

William, 22 to carry on the business, still helped by Jane. Now post office services were added, with letters arriving from Shrewsbury early, each morning and dispatched there each evening. Being 'open all hours' must have restricted social life, but fortunately the young man was able to court a young 'girl next door'. Elizabeth Lewis had recently come with her parents to the farm cottages by the Wingfield Arms, after their previous employment in Montford, and may therefore have already known William for some time. They married when she was barely 18.

About this time James Whitehorne died, leaving wife Elizabeth and son John to carry on until John's own untimely death in 1905. John Randles had also lost his wife, but continued to work well into his old age, perhaps reflecting some more healthy aspect to the work. Falling demand meant the business died with him.

At Yew Tree Villa, post office work expanded and so did the family. Of the six children, John the eldest left home early and later became a postmaster in Oswestry. Daughter Helen married into another grocery business near Chester, following contacts made via new motor traffic down the Holyhead road. Other siblings likewise dispersed leaving the parents to continue running the business until their deaths in the 1920s when yet again a widow had to carry on for a while.

During that time, bit by bit, this local sub post office had gradually taken on services initially restricted to the main town office, such as money orders, savings bank, and even telegraph links by the 1880s. By the 1890s mail came by cart and many letterboxes had appeared in many parts of the parish, some of which are still in use, boldly displaying their VR logo. By the turn of the century, the office also dealt with insurance and the issue of pensions, later including the state scheme. Finally, in the 1920s the telephone system began, requiring the office to be the local exchange. This was to be the first hint of a new technology which would eventually undermine traditional postal work. We see the results today.



Holy Trinity  
Bicton (1885)

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**Jan 2011**  
**No 534**

**Gone but not forgotten**

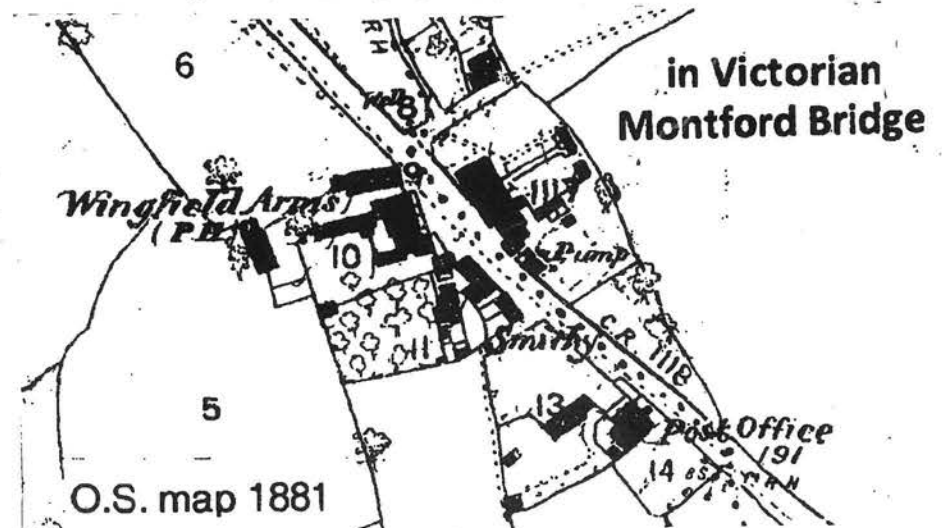
# Bicton Village News

**HISTORY  
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

**part 45**

website [www.bictonvillage.co.uk](http://www.bictonvillage.co.uk)  
(Managed by Richard Brett)



O.S. map 1881

## David Pannett's History of Bicton part 45

### Gone but not forgotten in Victorian Montford Bridge

Bicton churchyard contains the following memorials:

William Thomas March 15, 1924 aged 63

Elizabeth Thomas Feb 24, 1929 aged 64

James Whitehorne born October 26, 1821 died Aug 26, 1885

John Barber son of late James Whitehorne died April 27, 1905 aged 44

Elisabeth widow of late James Whitehorne Jul 23, 1905

John Randles died December 24, 1905 aged 94

Here they lie close together, after a lifetime as close neighbours in Montford Bridge running family businesses in which private and commercial were intertwined. In their day, they must have been known to all around the area, but are now sadly forgotten. So why should we remember them just now?

Today, Christmas cards still often show those romantic Victorian images of snowy roads and cheerful country inns, while the 2010 weather itself has been another reminder. For over 60 years in that Victorian era the Whitehorne family run first of the Nags Head and then the Wingfield Arms.

Christmas cards themselves were a Victorian invention and played their part in the expansion of postal services. The Thomas family lived and worked in Montford bridge for over a century, half of that time running the first local post office.

Between these two enterprises, John Randles had his blacksmith's shop, where he made his own valuable contribution to the Victorian rural community.

With the sad loss of the modern shop and post office in Montford bridge (on the Montford side) it is perhaps the Thomas story which is most topical and worthy of special attention now.

When John Wingfield of Onslow acquired the Preston Montford Estate in 1829, one of his cottage tenants was William Thomas. Later, the Nags Head Inn on the Bicton side of the road, then occupied by George Whitehorne, was added to the estate. The 1841 census then recorded William as a carpenter, aged 50, with wife Elizabeth, 60 and sons John, 25 and William 20 and daughter Mary also 20. Cousin Mary Thomas, age 6 was also with them in a way which was not unusual at a time when extended families provided their own 'social services,' caring for less fortunate members. The family also had a young servant girl, again not unusual then.

The Tithe map of 1849 showed John, occupying the smallholding, later known as Yew Tree Villa, on the recently improved 'Holyhead' road. (Thomas Telford).

The 1851 census listed him as a carpenter, now married to Mary Anne, recorded in 1841 as the daughter of William and Hannah Morris of Dinthill, a 'castrator'. The couple were now helped by cousin Mary as a 'servant' and together they were developing a new retail business.

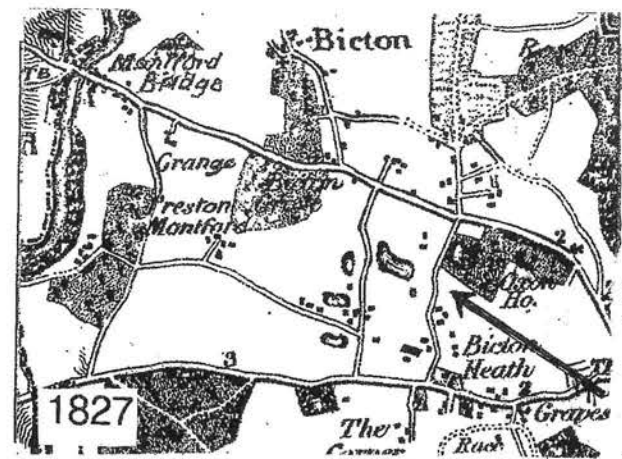
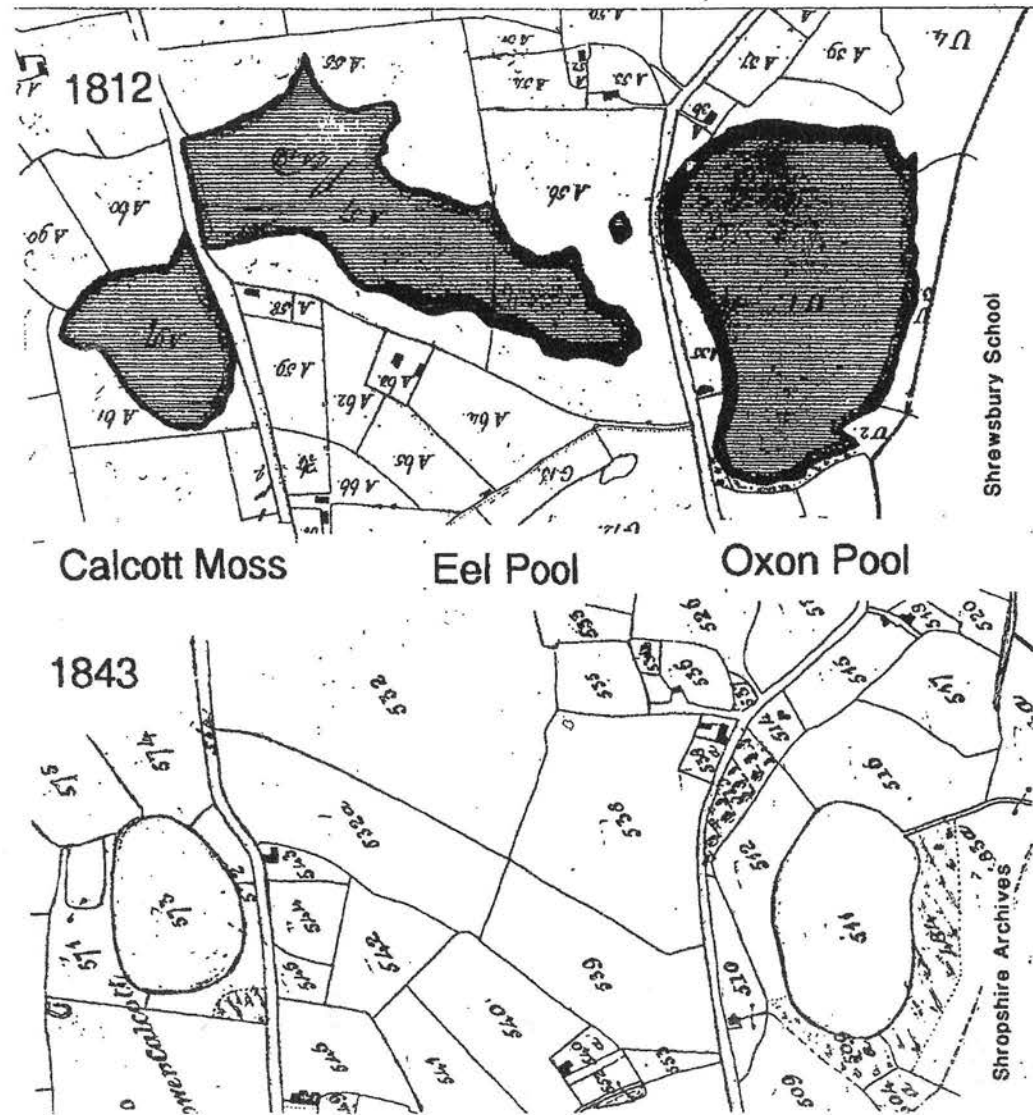
About this time it may have been brother William, also a carpenter, who briefly ran the Nags Head before James Whitehorne took over. Also John Randles and his wife Mary moved into a cottage in Drury Lane, next to Edward Lewis the gardener.

