaced the original one and another appeared in the adjacent field.

A close look at the original photographs suggest that the former had been there some time, while the latter was really new.

Architectural appearance of Roselea confirms this and reveals some similarities with those other new cottages which had already appeared by 1925.



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



May 2009
No 514

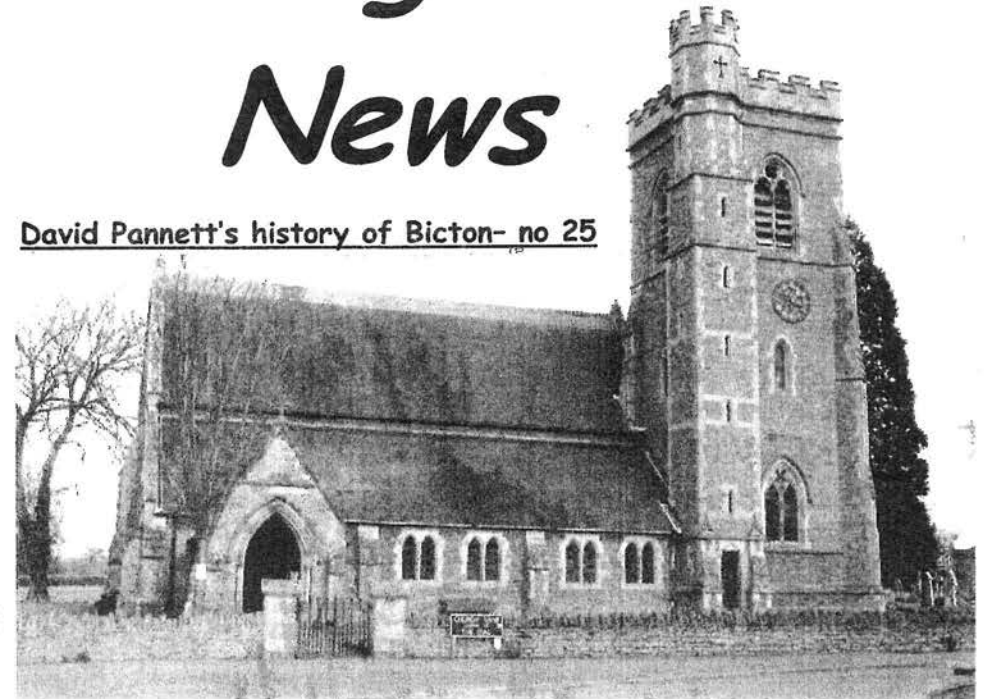
HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Bicton Village News

Offprint

David Pannett's history of Bicton- no 25



Upstairs Downstairs in Victorian Bicton

David Pannett's history of Bicton- no 25
Upstairs Downstairs in Victorian Bicton

Some years ago, the TV programme "Upstairs Downstairs" portrayed life in a large household employing a large domestic staff. It used story lines reflecting the rigid class system of Victorian and Edwardian England and the hierarchy within the servant group. More recently, several National Trust properties, have been paying more attention to the life "below stairs".

In and around Bicton, "Big houses" employing a similar large army of staff in the nineteenth century, included the "halls" at Bicton, The Isle, Onslow, Rossall and Preston Montford. Census records 1851 - 1901 reveal some interesting similarities and differences between these households.

Bicton Hall, for example, was then the home of the three Cotes sisters, Charlotte, Sophie and Emily and also their niece Lucy, after the death of Charlotte. At any one time they employed up to 11 staff as follows: Butler, Housekeeper, Cook, Footman, Ladies Maids, Housemaids, a Kitchen Maid, Laundry Maid and a Coachman, covering all the varied tasks running the household. The old Onslow Hall had even more.

While this general structure continued over the years, each census showed a constant turnover of actual people. Mary Jones, Laundry Maid, at Bicton was a rare exception, serving through three decades and still doing the same work in 1881 aged 69.

Another exception was Linda Thatcher, who, by 1871 had joined the Isle Hall as nurse to the Sandford children, but was still there in 1901, by which time the aging parents may have needed her skills themselves. Perhaps like many successful children's nurses, or "nannies" she had developed a close bond with her charges, which continued into their adult life and practically bridged the upstairs downstairs divide. Significantly, two children, Annette (46) and Richard (37) were also still at home in 1901.

Because other staff were always moving on to advance their careers or leaving to get married, (often to local lads: Dec 08), their average age remained in a constant 25-30 range at each of the "Halls". Illegitimate births could also occur in such environments, which brought such shame to hard working families that they hushed things up, leaving mysteries in some of our family trees. Apart from Mary, those of above average age, generally held the more senior posts, such as Housekeepers, including Mary Hughes 55, at Onslow and Anne Cooper 48, at Bicton, where the Butler Samuel Grey was 41. Emily Lamb 38, was Governess to the Sandford children at The Isle in 1871. Incidentally, she had been born in Yorkshire and had therefore travelled further than most staff, who mainly came from this county and the borderland. Perhaps her special profession enabled her to seek work over a wider area. or simply came here with the new Mrs Sandford from Milnsbridge House Huddersfield

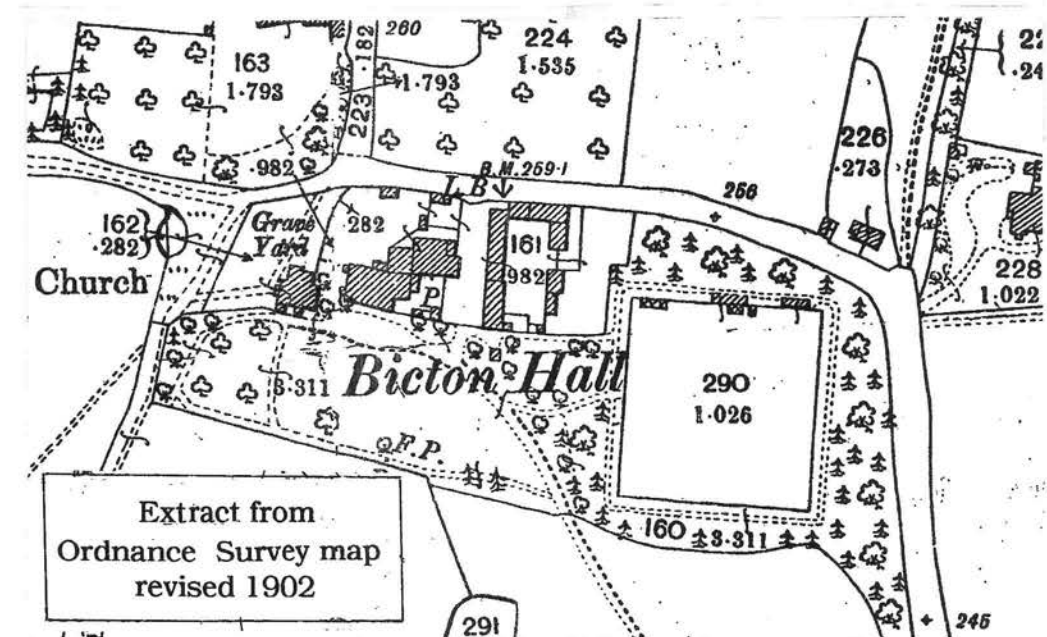


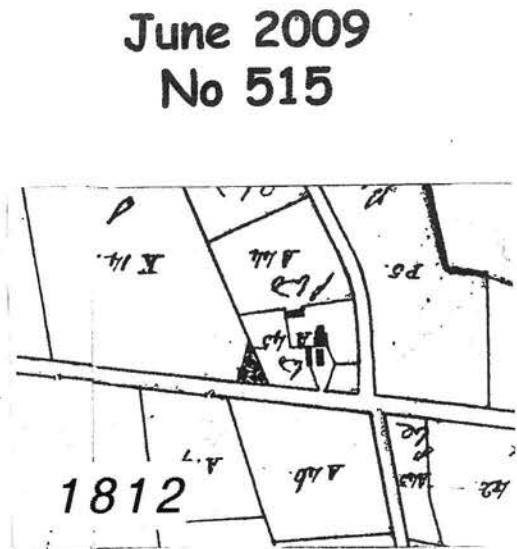
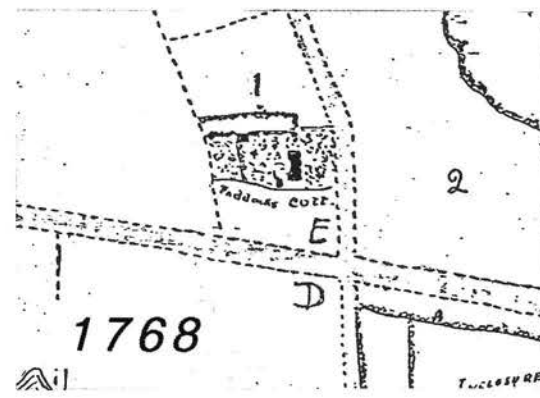
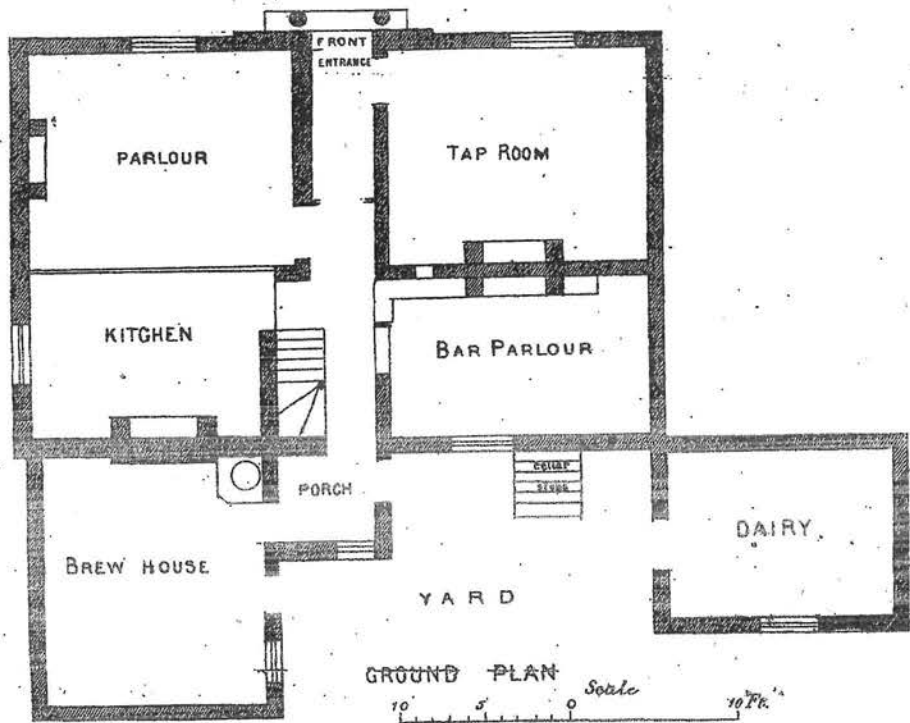
For such mature single people a job with accommodation had great advantages, as they may not have known any other "home".

Grooms and Coachmen were often housed above their charges in the stable block, rather than in some crowded attic, and this, no doubt allowed John Paddock (36) to live with his wife at The Isle. The total of 5 staff listed here represented a relatively modest upstairs/downstairs ratio of 1:1 or 1:1.5, while Bicton had a ratio of 1:3.6. The

work at The Isle may have been supplemented by "dailies" from the estate cottages in a way not available to the Cotes at Bicton.

Such high staff levels reflect the contemporary high birth rate, low wages and the labour intensive nature of domestic chores. A variety of social and economic factors have changed all this, including wider opportunities for girls. Such are the improvements in technology, now, even small houses can boast an army of "servants" by the names Hotpoint, Kenwood, Electrolux and Dyson, to list just a few. "Modern" husbands are also more helpful. However, power cuts can force us to think about those old time skills again.

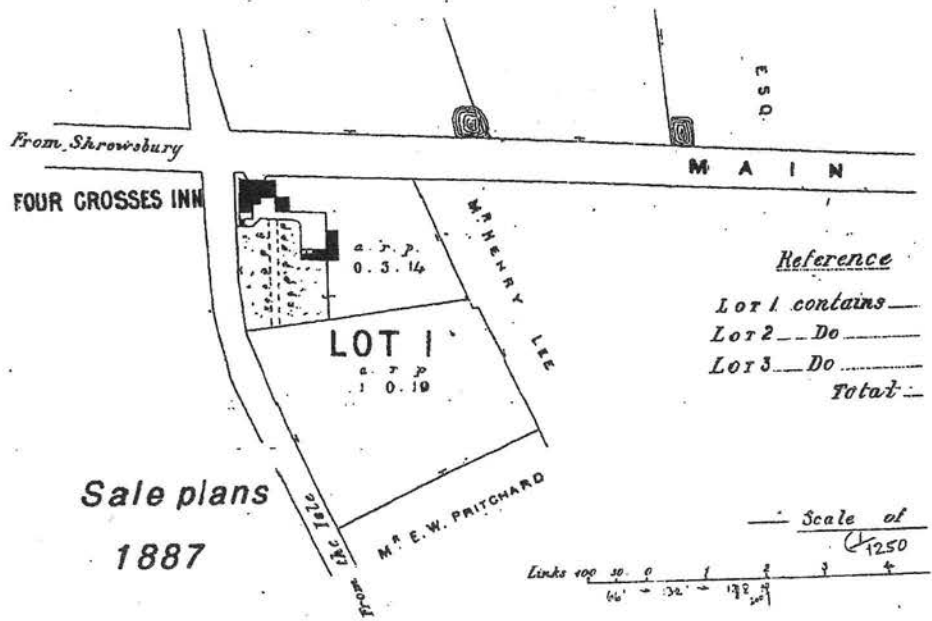




Bicton Village

News

Focus on FOUR CROSSES



David Pannett's History of Bicton. - No 26

Focus on Four Crosses

The Four Crosses Inn and adjacent garage are familiar landmarks to both residents and passersby, although somewhat detached from the rest of the village. They form an important service centre for the local area and have also been the scene of many traffic accidents thanks to the road pattern which accounts for the name.

The story of this site started in the eighteenth century when a Mr. Paddock enclosed a small patch of the heath for his cottage. At the 'inclosure' in 1768, along with many similar encroachments it was granted to John Mytton of Halston as 'Lord of the Manor.' (Dec 07). The new road pattern was laid out by the surveyors in a regular manner typical of such situations.

Such an important crossroads site clearly lent itself to commercial development and it is no surprise to find the cottage enlarged to an inn by 1812, when it was occupied by William Parrock[†], together with 8 acres of land. This was similar to the story of the Nags Head in Montford Bridge (Feb. 09) and in 1824 it was likewise sold to settle the debts of 'Mad Jack' Mytton. The tenant at the time was John Parrock, probably William's son. In this way it was added to the adjacent property of the Smith family, which also included the blacksmiths shop and land across the road from the inn. For the next hundred years at least, the inn was to remain linked to this land, so that part-time farming could also take place, not unlike the situation at the Wingfield Arms.

Further tenants came and went over the years, including Richard Sringer, S. Roberts, John Davies and Richard Light. At some stage, probably by the 1860s, the original inn was replaced by a new building right on the corner of the road. The Ordnance survey first recorded it on the 1881 map, while a sale catalogue of 1887 shows it in greater detail. Its symmetrical facade with central gable over the front door can still be recognised, although the interior layout has been greatly modified since.

Perhaps by this sale, it was acquired by Southams Brewery of

+ could be misspelling of Paddock

Shrewsbury and, from then on, for almost the next hundred years, it was to be some sort of 'tied house' run by successive managers and tenants under different companies. Their tenants included William Cookson, Thomas Sandbrook, Thomas Baker and Edwin Powell.

Official reports on licensed houses in 1896 and 1901 listed it as having 2 kitchens, 1 bar, 1 smokeroom, 5 bedrooms, a back kitchen and cellar. Outside there was stabling for 5 horses. It was 'good and clean' and free of any convictions for licensing offences.