Tragedy struck, however, when John Thomas died, barely 44, leaving Mary to continue running the grocery business, while bringing up her only son William, born 1859. The census showed she was also helped by her brother William, 'a dispenser of medicines' and Jane Brenthen, a cousin, still unmarried at 45.

By the 1870s, John Whitehorne, wife Elisabeth and children John Barber and Mary, had moved across to the Wingfield Arms, replacing William Feltham and closing the Nags Head. Now in the 'railway age' the road was losing passing trade.

In 1881 the Thomas household also changed: Mary died, leaving

Preston Montford Field Centre makes good use of two ponds in its grounds. Even simple pond - dipping can open childrens' eyes to the wonders of nature. Otherwise, fishing the large pools can be a great relaxation from the stresses of everyday. Either way there is something for everyone around our ponds.



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Feb 2011  
No 535

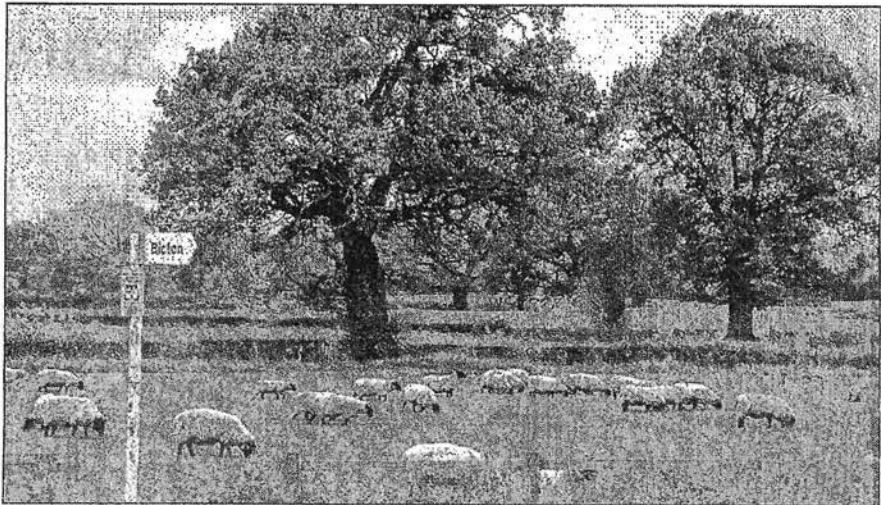
Pools and Ponds  
in our Landscape

# Bicton Village News

**HISTORY  
of BICTON**  
by David Pannett

Part 46

www.bictonvillage.co.uk





## Pools and Ponds in our Landscape

'February fill dyke' was a traditional observation that the accumulation of winter rainfall would fill the ditches, streams and ponds whether that month was actually wet or dry. Certainly the natural hollows and boulder clay soils of Bickton's 'Ice Age Landscape' hold a lot of water just now, including pools in the news: the old village pond near the old church and Oxon Pool down Shepherds Lane.

Around the village each farm once had its own pond for watering stock and keeping ducks. The village pond on the green was similar, catering for passing horse traffic. Significantly, cleaning here revealed a pebble surface on its bed, perhaps useful when wagons were driven into moisten their wooden wheels, as in the case of Constable's 'Haywain'. Elsewhere in the village small lakes were part of the parkland in front of Bickton Hall.

Bickton Heath, was for centuries left as rough pasture thanks to its poor drainage and numerous pools. Many of the shallower probably filled up with peat and had only become pools again when this was dug out in the Middle Ages. Oxon Pool, however was always open water because of the depth of the basin, like one of the Meres around Ellesmere

A survey of the Isle and Udlington estate in the 1580s reported that it was particularly rich in eels and let to a Mr. Mytton. By the 18th century John Mytton of Halston acquired the 'Lordship' of the Manor of Bickton, which gave him some ownership of the open heath. In about 1730 he took advantage of this by raising a dam along Calcott Lane to create his own Eel Pool, which he later retained as an 'allotment' at the 'inclosure' of the heath in 1768. However, his wayward grandson 'mad Jack' Mytton was obliged to sell the Bickton estate in 1824, after which the new owners were less keen on so much water. The eel pool, also known as the 'horse pool' because of its use for drinking at the Calcott Lane end, was soon drained. This then allowed a culvert to be dug under Shepherds Lane to lower the level of Oxon Pool.

The process was probably started by Andrew Spearman and his relations at Oxon and certainly finished by Edward Morris when he bought the estate in 1832 and improved the Hall and its grounds. Recently,

however, the culvert became blocked causing the water level to rise again, drowning the surrounding woodland. In particular, the tall young trees became unstable and subject to wind blow on the wet peat at the margin. Clearly something had to be done!

The County Council had acquired the Oxon estate when it was sold off in 1930. It gave them an opportunity to create more Council small holdings, typical of that period, but in modern times they have been sold off again. The council retained the pool area as a nature reserve and therefore found itself responsible for solving its problems. The culvert was easily repaired but the mess which it had caused posed a harder task. In these circumstances the partnership with Shropshire Anglers offered a happy solution. Much work is in progress, weather permitting, which will make the site more of an asset to the local community, not just fishermen.

All that drainage work in the early 19th century was typical of the period of 'agricultural improvement', which is also seen in the history of the Isle Pool. It was clearly marked an early map, such as that by Robert Baugh, 1808 and Christopher Greenwood, 1827 relied on some plagiarism, but mysteriously disappeared from the more actually surveyed Ordnance Survey maps prepared about the same time. The explanation is that Folliot Sandford of the Isle employed miners in 1793 to dig a tunnel draining the pool to the river Severn (perhaps the same gang also dug the tunnel across the neck of the Isle loop to drive a textile mill about the same time). As a relatively shallow basin, it could be easily turned into just another field, listed as the 'Old Pool' in a 1830 survey. However, it did not stay dry for much longer as it reappeared on later maps, although reduced in size. Clearly Humphrey Sandford (VIII) had different ideas on landscape amenities when he inherited the estate and took up residence in 1841.

Pools great and small make a valuable contribution to the 'bio-diversity' of the countryside at a time when more intensive farming is simplifying it. They remain a focus of wildlife activity by supporting both water life and more in the local area. Toads and many flying insects, for example, depend upon water for breeding.

Through all this, ponds can be a useful educational resource demonstrating principles of 'ecology', i.e. how plants and animals live in a community occupying different parts of the habitat, eating and being eaten.

The Lewis daughters generally found work and husbands in other towns thus leaving the area. Two of William's sons tried their luck in America, Walter staying in Chicago, while Frederic returned to Bickton with ill health after working in compressed air on the foundations of a New York Bridge.

Such spirit of adventure, escaping limited local opportunity, was often a factor encouraging young men to join up in World War One. This war did, however, start those social changes which were to bring about our present state in the third stage of the population model.

Female emancipation was opening more career opportunities for them, replacing or delaying motherhood. There was better education and advice from Marie Stopes for them now, all resulting in smaller families. The later descendants of Edward and William Lewis reflected this too, while the Duke and Duchess of York set a new royal example.

However, the total population was by now much larger causing towns to expand their suburbs, while even Bickton acquired its first suburban houses in the twenties.

The modern population 'pyramid' diagram has now changed its shape to more like a 'column' and politicians must grapple with the implications. However, at the same time many have been promoting fears of man-made global warming, while shrinking from making the obvious connection with the sheer numbers of mankind. Perhaps they fear upsetting traditional cultural and religious attitudes which are generating this real global problem.



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Mar 2011  
No 536

# Bickton Village News

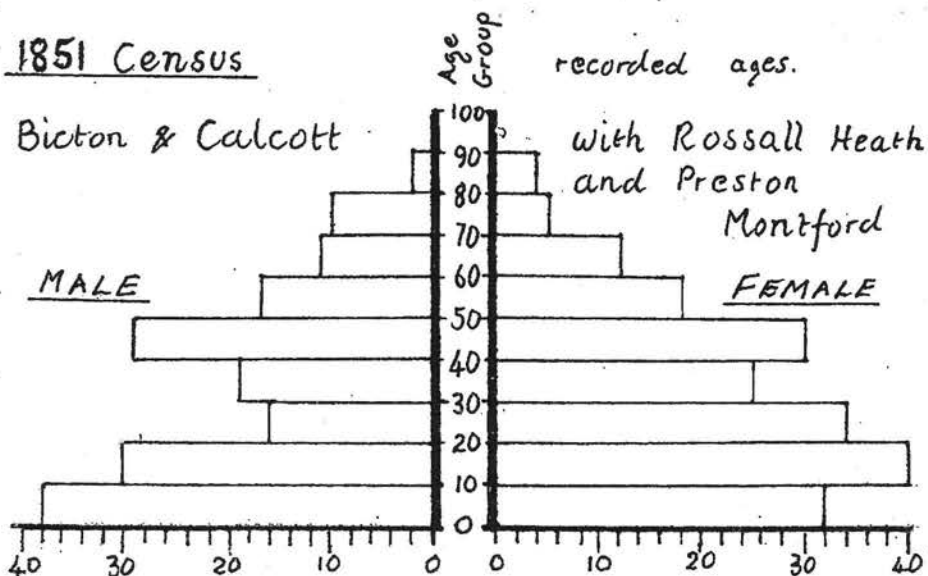
## HISTORY of BICKTON

by David Pannett

Part 47

www.bicktonvillage.co.uk

### 1851 Census



Edward Lloyd	Ridger	Man	53	1
Edward Lewis	Head	Man	72	
Elizabeth / Do	Wife			64
William Lewis	Son		26	
Charles Lewis			8	
John Road	Head	Man	50	
Mary	Wife	Man		48
Richard James	Stepson	Man	20	
Samuel Davies	Boarder	Man	32	

Population then and now

## David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 47

### Population then and now

Both locally and nationally, current political debates include care for the elderly, pensions, provision of schools and future demands on housing. Within the parish we have a primary school which also serves a wide area where other schools have closed, while, in recent years, two care homes have been built. The background to all this is our changing population structure.

'Demographers', those who study human populations, often refer to their 'population transition model', which includes three stages recognisable in different parts of the world.

In stage one, seen in the poorer underdeveloped countries, a high birth rate was particularly balanced by a high death rate and short life expectancy. This still allowed a slow increase in total population, but as recognised by the Rev. Malthus in the early 19th century, such 'natural increase' would be periodically checked by famines, disease and warfare. Indeed the very growth of population could trigger such catastrophes through environmental degradation and competition for resources. Darwin appreciated this as a model for his 'natural selection' in animal populations.

In stage two, now associated with 'developing countries' death rates fall, partly through better medical care and 'famine relief', while a high birth rate continues leading to a 'population explosion.' This generates economic and political problems of its own which are constantly in the news.

In stage three, illustrated by advanced 'Western' countries including Japan, the birth rate has declined, 'natural increase' is slow or static, while the proportion of older people therefore increases, helped also by greater survival rates.

So much for textbook generalisations, what aspects of it can be seen in our own local history?

Mediaeval Britain and Shropshire certainly had all those characteristics of an underdeveloped 'Third World' country: essentially rural, with subsistence agriculture, foreign trade based on exporting 'primary products (wool) and a political elite wasting national wealth on their own pet wars. As population expanded in favourable years, it became vulnerable to disasters caused by disease and climatically induced famines, especially the 'Black Death' and 'Little Ice Age' starting in the 14th century.

Our 16th century Shrewsbury chronicler recorded some instances of these:

1525: ' This year the plague was in the town of Shrewsbury'

1526 This year was such scarcity of all things in England by reason of unseasonable weather..... that many died for the deficit of bread.'

1531 This year was there a plague again in this town of Shrewsbury'

Poor hygiene and medical ignorance also played a part affecting even those wealthy enough to be well fed. Locally, Humphrey Sandford, 1580 - 1654, and his wife had at least seven children, but his son Richard lost his wife had 29, while grandson Richard lost all three children before dying himself age 31 in 1676. Queen Ann was faring no better, all of which are affected dynastic history.

During the 18th century things began to improve slowly, especially with the absence of plagues. Nevertheless, childhood remained a vulnerable period. For example, in the first three months of the following century, St Chad's registers, which then included Bicton and Rossall as well as part of the town, recorded 65 deaths of which 40 were children. The 15 adults ranged in age from 14 to 80 obviously dying 'in harness' rather than in retirement.

During the rest of the century the country became more wealthy with industry and improved agriculture and could import food to banish the threat of famine. (In this way the Irish potato famine of the 1840s could have been alleviated, had there been political will - a fact which left lasting resentment amongst survivors).

Improved understanding of health is reflected by the rebuilding of the Royal Salop Infirmary in 1830 and then promotion of better water supply and standards of housing following damning public health reports. In rural areas estates began building better workers cottages, although still basic by modern standards. In this way the nation was entering stage 2 Of the population model, with Albert and Victoria setting an example.

Census records show large families, especially amongst low paid agricultural workers, who could least afford or accommodate them. On the other hand 'many hands make light work', while the large families could better provide their own 'social security'. The large number of children in proportion to the elderly shows up clearly in a 'population pyramid' diagram for 1851.

Problems of having such families in small cottages were usually eased by sending the eldest children away to work, especially girls who could go into domestic service. At the same time others were coming into the parish to work in the large farms and 'big houses,' producing a marked female bias in the population diagram.

For this reason actual data on family sizes must come from individual family histories. Thus we know that Edward and Elizabeth Lewis of Montford Bridge raised seven children from 1833, including son William, who went on to raise eight of his own in Old School House Bicton. His son Ernest went on to produce six at Miinsbridge.



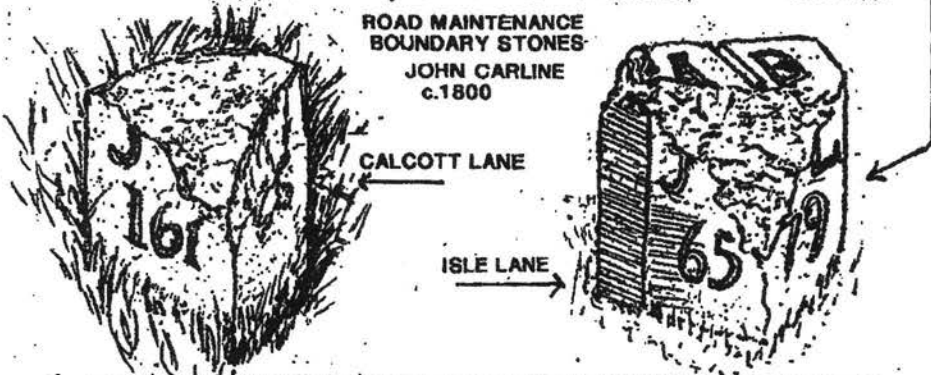
# 1797 ROAD AGREEMENT

The Bickton Heath Roads divided into such portions as are to be kept in repair by the under mentioned Persons their successors and Representatives respectively, being first put in complete repair.

John Jones  
Richard Brumthorpe The North End of the Road leading from the Westway Road to Roffhall Heath marked in the Map by the Letter (A). 65 Yds

Edw. Lea Esq  
The Representatives of the late Sir Roger D'Eulieu  
Part of the last mentioned Road adjoining at the North End to the portion allotted to Richard Brumthorpe & at the South End by a portion to be allotted to same 70 Yards  
(B)

Wm. Smith Esq  
The remainder of the Road ending at the corner of the



SHREWSBURY SCHOOL LIB.