During this period, as already noted at Monford Bridge (Feb 09), road traffic had been in decline, but the business remained an important 'local' for the surrounding scattered agricultural community. As the twentieth century progressed, however, road traffic steadily increased, not only for business, but also for pleasure. One symptom in Bicton was the appearance of 'tea rooms' in various houses from 1905 onwards. William Proctor at Lyndhurst and John Radcliffe at Rose Cottage, who also offered B&B. Significantly, by 1929, The Peoples Refreshment House Association had taken over both the Wingfield Arms and the Four Crosses. Perhaps at this time the building was extended and bay windows inserted all around so that the new work would blend with the old. In addition a spacious tea room was built of wood in the space behind which could open out of normal hours. For many years this acted as a sort of village hall, where local events, including WI meetings took place. It finally lost this role to the Village Hall in the 1950s.

After the P.R.H.A. was wound up, the property passed first to Charringtons and then Mitchells and Butlers, during which time the Howells family were managers and tenants for some thirty years. Land was also sold off and the fields across the road later became the site of Merton Nurseries. One echo of the P.R.H.A. remained in their deeds, however, forbidding the establishment of a rival tea shop!

As road traffic continued to increase, a garage developed in the inn yard which in the 60s evolved into the enterprise we see now. Then the status of the road changed forcing the inn to adapt.

Do support our local services and, while there, look around at their history, but also watch the traffic. The eighteenth century road design can still be dangerous!

The path enters Bicton Parish across Monford Bridge and sets off across fields through a gate opposite the Wingfield Arms (The history of this area has already been discussed in several installments of this history series).

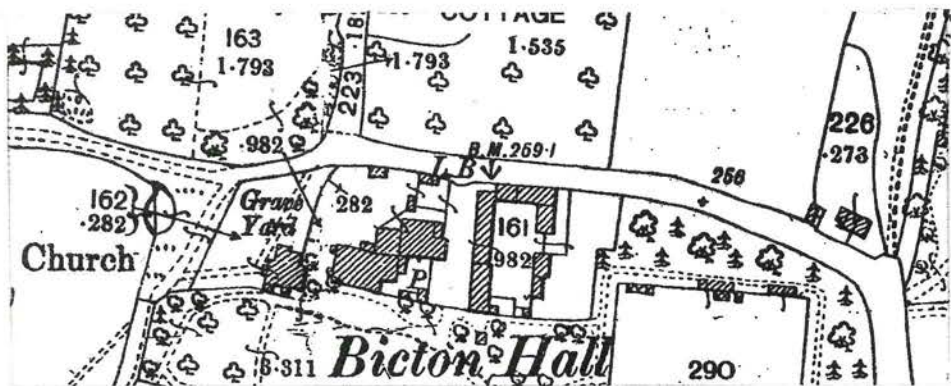
As it passes from one field to the next it also crosses several features which record the development of the valley since the last Ice Age – flood plain and terrace – before climbing a ridge which was a terminal moraine of the last ice sheet. The views westward from the crest include the Long Mountain and the Bridden Hills on the skyline and the gaps through which that ice once poured down from Wales 20,000 years ago.

The remainder of the route includes a variety of green lanes whose shape and hedgerow flora reflect their different origins : early eighteenth century enclosure of Bicton's medieval 'open fields'; nineteenth century enclosure of Rossell Heath and medieval woodland clearance at Shelton. (Featherbed Lane was once called Eatherwood Lane).

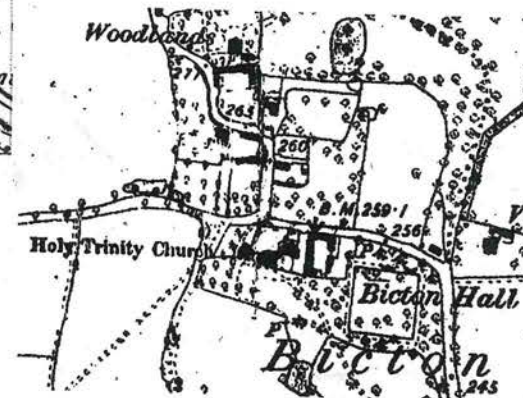
Where the path enters the old village of Bicton, the walker will meet a very sorry sight: a small green lost in weeds, a wet rutted road, but a dry village pond, an overgrown graveyard and ruins of a chapel closed for safety. (Compare all this with Shawardine Millennium Green and Montford Green!)

Nevertheless, there is still plenty of interesting historical detail here: study the local bricks in a restored barn wall, while hunting for the Ordnance Survey benchmark. The lone pillar was one of a pair flanking the carriage drive to Woodlands Farm. Although the victorian vicarage is hidden by trees, these are also of interest.

These are but some of the features to observe along the way – do keep your eyes open. If you have lost those past editions of this Village News which explain them, offprints are available on request.



July 2009
No 516



Bicton Village

News

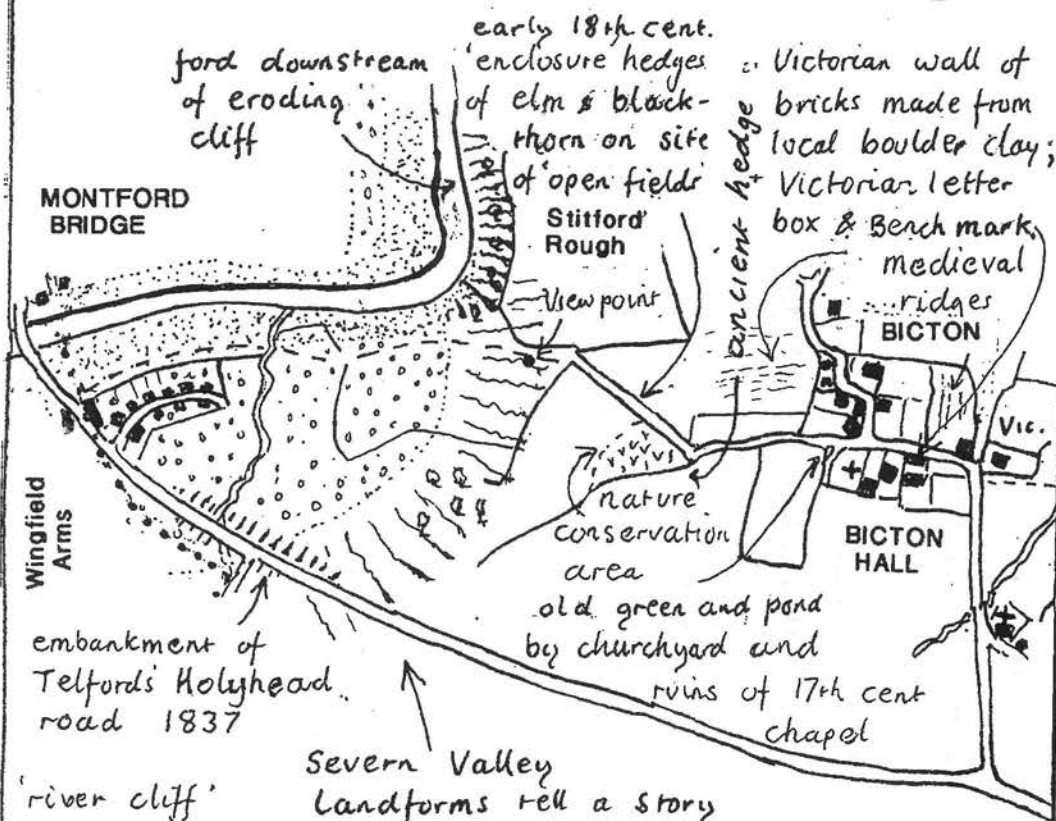
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David Pannett's History of Bicton no. 27: Walking the Severn Way

With long Summer evenings and the approaching holiday season, why not take a healthy country walk! It so happens the 'Severn Way', one of our longest long distance footpaths actually passes through Bicton as it bypasses all those bends around the Isle. It is well signed and equipped with good gates and styles, all described in a published guide to the whole route from the Welsh Hills to the Bristol Channel. This guide, however explains very little about the river and associated landscape, so there is scope to rectify this for the Bicton section at least.

In practical terms, the number 70 bus can be used as part of a round trip and therefore it is convenient to continue our description as far as Shelton.