Received of Joseph Cardale Esq. the sum of Four pounds Ten shillings for said Boundary Stones laid labor to the said, and letters of payment. To Bickton

4 10/- each laid 1804 18.0

For Cardale & Co. J. John Cardale

4-10-0

When land between the Mount and Shelton was being developed for housing, a set of stones marking the complex boundary between the parishes of St Chad and St Julian was simply swept away. Fortunately, one was rescued by the Lewis brothers and now stands in the garden at Merton. Perhaps our seven missing road boundary stones may have been 'recycled' in a similar way - do keep your eyes open.



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www.bicktonvillage.co.uk

## Bickton Village News

HISTORY  
of BICKTON

by David Pannett

Part 48

Roadside stones and their stories

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

Example near Four Crosses, Bickton.



## David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 48

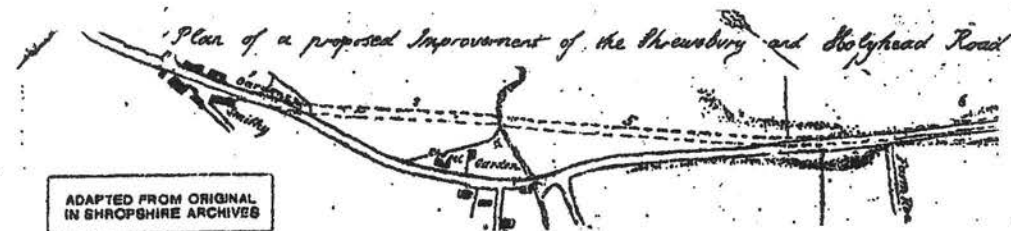
### Roadside stones and their stories

In winter and early spring our bare hedges can sometimes reveal some special stones, normally hidden by summer growth. Each have their own story to tell about the development of our landscape and road system.

Most obvious are the mile stones along Telford's Holyhead Road, locally represented by two examples, near the Four Crosses and on Grange bank. This improved road was a government sponsored project in the 1830s to speed up the link between London and Dublin. As a result, Thomas Telford was able to design work far superior to any found on the average local Turnpike Road of this period. His milestones between Shrewsbury and Holyhead are a reflection of this, consisting of a uniform pattern of iron plates mounted on hard limestone blocks from Anglesey. The bold easily read figures could be changed simply for each individual casting.

The iron work was by William Hazeldine, ironmaster of Shrewsbury, probably at his works in Coleham, where Coleham Hardware still occupies a surviving part. It could be argued that the artwork as the head of Mardol should really be a memorial to this teamwork of Telford the mason and Hazeldine the ironmaster on so many road and bridge projects!

One by-product of improving Grange Bank was the isolation of Drury Lane, where the old road had once acted as the local parish boundary (St Alkmond - St Chad). The actual line ran down the centre, but now the Preston Montford Estate enclosed its half with gardens, leaving only a narrow lane on the Bicton side. At the same time, at least one boundary stone was inserted where it still stands hidden.



Another set of stones relate to the story of the heath enclosed in 1768. The creation of this new landscape not only involved field hedges but also drainage ditches and public roads, including Calcott and Shepherds Lanes. At first the new road were financed by a levy on each of the eight landowners involved, raising the total of £50. However, almost 30 years later, when perhaps more maintenance proved necessary, a new type of agreement was worked out whereby each landowner would be responsible for a particular length. The roads were therefore carefully measured again by another surveyor, William Hitchcock of Alberbury, (father of Americus Hitchcock who later made a fine map of Shrewsbury in 1832). Appropriate lengths were duly allotted and their boundaries marked by stones where these did not coincide with convenient road junctions.

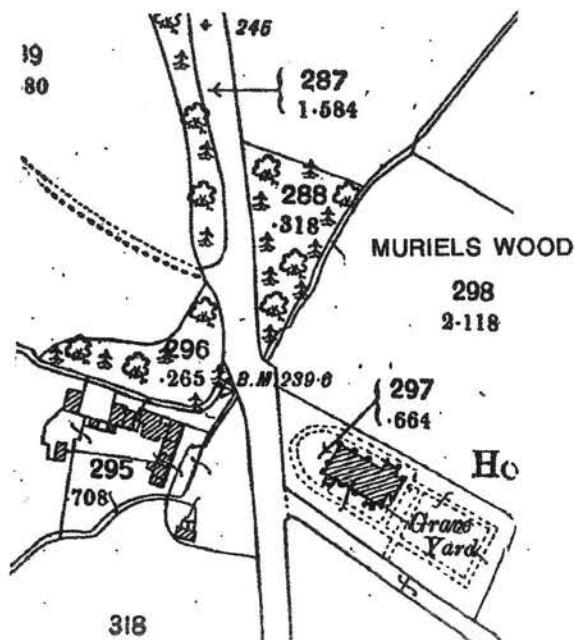
These stones, bearing the initials of the landowners and their allotted lengths in yards each way, were supplied by John Carline, the leading stonemason in Shrewsbury at the cost of 10 shillings each (50 p). John's father, also John, had first come from Lincoln to help build the English Bridge in 1776. John II then stayed on to set up a home and business in Abbey Foregate on land newly available thanks to those bridge works (Wakeman School site). He also took a lease on quarries at Grinshill, from which our stones also came.

He supplied nine, but we only know of two surviving in situ, by the Isle Court in Isle Lane and near the northern end of Calcott Lane. Others have disappeared, mainly through the redevelopment of original hedges around residential development, as along Shepherd's Lane, where possible original sites can only be worked out from the old documents. These same records suggest that this whole process stretched over several years, during which time some landowners changed. The multitude of changing landowners was indeed a characteristic of Bicton Township, in contrast to neighbouring parts each dominated by a single long-standing estate, such as the Clives of Montford, Sandfords of the Isle and Wingfields of Onslow and Preston Montford. For this reason these old boundary stones were something very special to Bicton and may not have been needed elsewhere.





**BICKLEY**



Offprint from  
**May 2011**  
**No 538**

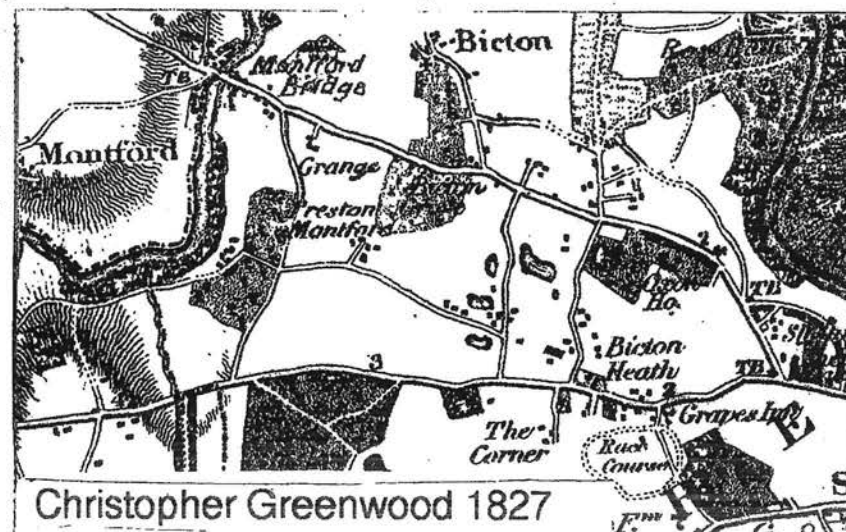
Down in the Woods

# Bicton Village News

# HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

## Part 49



**www.bictonvillage.co.uk**  
(Managed by Richard Brett)

Christopher Greenwood 1827

## David Pannett's History of Bickton Part 49

If you go down to the woods today you won't be at all surprised to see, not teddy bears, but the first real signs of spring growth after a cold winter with the woodland plants striving to get started before the canopy cover shuts out much of the available light. Of course, there will also be some history to notice!

In the distant past our landscape once contained much more forest and woodland, but constant expansion of population gradually reduced it. Some local place names still provide clues to its former extent, especially the element 'ley' as in Pulley, Plealey or 'wood' as in Hanwood and Woodcote. Medieval monasteries exploited them for building materials while local peasants used woodland pasture for their stock, especially pigs which would eat acorns.

While so much was disappearing, some landowners took care to preserve some areas for more sustainable exploitation as 'coppice', i.e. cut in a 20 year rotation to yield useful poles for fencing, tools and light building. The name Bickley itself suggests this coppice has been here for a long time. Right to remove wood was indeed part of the grant to Buildwas Abbey in 1247. A later deed in the seventeenth century suggests it was also treated as a common pasture. As records became clearer, it can be seen that three landowners each had a part of it.

About this time too, such woodlands were often exploited for charcoal in iron making. Bromley's forge, just across the river from Bickley appears to have been set up by Basil Brooke in the early seventeenth century using fuel from Boreatton, power from the Perry and transport on the Severn. There is no evidence that Bickley also contributed charcoal, but it could have done. The enterprise did not survive the Civil War as Brooke backed the losing side!

Such industrial exploitation nationally caused many landowners to worry about maintaining supplies, just when naval shipbuilding was becoming more important. The need for new planting was therefore obvious. Such concern coincided with the appreciation of 'landscape' around their new country houses. Once medieval nobility had used forests and remote wild places for their hunting, but now in more 'cultured' times they were more interested in improving the visual appearance of parkland nearer home. Through the eighteenth century, experts in design such as William Kent and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown 'improved' many landscapes. Locally, Humphrey Repton contributed his ideas to lay out Attingham parkland.

Lesser landowners and gentleman farmers, observing these grand designs, copied them as best they could within the confines of their own small estates. The Wingfields of Onslow had space for a conventional park, but others, including

Hanmer of Bickton House, Jenkins of Bickton Hall, Spearman of Oxon and Wentworth-Fielding of Ross Hall managed smaller versions. Their efforts were shown as a special symbol on the new Ordnance Survey and Greenwood maps by the 1820s.

The common design features included belts of trees hiding the neighbours, while framing a longer vista across a wide 'lawn' of well grazed pasture. Pools could be included if the land allowed, while functional outbuildings, including stables, would be kept out of sight to one side. They might have their own 'tradesmen's' entrance off the village street, while the 'carriage folk' approached the house via a separate 'drive'.

All these typical features are illustrated by the Bickton Hall estate which was improved by Richard Jenkins after his return from India in 1827 and before he spent more time in London as an M.P. One legacy of this is a small plantation opposite his gateway, now known as Muriel's Little Wood, in recognition of the efforts which the late Muriel Morris made to secure this for public use. Records place its origin to the 1830s, between the 1830 St Chads Parish survey and the 1843 Bickton Tithe map, which described it as a 'plantation'. It had been originally part of 'Near Cowpasture' while in 1768 this end of it at least was named 'Paradise Meadow'. The ground may have been damper before the stream here was scoured deeper to improve the drainage upstream.

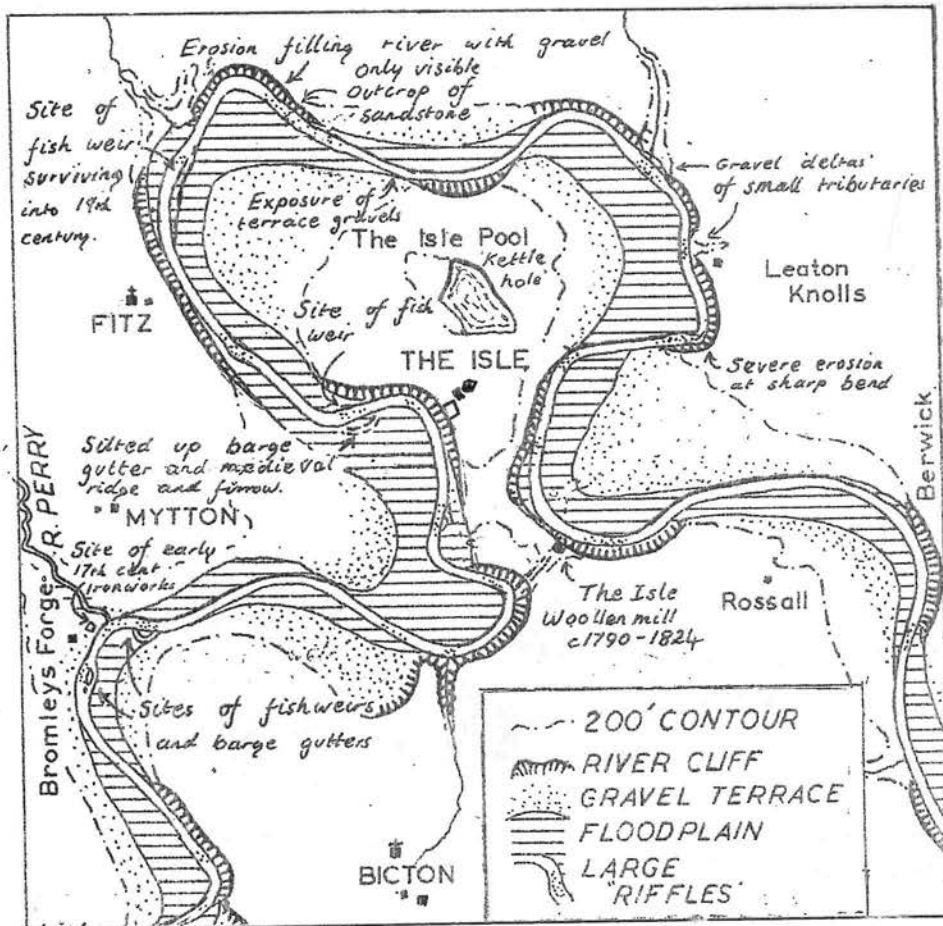
Later in the nineteenth century many such parks became the home for exotics, as seen in the Vicarage garden and the churchyard, but for now only native species, especially oak, were planted.

Meanwhile in the surrounding area, not visible from the houses, odd patches of woodland could still be useful where relief or odd shaped property boundaries made alternative uses difficult. Stitford Rough on a cliff overlooking the Severn and High Oaks in a corner of one of the estates are such examples. Left to regenerate naturally, they could still supply the odd material for fencing etc., but perhaps just as significant they provided cover for game. The nineteenth century saw the development of organised fox hunting and the sporting gun. Even those who do not approve of hunting must appreciate that 'hunting, shooting and fishing' interests have helped create and maintain landscape features which we can all enjoy, along with other wildlife.

History, of course, is always being made and renewal is ongoing. What will be the effects of current usage in these woodlands, motor cycling in Stitford Rough, scouting in Bickley Coppice and public access in Muriel's Little Wood? Only time will tell.

proportions appropriate to a family more concerned with professional careers than display. Significantly, just at a time when similar houses in the neighbourhood were creating mini-parks in the spirit of the 'landscape garden' movement, Folliot Sandford actually drained the pool in 1793 and later preferred to spend the remaining years of his life away near Bath. However, Humphrey Sandford (VIII) restored the situation when he took over in 1841.

Nineteenth century investment is better seen elsewhere on the estate in the form of improved cottages for workers. So the play moves on – I wonder where new 'bits of scenery' will be left behind for the future?



website [www.bictonvillage.co.uk](http://www.bictonvillage.co.uk)  
(Managed by Richard Brett)

# Bicton Village News

Jun 2011  
No 539  
Offprint from David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 50  
The Isle through the ages

William Shakespeare once summed up the stages of human life with the verse:

"...And all the World's a stage  
And the men and women merely players  
They have their exits and their entrances  
And each in their turn plays many parts..."

This could also apply to the story of our landscape, if we add the observation that "the stage hands keep leaving bits of scenery behind after each act". The Isle illustrates this very well in the form of medieval earthworks, a 15th-16th century timber frame farmhouse and an 18th century brick mansion, all now joined by a modern commercial farm. They all cluster together within a special 'stage', where the River Severn has carved wide loops through soft glacial sediment leaving only a narrow neck as access to a wide peninsula. Although correctly named 'Up Rossall', this site is therefore more generally known as 'the Isle'. However, no man or place can ever be a true island, as national and even international events have impacted on its local story.

The most dramatic outside influence was the Norman Conquest, which reorganised the feudal control of land in this country. Rossall was granted to one Albert who held it under Reginald the Sheriff and later Fitz Alan, Earl of Arundel, and Lord of Oswestry and Shrawardine. Albert and his successors were 'knights' owing military service to the Fitz Alans in time of war and therefore it was appropriate for them to build a small fortified manor house, as much for show as for defence. Succeeding generations here took the name 'Rossall' and continued this knightly lifestyle through the 13th century, when no doubt they may have seen action in the Welsh Wars.

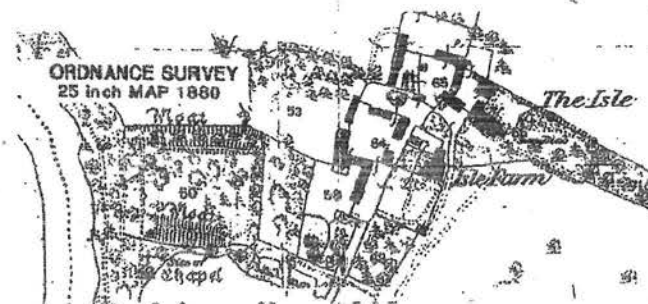
They also added a chapel to the complex serving the household and a local peasant community, who actually worked the land. The estate also built a fish weir on the Severn. A mill on the Perry in Yeaton had also long been



linked to the estate. After about 1400, however, this medieval world began to fall apart. The Black Death and 'climate change' of the previous century led to the breakdown of old ways of peasant farming and stimulated a great period of rebuilding, often on new sites, of which the timber framed farmhouses is one example. On the river, the increasing demands of trade meant that special commissioners ordered the clearance of obstructions in the river, which probably included the local fish weir. A field name on The Isle and silted up barge gutter on the Fitz bank are the only clues to its site. (The Fitz weir survived however.)