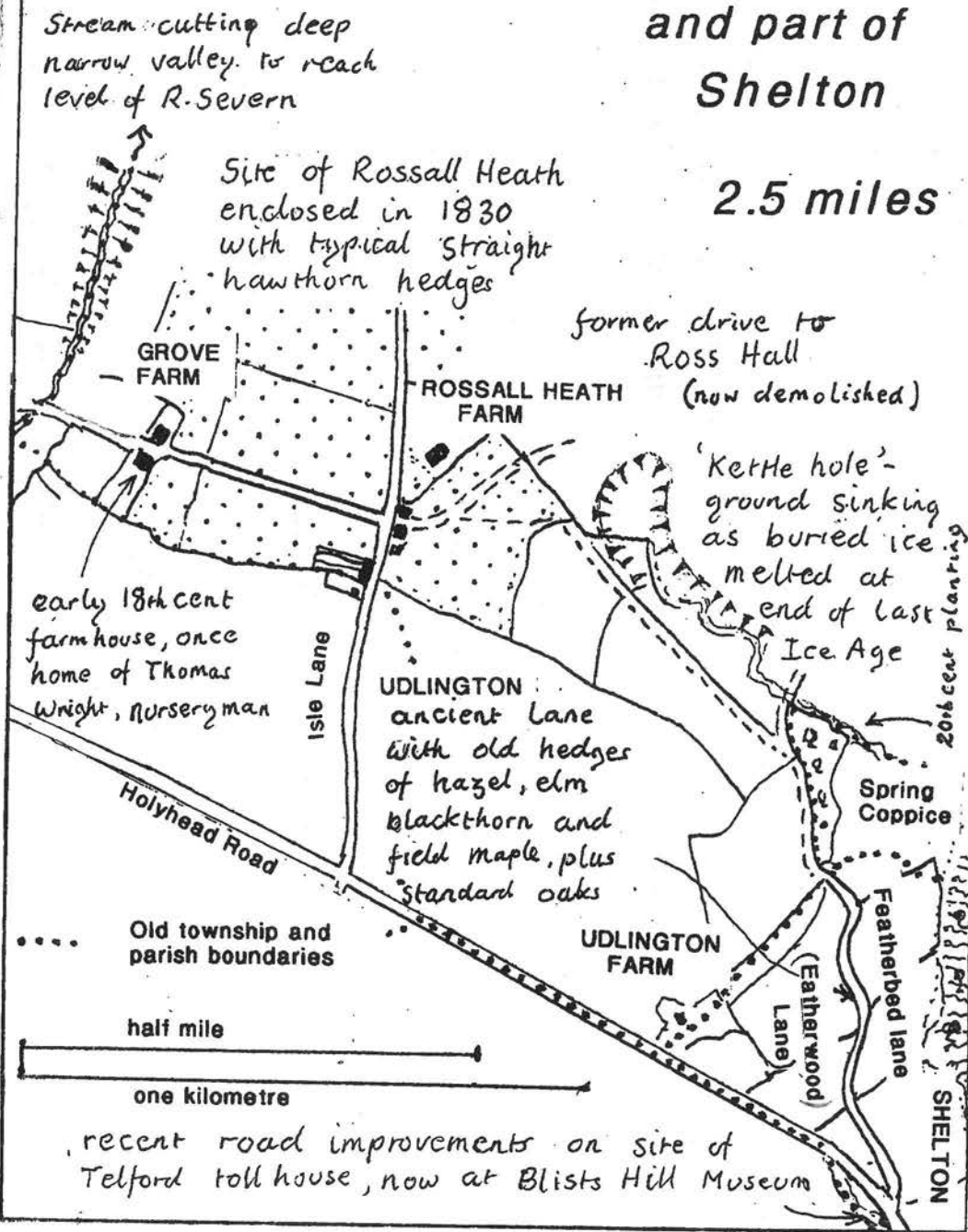
The Severn Way



through Bicton

and part of Shelton

2.5 miles





Cordyline Palm

selected by nurserymen and plant breeders from naturally occurring variations. In the wild, any tree sprouting 'non-standard' growth could actually be handicapped and not thrive, but a nursery man would seize upon such mutations for their decorative effect – dwarf or upright habits, yellow or blue foliage etc. Even a single 'odd' branch could be multiplied by cuttings or by grafting on normal rootstock. Junipers and the Lawson Cypress have proved particularly useful in all this production, including varieties more suited to confined gardens than gentleman's parks or the vicarage.

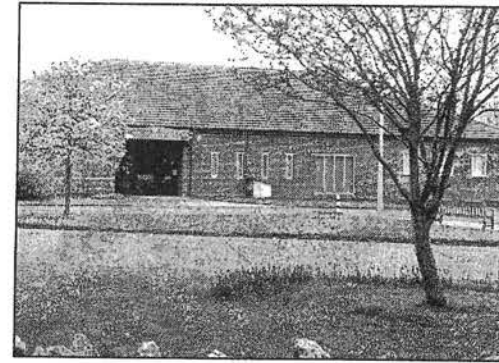
Nationally many of those were promoted by Alan Bloom of Bressingham, while locally they were available from Merton nurseries, where Herbert Lewis planted his own collection. They still thrive, but suffer from congestion since even 'slow growing' dwarf varieties eventually grow!

By now the planting had become even more 'international' and our local specimens include Monkey Puzzle (*araucaria*) from Chile, Gum (*Eucalyptus*) from Tasmania, Cordyline Palm from New Zealand, Chusan Palm from China, Acers and cherries from Japan.

Some of the northern hemisphere 'exotics' actually once grew here before being wiped out by a series of ice ages and are therefore quite at home in our current 'Interglacial' climate.

Holy Trinity Church Garden Trail ↗

Sunday 12th July

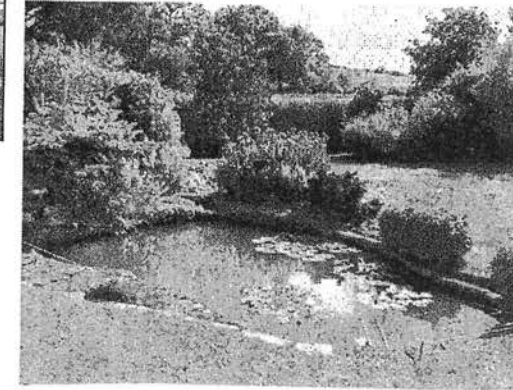


Bicton Village

News



August 2009
No 517



Up the Garden Path



David Pannett's history of Bicton part 28

David Pannett's history of Bicton part 28

Up the Garden Path

The different native trees and shrubs in our local countryside provide clues to the history of the landscape (July 09). Likewise, those in the village gardens reveal something of our garden history. In addition, gardens now contain many 'exotics' introduced from other 'temperate' parts of the world at different times.



Giant Sequoia
popular with Victorians

During the nineteenth century botanical explorers were bringing back a selection of seeds and specimens from North America, China and Japan. The owners of large parks and gardens eagerly incorporated them into their existing native planting schemes. A very popular tree was the giant Sequoia from California, which earned the popular name Wellingtonia as a tribute to the 'Iron Duke'. After first arriving in 1853 they gradually appeared in many parts of the country including locally at Preston Montford and in Bicton's new churchyard. Our landowners cherished their specimens while the Americans were busy chopping theirs down. As a result, a later visitor from California once remarked "Gee, you have better ones than we have!"

The Leighton estate near Welshpool was particularly enthusiastic in acquiring North American trees, perhaps to upstage the neighbours at Powys Castle.

As a result, between 1880 and 1911 a Nootka Cypress from British Columbia was able to exchange pollen with a Monterey Cypress from California. This produced a hybrid named the Leyland Cypress, which, like 'a mule', was vigorous but sterile, but being a plant it could be

propagated by cuttings.

Amongst other introductions from this region was the Lawson Cypress, now seen in Bicton old churchyard.... more about these later.

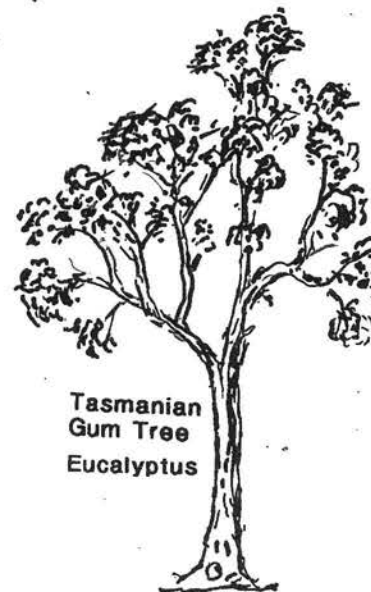
While all this was going on, the Scots Pine was also being reintroduced to lowland Britain, as can be seen at Udlington for example.