At the personal level, Thomas Rossall died without issue in 1418, leaving the estate to Phillip Englefield of Berkshire, his brother-in-law. The Englefields were already greatly involved in public affairs and may have been 'too grand' to want to use the old manor house of the Rossalls. The estate was therefore only left with its tenants and both manor house and chapel disappeared from the records before the end of the century.

Phillip Englefield's son Robert and grandson, Thomas, contrived to rise in the ranks of Royal officials, but the affairs of state were soon to become very complicated as dynastic and religious issues came to dominate the 16<sup>th</sup> century. To cut a long story short, the next Englefield, Sir Francis, served the Princess Mary, daughter of Henry VIII, and became even more important when she became Queen, promoting the catholic cause against the force of protestant reform. When in turn, Elizabeth took over and continued the reformation, Sir



The Isle Farm



The Isle

Francis fell from power and went into exile, during which time his tenant at The Isle, Richard Sandford helped look after his English affairs. This led to some messy disputes during which the estate was forfeited to the Crown, and re-allotted to some of the Queen's favourites, although the four tenants actually occupying the land may not have been disturbed, including Richard's son Humphrey.

Religious allegiances still influenced affairs into the next century, especially around the time of the Civil War. Some cupboards in the old farmhouse are reputed to have been hiding holes for priests. Significantly, Humphrey Sandford (II) married Jane Gifford from White Ladies, Staffordshire, a 'safe house' used by the fleeing Charles II.

As dynastic and religious strife calmed down, The Isle entered a new 'modern age', dominated by educated country squires, now firmly C of E. From now on a long line of Humphrey Sandfords pursued professional careers in the Law and the Church, following public school and university education. They also participated in public affairs while actual farming was continued by their tenants.

Bit by bit, through the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Humphrey Sandford (VI) bought out the remaining owners of parts of The Isle peninsula, making it once again a single estate. This included buying the main house in 1749 which had probably been started in the 1690s. Sandford alterations now included turning it back to front, so that the normally 'rear' chimney stacks now flank the front door, producing an unusual architectural facade. Nevertheless, it retained its modest

after the initial spring growth. More average rings returned in the more normal conditions of the 80s, with even the occasional moderate flood along the river. By now many people in Shrewsbury had got the impression that the Clywedog dam was protecting them from bad floods when, in fact, its function was to be kept fairly full in order to top up the river during dry conditions, as it had done in 1976. It therefore came as rather a shock to experience bigger floods, culminating in the really dramatic ones of 1998 and 2000.

The subsoil was by now thoroughly recharged, to which our tree could respond with growth rings reminiscent of its youthful years. Its last ring, laid down in 2010 did, however, return to a more average width perhaps heralding a drying trend continuing into this year which, no doubt, will be recorded by the other trees still growing in the wood.

The ultimate trigger for all this may be in the balance of cool and warm water in the Pacific, since we are all part of a global climate system just as we are part of a global economy with rising prices of fuel and food. Even in Bickton we cannot escape the rest of the world!



History in the making!



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Jul 2011  
No 540

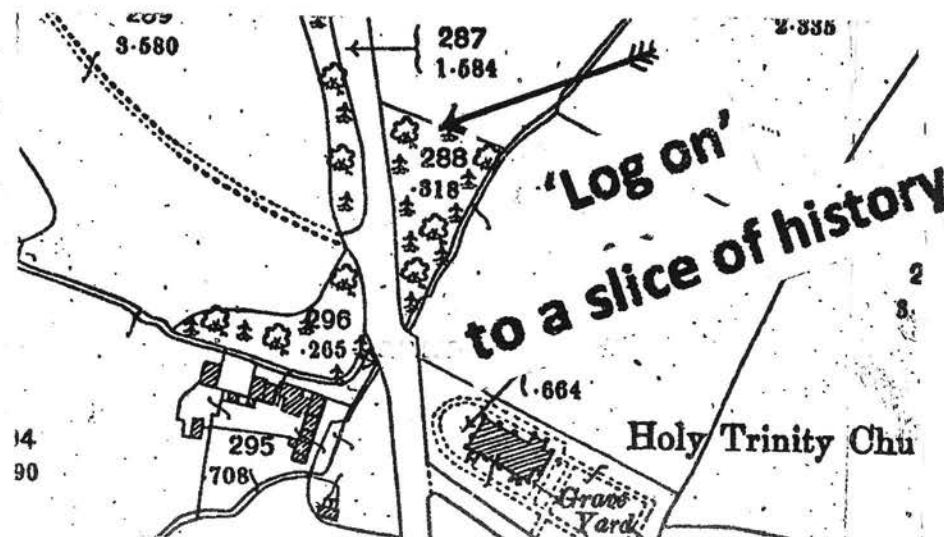
# Bickton Village News

**HISTORY  
of BICKTON**

by David Pannett

Part 51

www.bicktonvillage.co.uk  
(Managed by Richard Brett)



## David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 51

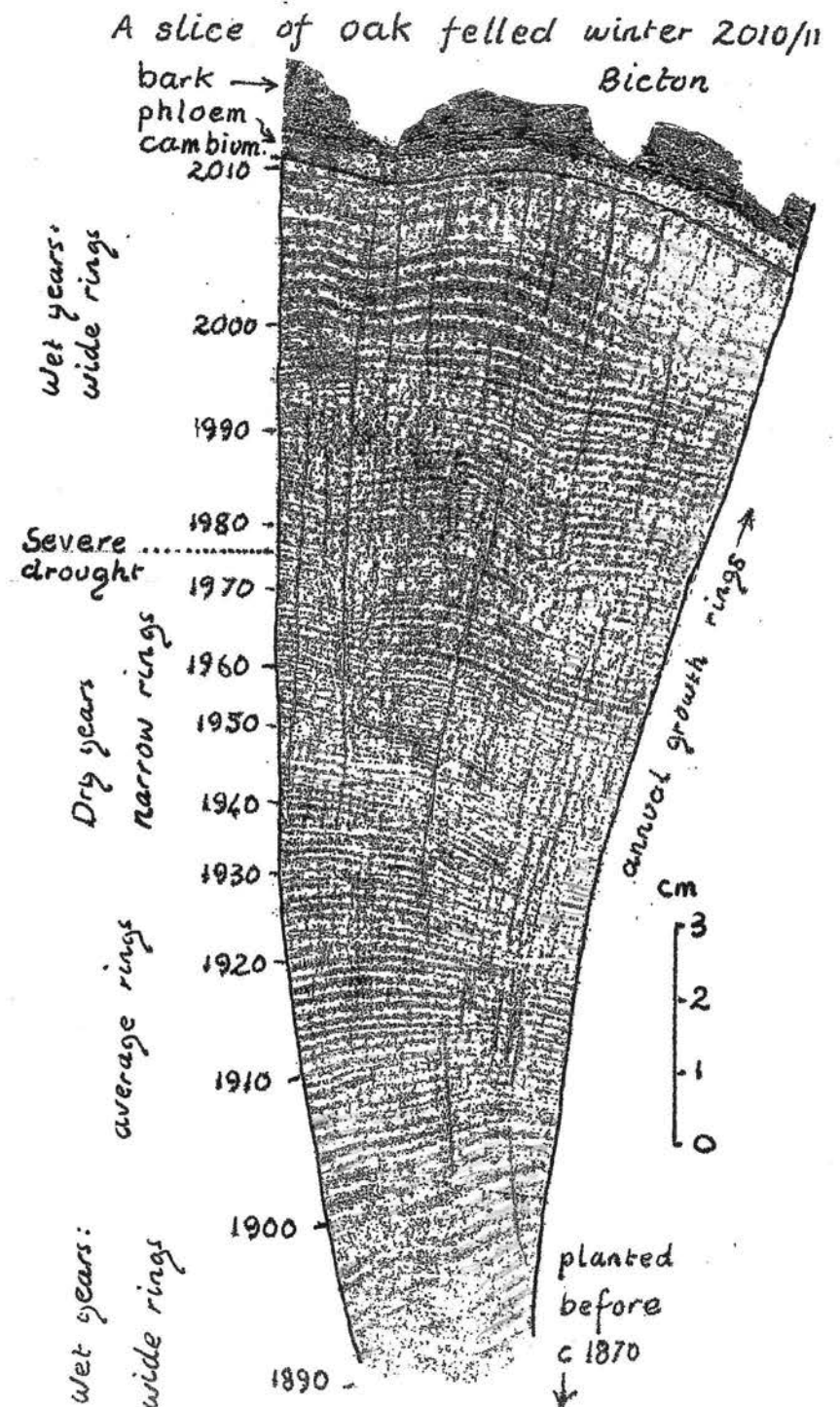
### 'Log on' to a slice of history

The dry spring this year has revived memories of other dry years, especially 1976 with its water restrictions, parched lawns and forest fires in parts of the Country. Throughout this time trees, including an oak recently felled in Muriel's Little Wood, were making their own record of such stressful years. Within each tree trunk the actively living zone is only a thin layer called the 'cambium', where dividing cells produce new woody tissue within and the spongy 'phloem' outside, beyond which the protective bark is also produced. Each spring the new woody cells are large and open in order to transport water and nutrients rapidly up to the fresh growth of leaves, but they become smaller and denser later in the season. This gives a clearly defined ring sequence for each year which, when counted, can reveal the age of the tree. The specimen in question can thereby be traced back into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The width of such annual rings, however, often varies, revealing the tree's response to that year's growing conditions, principally available soil moisture. Oak trees have deep roots tapping into water held in the subsoil, which has generally accumulated during earlier winters, rather than relying upon what falls in the summer growing seasons. This can give a time lag in the tree's reaction to changing weather patterns.