Meanwhile, cottage gardens retained the traditional mixed hedges similar to those in the surrounding farmland, but added useful plants such as damson and plum. As modern cottages and 'suburban' type houses were developed from the 1920s onwards, hedges of privet became almost universal. It is a native evergreen tolerant of clipping. Garden shrubs within were often only roses and lilac. By the 1960s, however, new ideas



Lawson Cypress

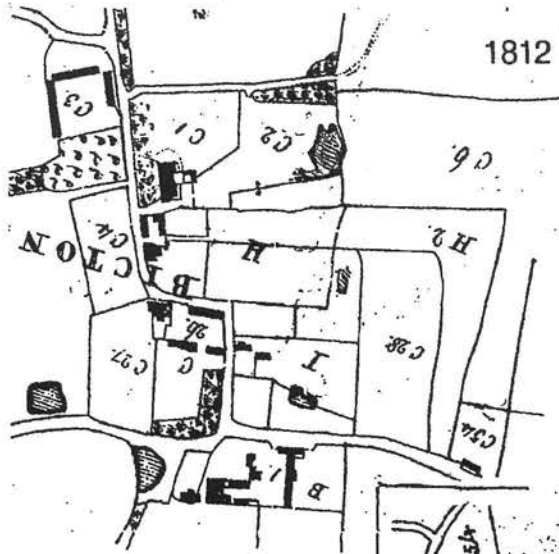
and materials reached the village. Now developers wanted 'open plan' fronts devoid of hedges, while nurseries were offering a wide range of alternatives to privet for the other boundaries: Beech, box, laurel and that Leyland Cypress mass produced by cuttings.



Tasmanian Gum Tree
Eucalyptus

In the century before, Charles Darwin had developed his ideas of 'natural selection' by noting all the 'unnatural selection' going on all around in the breeding of food crops, farm animals and ornamental pigeons. Today, gardens are packed full of 'cultivars',

September 2009
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'OLD' BICTON
in the 19th century



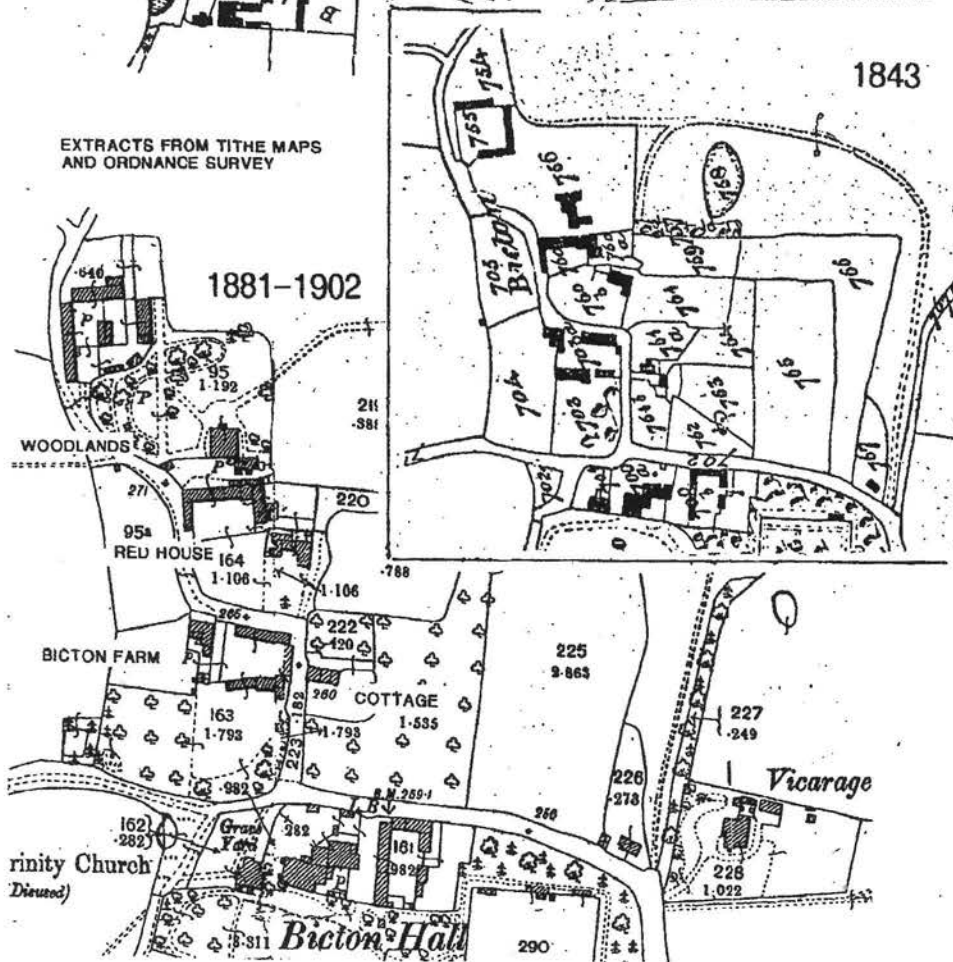
Bickton

Village

offprint

News

Up the old village street



David Pannett's History of Bickton part 29

Up the old village street

Bicton Village has two distinct parts: the original farming settlement and the newer cottage and 'suburban estate' community. Many inhabitants of the latter rarely venture into the former and in the late 19th century even two census enumerators failed to reach it! Now, the population of this end has been expanding, thanks to bungalows infilling between the old farms and 'barn conversions' within them.

The story of this area reflects both the influence of particular individuals owning it and the changing times through which they lived and worked, especially during the 'Agricultural Revolution'. This was a period of steady improvement in land management and production, during the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Here in Bicton the old 'open fields' were enclosed by a series of exchanges between landowners, leading to the amalgamation of farm units until there were only three, plus the 'Hall', one for each estate. No single big estate dominated the village (as at Montford) and instead a succession of smaller landowners became involved through inheritance, marriage, purchase and even by foreclosing mortgages. They also bought, sold and exchanged plots of land between themselves to simplify boundaries, enlarge holdings or raise ready cash. Most were absentee landlords just letting their farms, but some were resident and probably had the greatest impact on the landscape.

In general, improvements included brickwork to replace old timber frame and mud, so that the local boulder clay proved very useful. The weathered surface layers provided the preferred material, so such brickmaking left no deepholes, but field names, such as the one near Bickley Coppice, provide a clue. These local bricks often included glacial pebbles by accident, – take a closer look.

The end of the 18th century and the first part of the next were particularly prosperous because of the Napoleonic Wars, so that landowners were able to invest more in their property, both for production and more genteel comfort for themselves. Developments of this kind took place in Bicton and are shown up by the contemporary maps and surveys. They survive to this day, thanks to the subsequent fall in prosperity, first after the wars (Waterloo!) and then later when British agriculture faced overseas competition. Farming techniques, nevertheless continued to improve, so that investment would have concentrated on

functional buildings and machines.

'Bicton Farm' was always a tenanted holding throughout this period and has therefore retained its original early 18th-century appearance, while the neighbours were altered, by new 'owner occupiers'.

'Red House' once stood facing the street, next to its yard, in the same way as 'Bicton Farm', but was totally rebuilt on a new site facing the garden. Deeds suggest it was the work of John Gittins of Ensdon House, who chose to live here after buying the farm soon after 1800. He moved out after 1830 and let the farm to Nathaniel Hughes. By 1845 the property, now let to Richard Russ, was in the hands of Richard Gittings of Shrawardine. There is an interesting family story here: the Gittins family were already established tenants of the Montford estate (Clive) and perhaps one sought to invest in freehold property during those boom years.'

'The Woodlands' presents a similar story, but on a slightly grander scale, in which the original farmhouse was developed into a small 'gentleman's residence', facing parkland and including a new pleasure garden. A separate carriage drive by-passed the village street, where the concentration of farming activities no doubt kept it rather mucky. The creation of the garden, with its curving wall provided both privacy and shelter from west winds, involved the diversion of the road.

John Morris, who bought the property in 1806 for £6147.00 may have started the changes, since he also owned Bicton Farm, across the road. However, it is more likely that all this was the work of John Lloyd, a 'gentleman' farmer who bought Woodlands soon after 1830, following the death of Thomas Morris (perhaps John's son.)

The house has three storeys, giving space for both family and domestic staff. For instance, in 1851, when John Lloyd was by then a widower aged 75, the household included four domestic servants and one widowed labourer.

The Bicton farm ownership had meanwhile passed to Dr. William Crawford of Bicton House, a similar three-storey building in its parkland.

In between these farms stood 'Bicton Cottage', were at this time, Mrs Christianna Jellico ran a small boarding-school with her daughter Lucy. The cottage has gone, but it's coachhouse cum stable block remains as a residence. Those pupils must have been packed in very tightly!

Meanwhile Richard Jenkins improved his home at the Hall.

Each of the farms continued with its individual story, but still in a framework laid down during this important period in our history. They remain good reminders of those times

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No 519

HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Part 30

Bicton Village News

Holy Trinity Church, Bicton

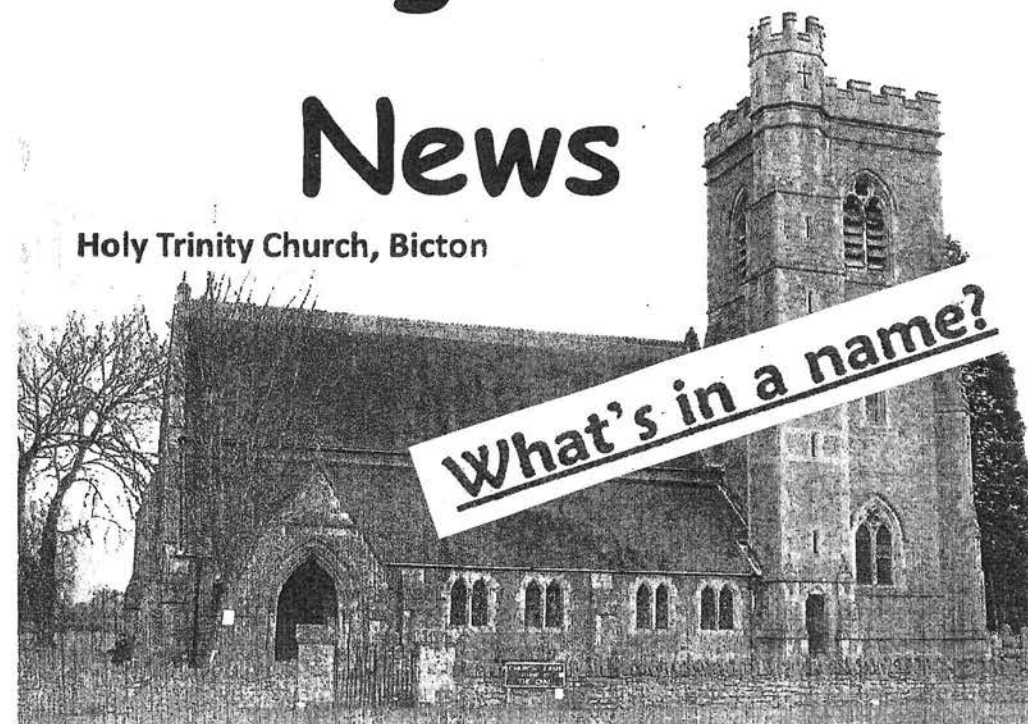
What's in a name?



*Map showing the main kingdoms and provinces
of England and Wales in c.600*



email bicton.news@tiscali.co.uk
(Goes to Paul Evans)
website www.bictonvillage.co.uk
(Managed by Richard Brett)



David Pannett's History of Bicton part 30 What's in a name?

The reorganisation of our local government this year has brought Bicton more directly under the control of the Shropshire (County) Council. Before it had also come under Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council, whose name reflected an earlier amalgamation of Shrewsbury Borough with the surrounding Atcham Rural District, which had included Bicton (see 'A.R.D.C.' rural cottages in the crescent Montford Bridge). Historically, Bicton was for centuries closely linked to the Borough as part of the Liberties of Shrewsbury, by virtue of being an outlying township of the Parish of St. Chad. Later it became a separate parish with a church dedicated to the Holy Trinity. Throughout, it has been part of the diocese of Lichfield, yet, close by to the south, neighbouring parishes belong to the diocese of Hereford. Today, matters of law and order involve the West Mercia constabulary, rather than county or borough police forces as in the past.

Such a medley of past and present forms of authority! How are they all related?

The term 'Mercia' takes us back to the eighth century when Anglo Saxon 'warlords' were organising a series of small kingdoms during the unsettled times after the breakdown of Roman rule. 'Mercia' was the name of one occupying most of the Midlands, which was then a border zone between the partially celtic and christian areas to northwest and the southern Saxon Kingdoms being converted by Augustine from Rome. In this area, Mercian Kings such as Penda held on to their old religion much longer. His son did, however, convert, making the whole country nominally christian. (Nevertheless old festivals linked to the agricultural year and the winter solstice carried on with the Christian message, while we are still reminded of the old gods each Woden's day and Thor's day.)

However, such national unity revealed differences between Celtic and Roman faith and ritual, which had to be resolved at the Synod of Whitby in 664. The Roman view prevailed and the other side sacrificed their independence in exchange for membership of a wider 'European Community'.

Nevertheless, the Celtic contribution continued as Chad came down from the north in 669 to organise the church in Mercia and create a diocese within its borders. Meanwhile, Merewalh, another son of Penda, had become King of the 'Magonsæte', the people of Hereford, whose territory also became a diocese. Both kingdoms have gone, but the boundary between each diocese still runs right across our local area, showing how this dynasty must have carved up this eastern half of Powys between themselves.

The 'Celtic' tradition of favouring 'home grown' saints rather than 'Roman imports' continued so that Chad was declared one after his death and

his name used in the dedication of churches.

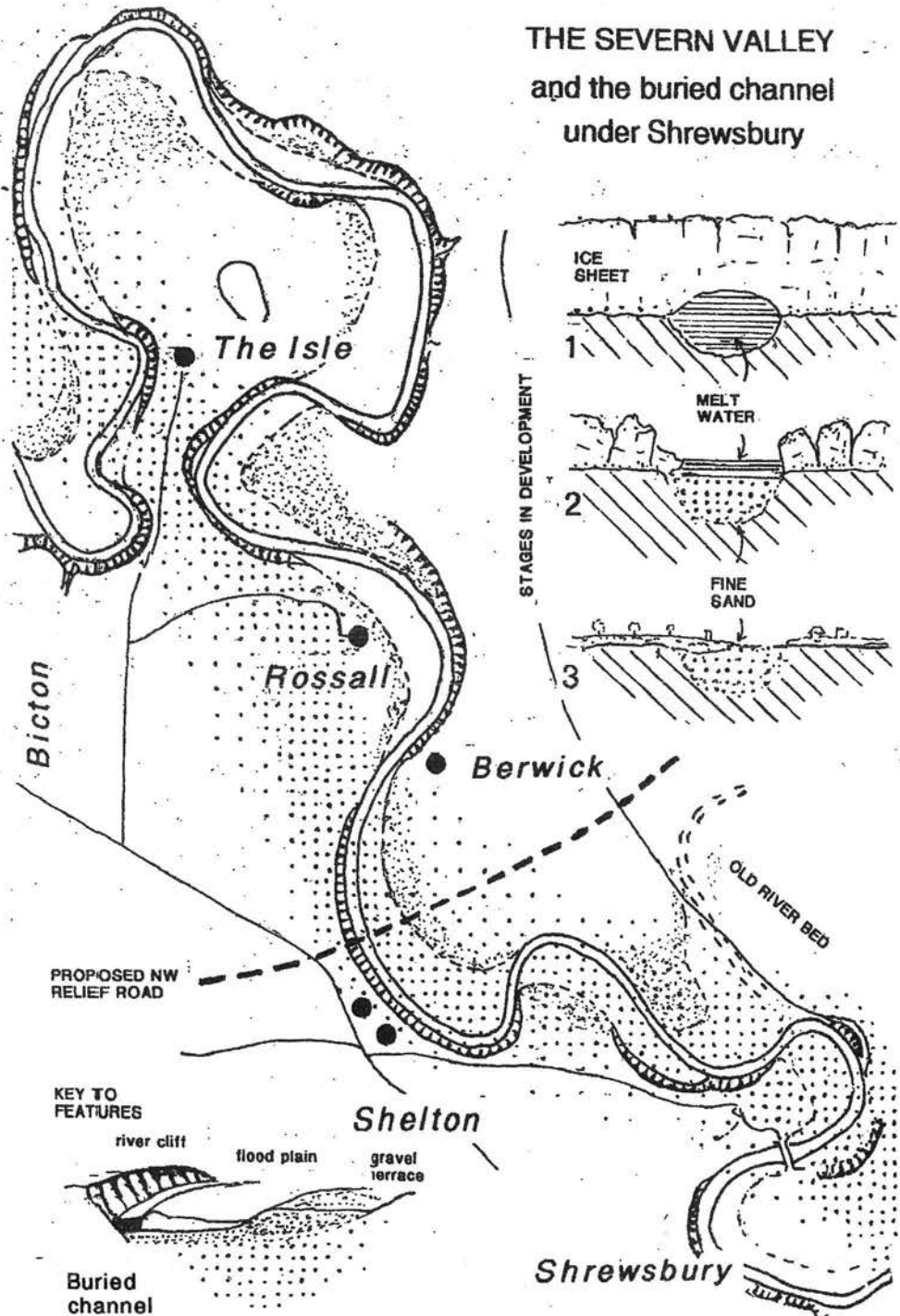
In the following century, Mercia became famous for King Offa, the builder of dykes, but then in the century after, the Danish invasions destroyed the kingdom. To add insult to injury, when Alfred the Great of Wessex reclaimed the territory in the tenth century, he imposed a totally new system of 'Shires' and central 'Shire towns', thus wiping the old Kingdom off the map and almost out of the history books. This was local government reorganisation on a grand scale, which formed the basis of what we still have today, including Shrewsbury and Shropshire.