In this way a prepared slice of our sample tree, covering over a hundred years, certainly shows some significant, long-term trends as well as brief fluctuations between years. At the start wide rings which suggest a moister climate may also reflect a group of growing trees not yet competing for available moisture. Within the later, drier decades there were, nevertheless, some episodes of flooding along the Severn, such as those in 1946-7. During the 50s, in spite of famous dramatic events at Lynmouth, in the North Sea and the 'mud bath' West Midlands Show of May 1955, our tree records some particularly dry years which prompted engineers to worry about maintaining the summer flow of the Severn. Their solution, in the 60s was to be the Clywedog dam. By coincidence, the rainfall in the early 60s was sufficient to cause floods and allow wider rings again.

In the 70s, however, several years appear dry, culminating in the famous drought of 1976, when the tree could lay down very little summer wood





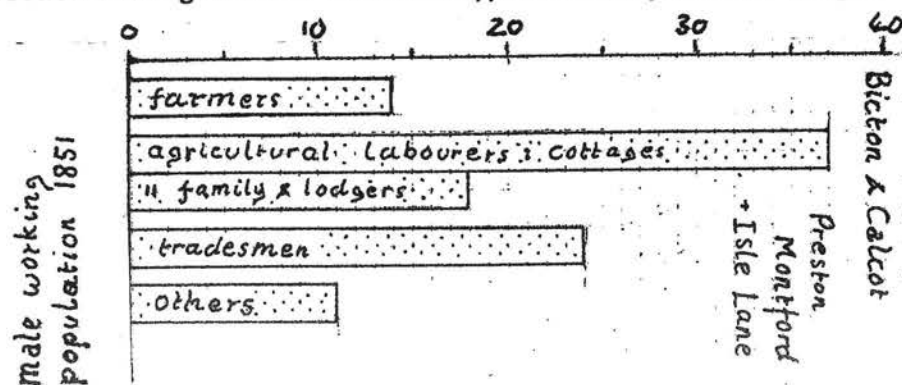
labourers and their families, mainly in groups of cottages in Calcott, Montford Bridge, Isle Lane and Shepherds Lane. Those still single were still at home or living in one of the farm houses built with space for such staff. Other cottages housed a variety of tradesmen; bricklayers, carpenters and blacksmiths, all necessary to maintain the local infrastructure. Just compare this with the present situation!

During the rest of the century, mechanical improvements gradually crept in, although perhaps slowly since this area had only mixed farming rather than specialist arable. Some labour-saving devices were being developed in the expanding American farmland where there was a shortage of labour, but since British farming then suffered competition from the resulting cheaper imports, farmers had little money to spend on them.

Locally, Thomas Corbet developed the Perseverance Iron Works in Castle Foregate, Shrewsbury, in the 1870s, producing improved equipment for which he became nationally known. Mechanised mowers and reapers were now becoming available and the workforce could be reduced to save costs. Anyway, with depressed wages alternative employment was even more attractive to a new generation with at least some improved elementary schooling. As demonstrated at Onslow, steam traction engines could now take the specialist threshing gangs from farm to farm. They are remembered in Bicton in the 1920s.

Two world wars and a deep depression provided further stimulus to change in the twentieth century, especially more mechanisation, which we must explore some other time.

Many reminders of those earlier times are still around the village, but have been adapted to modern life and a variety of inhabitants with no particular connection with agriculture. A feature typical of many modern villages.



# Bicton Village News

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Offprint from  
Aug 2011  
No 541

**HISTORY  
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

**Part 52  
Down on the farm**



## David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 52

### Down on the farm 160 years ago.

At the end of August, once again many visitors will be coming to the parish of Bicton to enjoy the Onslow Steam Fayre, where displays and demonstrations will remind us of the story of mechanisation in the countryside. In particular, the field demonstrations of horse, steam and early tractor cultivation and the running of old threshing machines allow us to appreciate the hard work involved.

By coincidence, in 1823, the St Chad (Shrewsbury) parish register recorded the death of Thomas Healey of Onslow, age 13, killed by a threshing machine. Normally such registers only record the cause of death in exceptional circumstances and clearly this was considered such a case, since these machines were still rare at this time.

Although such machines obviously made life easier for the workers, they also threatened their employment and were not always welcome. This was a common situation in many industries at the time and for many years since.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, farm work was very 'labour intensive' in a manner not far advanced from the Middle Ages. A cartoon by 'George Cruikshank, c. 1852, in which a landowner is studying these traditional ways with a view to making improvements, shows some similarities to medieval manuscripts (Cruikshank also illustrated stories by Charles Dickens). Cultivation still involved walking behind a single furrow plough drawn by animals, although better iron shares and stronger horses had speeded up the work. Although drills had been introduced for root crops, most cereals were still 'broadcast' by hand. For harvesting wheat the reaping hook was now replacing the sickle, two related tools which are often confused. The hook has a smooth knife edge, kept sharp by a stone, which slashed a bundle of straw held in place by a crooked stick. The sickle, well known as the Soviet symbol, was lighter and toothed like a file, so that it cut by a sawing action across a bundle of hand-held heads of grain. Being lighter to operate, it was also used by women as shown some medieval illustrations. We can also understand the biblical story of Samson cutting a field of wheat with the jaw-bone of an ass.

Barley and oats, like hay grass, could be cut with a scythe, hence the pub



cartoon by George  
Cruikshank 1852

name 'Barley Mow'. Today, the scythe is usually associated with the 'grim reaper', but the earliest illustrations show him with a sickle!

The cut grain was tied into sheaves with rope of twisted straw, and stacked in stooks to dry before being carted to the stackyard to await threshing. Harvest was always a busy time for the whole community with extra help expected from wives and children, hence the tradition of a long summer school holiday. 'Gleaning', recovering fallen grain from the stable, was one of the perks, helping to feed chickens or family at home.

Threshing by hand could be delayed until the winter. It involved spreading the sheaves on a floor and beating them with flails, an operation requiring some skill in order to avoid injury! Tossing the results into the air then allowed a breeze or fan to separate the wheat from the chaff. Finally the grain could be bagged up and sent to the miller.

All operations required a large workforce and it is no wonder that census records of the nineteenth century show the parish filled with agricultural



Mary was later joined at Calcott by her younger brother John, when he became Rector of Hanwood. She then moved her school to Dogpole in Shrewsbury, the advertisement for which throws light on the curriculum followed:

"Board and instruction in English grammar, Geography, General History, plain and ornamental needlework etc., 26 guineas per term. German, French, Music, Writing and Arithmetic, Drawing Dancing and Deportment by a master as usual extra charges."

How this enterprise prospered is not known, since it faced competition from other providers in town. Significantly, she had returned to Calcott by 1871 but not to a restful retirement on a teacher's pension! Instead, she cared for an 'imbecile gentleman' until her death in 1889 aged 91. Skills learned in teaching young children can still often help when dealing with victims of dementia. She is buried in Bicton but the grave is not obvious.

Finally, today's youngsters, as they sit on comfortable chairs working computer keyboards, need to be reminded of those far off days of hard benches, chalk and slate!