By this time, St Chad's church was already an important local religious centre, but its extensive parish had to be broken up in order to give parts to the newer town churches. In later centuries, this whole group of parishes became known as the 'Liberties of Shrewsbury', within which the developing borough authorities had some secular jurisdiction. When Bicton and adjacent townships of St Chad's became a separate parish in 1853, its upgraded chapel needed a new dedication.

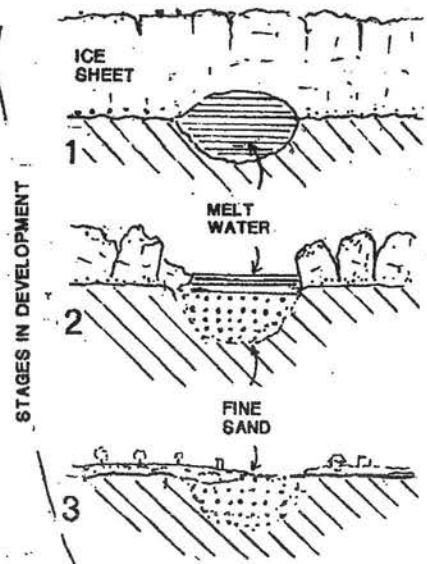
The concept of a tripartite deity, "Father, Son and Holy Spirit," had been well debated by the early bishops around the time of the Nicaean Council in 325. They noted that the Bible was not very clear on the subject, so that different interpretations were possible, but then, in 381, a new emperor Theodosius, who had little patience for learned debate, chose one version and declared others heresy. This was one more stage in the 'Romanisation' of christianity by which 'authority' was to have a high priority for the next thousand years.

The Reformation was a revolt against such authority as Protestants chose to interpret Scriptures for themselves. For instance, 'Unitarians' were so called because they rejected the concept of the Holy Trinity and more besides (Darwin's mother was a member of the Shrewsbury congregation and Charles was first educated by its minister). By the nineteenth century, 'non conformist' churches, rejecting the Church of England, were very popular and as a result remaining 'Anglicans' felt the need to reassert its ancient traditions. As new churches were built to cater for changing patterns of population, they were given both mediaeval architectural styles and dedication emphasising those old traditions.

Also in the nineteenth century, many political developments were taking place to produce the local government system we know today – complex story for some other time. More recently, the government has been accused of imposing regional government to please the E.U. Could the ghost of Mercia be coming back to haunt us – first the police and now the Mercian Regiment at Copthorne Barracks?



THE SEVERN VALLEY
and the buried channel
under Shrewsbury



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**HISTORY
of BICTON**
by David Pannett

Bickton Village News

Controlling the River



David Pannett's History of Bicton part 31

Controlling the River

Part 11 of this series (Jan 08) discussed the river Severn around Bicton following wild ideas about flood prevention appearing in the press, which included the flood control barrage on the proposed N.W. relief road. Alarming such an idea has since been taken up by Environment Agency and therefore yet further comment is now needed.

That original essay explained how the local Severn valley had developed during the closing stages of the last Ice Age. A meltwater river, seasonally large and heavily charged with gravel, carved the winding valley through thick glacial deposits. Then, it shrank to its present size in our post-glacial climate, filling unwanted channel with silt to form a floodplain and leaving its old gravel deposits 'high and dry' as terraces on the inside of those bends. Boreholes for the new A5 clearly revealed the relationship between these features at Montford Bridge. Both here and elsewhere on the Shropshire Plain, such boreholes were also revealing a hidden network of buried sand-filled channels, one of which would give Relief Road engineers quite enough trouble without getting mixed up with a flood barrage.

Pressure for some action comes from a vocal anti-flood lobby in Shrewsbury. Once their cry was 'dredge the river', no doubt upon being alarmed by silt deposits visible at the English Bridge (ie on the inside of a bend where rivers normally do such things!) For decades authorities have been keen to clear rivers of perceived obstructions to help free passage of floodwater. On the Tern, for instance, nineteenth century botanists recorded a range of plants which are no longer found there since the river has been changed from a chain of mill ponds to a deep drain. Locally, the Perry has received similar treatment in order to lower the outlet of Baggy Moor. Here in Bicton, the construction of the new A5 prompted clearance along the brook rather than excavation of ponds to catch sudden run off, thus continuing the story of land drainage in the old heath area. (Sept 07).

The Clywedog dam was popularly believed to cure floods, but it was designed to be kept full in normal years in order to 'top up' the flow in drought years. Its neighbouring agricultural valleys, meanwhile, have the usual field drains and cleared watercourses designed to rid the area of water as quickly as possible. This is fine for this farmland, but a bit rough for areas downstream.

With this problem in mind, the idea of impounding floodwater upstream has been given more thought and some embanked floodplains above Melverley are already being allowed to flood again. In this context a flood barrage looks attractive.

In order to be effective, it would have to hold back a substantial volume of water, not only filling the floodplain but also spilling on to the terraces where crops grow and people live. Thanks to the river's low gradient (just over 1 foot per mile) the effect of this would reach upstream towards Montford Bridge. The structure would need to be large and sit on good natural foundations, but, as luck would have it, the Ice Age deposits have not provided one.

Meltwater trapped under thick ice sheets can carve channels in the underlying bedrock, even rising and falling thanks to the hydrostatic pressure inside the confined tunnel. As ice thinned, they became ice-walled open channels which the meltwater filled in with fine sand to achieve a normal gradient. When both ice and meltwater finally disappeared, this sand filling often remained hidden until discovered by engineers seeking water supplies or good foundations.

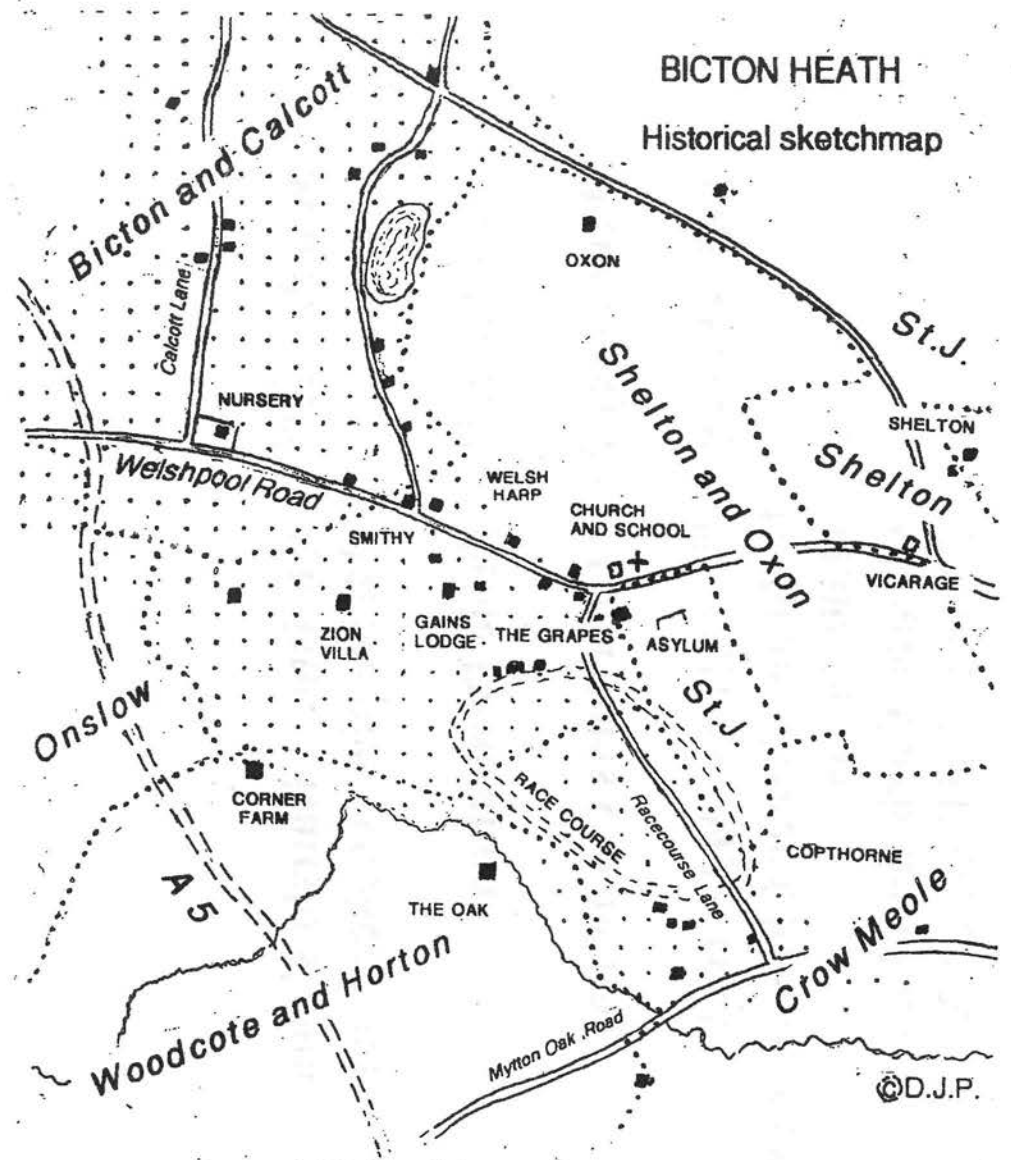
Our local example passes under Walford, The Isle and Rossall and then under the present river by Shelton, where it curves around towards Shrewsbury. Perhaps for this reason its cross-section here is asymmetrical, gentle to the north and steep to the south not unlike a normal river. Its sandy filling, which extends to about 25 metres below the river, is well exposed in the cliffs below Shelton. At Shrewsbury it becomes deeper and narrower between The Quarry and Castlefields, descending to sea level, 50 metres below the river level.

Here, the Darwin Centre needed foundation piles 30 metres long! Significantly, beyond here, new bridges over the Reabrook on the inner relief road are tubes set in earth embankments avoiding piles altogether.

The fine sand is also an 'aquifer' allowing the slow passage of water, and this property has been exploited for abstraction at Shelton Waterworks.

Meanwhile, the Environment Agency has been busy with successful flood protection walls in parts of Shrewsbury, thereby undermining the need for works upstream. If one is really needed, how about a site just below Shrawardine, where the narrow valley exposes a solid rock base? A barrage here could hold back a large volume in the old glacial lake basin upstream, but it would also upset a lot of people in Pentre and Melverley!

BICTON HEATH
Historical sketchmap



Probable extent
of heathland in
the Middle Ages

Parish and township
boundaries pre 1850
(St. Chad & St. Julian)

pre 1850
settlement

offprint from

December 2009
No 521

History of Bicton pt. 32

Bicton Village News



Bus ride to Bicton Heath

O.S. 6 inch map
revised 1926

David Pannett's history of Bicton part 32

Bus ride to Bicton Heath

Over the years many local inhabitants may have found outsiders, visitors and delivery firms getting confused between 'Bicton' and 'Bicton Heath'. Now, the number 70 bus obliges many to pass through Bicton Heath and become familiar with its landscape, including the Grapes, Oxon Church, Coop Store, Shelton Hospital etc. In view of this, a brief explanation of the area is appropriate.

In the Middle Ages open heathland stretched along the borders of the ancient hamlets occupying this area. Most were townships within the parish of St Chad, although parts of Shelton also belonged to St Julian's, and each also had a share of that open land, although the general term 'Bicton Heath' was applied to most of it. Local communities would have grazed their animals here and in the 13th century the monks of Buildwas Abbey also acquired rights as an extension of their 'Granges' at Bicton and Crow Meole (Monk Meole).

In later centuries, after the reformation, each township enclosed its portion of the heath in an individual way, until, by the early 19th century no open land remained. Nevertheless some distinctive landscape features had been created.

In Onslow, a single estate was able to reorganise plantations and new hedges in its own way. By contrast, in the neighbouring townships of Bicton and Calcott and also Shelton encroachments by cottages and smallholdings had been taking place since the 17th century. The remaining open land was finally enclosed by agreement between the landowners in 1768 and 1804 respectively. Some local access roads, including Calcott Lane and Racecourse Lane were also laid out.

The Shelton part of the heath, together with its extension into Crow Meole (probably enclosed by the Mytton family) had also been under the nominal control of the Borough of Shrewsbury. For this reason, the corporation had been able to lay out a racecourse here in the early 18th-century. After enclosure it crossed Mytton land, but when this had to be sold in 1824 to pay off 'Mad Jack's' debts, the new owners were less cooperative. Fortunately, in 1831, the Earl of Tankerville offered an alternative site along Monkmoor Road.

Today, Mytton Oak Road and Racecourse Lane still remind us of this story.

Meanwhile, the pattern of smallholdings and encroachments beside the Welshpool Road encouraged the development of various services, not unlike those at Montford Bridge. By the mid 19th century there were two inns, two blacksmiths, one of which was also a small foundry, a selection of tradesmen and up to two shopkeepers. A Methodist chapel was also a typical feature of such a community.

The middle of the century also saw the greatest changes with the founding of the county asylum in 1845 on an adjacent plot in St Julian's parish. Then in 1853 the Shrewsbury parishes were reorganised, creating not only Bicton Parish, but also a new one covering Oxon and Shelton, sweeping away some irregular boundaries. A new church and school were built, which like Bicton, used red sandstone, thought appropriate to its mock mediaeval architecture. The vicarage was built well away near Shelton and is now in the 'Oxon Priory'.

This provided a new centre for the community. Otherwise, the Grapes alone had been providing this since the 18th century. In 1896 it was recorded as being the property of the Lichfield Brewery Company and consisted of a parlour, bar, sitting room, clubroom and six bedrooms. By contrast, the Welsh Harp, owned by the local Oxon estate had only minimum facilities.

Around, the smallholdings lent themselves to milk production and retail sales. Otherwise, their land allowed infilling by more cottages, especially along the main road. This trend continued through the 20th century producing a great mixture of building styles and ages.

Increased traffic along the road, in the age of the motor car brought more trade to the area. As a result the Welsh Harp was remodelled in the 1920s while the Grapes was totally rebuilt in 1936. Eventually, in the 1980s, the Welsh Harp was also totally rebuilt, just in time to lose trade when the new A5 bypass was built. Its structure then contributed to the present supermarket.

By this time continued suburban growth included whole estates rather than odd infilling, so that the area has become fused with the rest of suburban Shrewsbury. Nevertheless, many aspects of its heathland legacy can still be seen in the landscape. Just look around as you pass through on the bus!