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**Sep 2011**  
**No 542**

# Bicton Village News

# HISTORY of BICTON

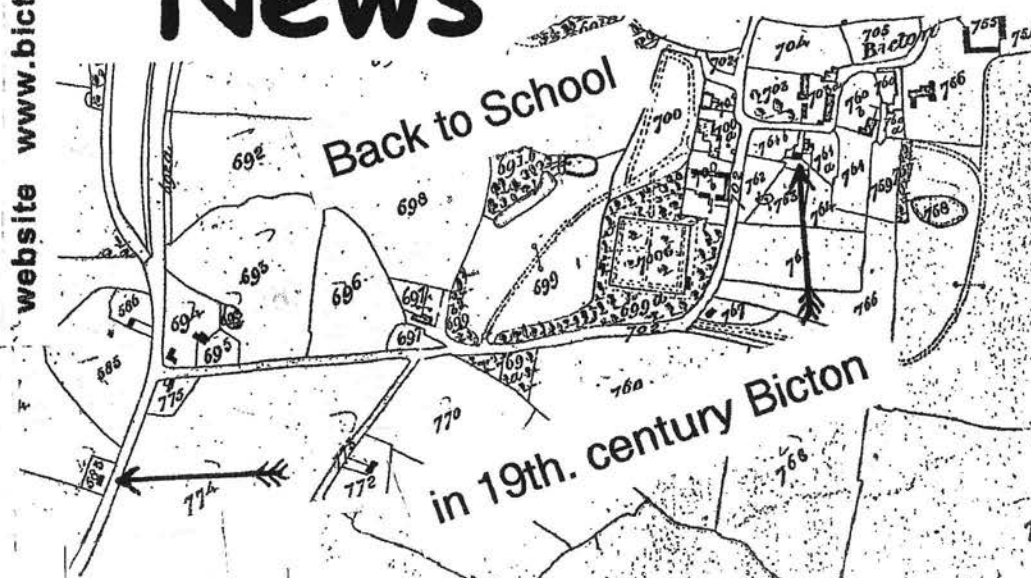
by David Pannett

## Part 53



**HOME TUTOR**  
**AT WORK**—cartoon

website [www.bictonvillage.co.uk](http://www.bictonvillage.co.uk)





remained single. By 1851, as a sort of second career, she had set up her own small boarding school for girls in Calcott House (on the site of Haughton) where the 1851 Census records a pupil aged 11 from London.

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HOME TUTOR  
AT WORK-cartoon



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**Sep 2011**  
**No 542**

# Bickton Village News

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**HISTORY  
of BICKTON**

by David Pannett

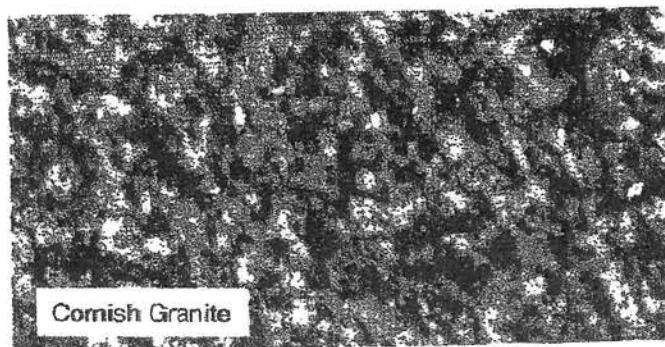
Part 53



As burials spread into the newer section beyond the sequoias, yet more varied igneous and metamorphic rocks have been used. White marble remained useful for clear inscription but was now joined by contrasting dark igneous rocks for similar reasons (e.g. David Watson, 2006). However, distinctive patterns still have an appeal and have been recently provided by two other rocks. One is a version of 'Larvikite', originally from Larvik on the Sogne Fjord in Norway, but now sourced from China. Within a dark crystal background, large flat feldspar crystals act like mirrors each reflecting light in one direction. As you walk past Bill Wall, 2008 for instance, it appears to wink at you. Another pattern is provided by Gneiss (pronounced 'nice'), which is a metamorphic granite (Reg Trow, 2000 and Yvonne Longland, 2005). The way in which the original crystal network appears to have been remelted and sheared into the pattern of contorted streaky bacon demonstrates the immense pressures involved. The result is as good as any modern art! Amongst all this one can still find some dark slate which may have come from nearby Wales (Scharf, 1985). There is still plenty available!



Italian Marble



Cornish Granite



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**Oct 2011**  
**No 543**

# Bickton Village News

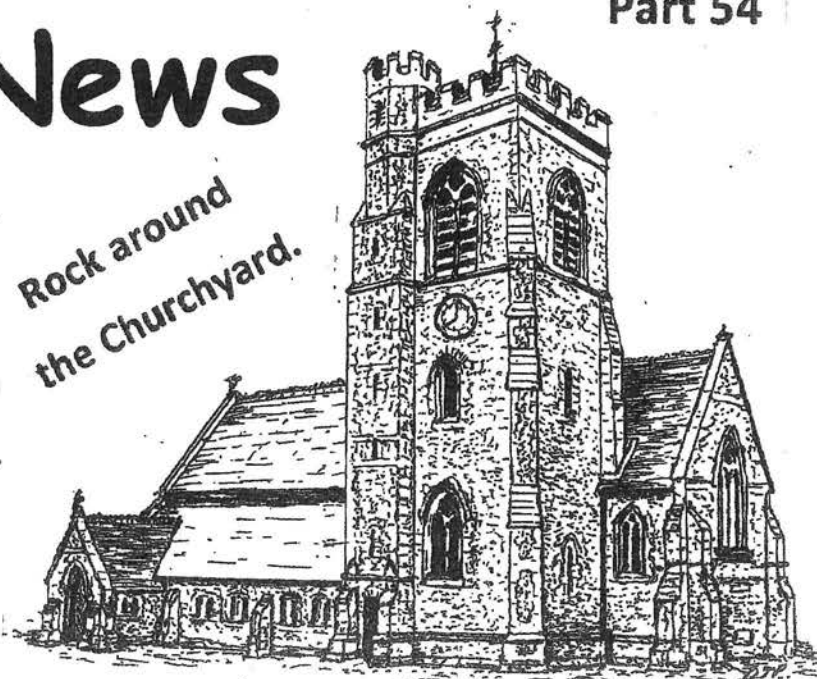
**HISTORY  
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

Part 54

[www.bicktonvillage.co.uk](http://www.bicktonvillage.co.uk)  
(Managed by Richard Brett)

Rock around  
the Churchyard.



## Rock around the Churchyard.

We have already discussed (Aug 09) how, during the last 150 years, our gardens, which were once dominated by native plants, have become enriched with species originating from many other parts of the 'temperate' world. As a reflection of this, our old churchyard has a fine collection of yews, while the new churchyard has giant sequoias from California. Around them the gravestones tell a similar story. Once they were almost all of Grinshill stone, from nearby in Shropshire, but later, as transport systems improved, material was brought from elsewhere in Britain for those who could afford it. Now stone is sourced from ever further distances, being chosen both for quality and competitive prices. Cemeteries including our local churchyards are becoming 'Geological Museums', where cut and polished specimens reveal their nature more clearly than in many original quarries. (What all this has been adding to our adverse 'balance of payments' is another matter!) Even in Bicton they illustrate the three main types of rock recognised by geologists:-

1. **Igneous:** Rocks formed originally in a molten state, (i.e. fire-formed) which cooled to a mass of crystals of the principle rock-forming minerals: glass-like quartz, milky white or pink 'feldspars' made of complex aluminium and sodium silicates and also darker 'ferro-magnesium' minerals. Variations in the proportions of these and sizes of crystals can produce granite in '57 varieties'.
2. **Sedimentary:** Rocks are made up of fragments of other rocks ranging from coarse gravels to finer sands and clays laid down in water or blown about by the wind. The Cardeston Stone or 'Alberbury Breccia' and the sandstones from Shelvock and Grinshill, used in the church, illustrate this range. Both are products of a desert environment from when the Shropshire 'basin' lay nearer the equator 250 million years ago. Such sediments are termed 'clastic' to distinguish them from those formed by chemical and organic activity such as limestones. Algae, corals and molluscs can extract dissolved calcium from seawater and build limestones from their remains. The bigger fragments in the Cardeston Stone are, in fact, eroded limestone.

3. **Metamorphic:** Rocks started out as any one of these, but have been altered to varied degrees by heat and pressure, while buried deep within the crust. They are now only accessible thanks to millions of years of erosion and are therefore often well over 600 million years in age.

When the new churchyard was opened in the 1880s many memorials continued the use of local sandstones, either as simple slabs (e.g. William Lewis, 1907) or the more ornate structure for the Wingfield family of Onslow. They, incidentally, illustrate the relative social levels of the local squire and the local builder. The Wingfield tombstone also illustrates the relative durability of the 'red' and 'white' sandstones. Both are used for decorative effect but the 'red' version in which sand grains are mainly held together with iron oxide, weathering is destroying the inscriptions. The welsh slate columns, 'metamorphic shale', are so far holding firm at each corner.

Around these the rest of the graveyard was soon becoming dominated by far-travelled material starting with cornish granite, (Rev. Newton Lloyd, 1888 and James Whitehorne, 1885). Pink scottish granite came later (Morgan of Udlington, 1938), otherwise, white italian marble, a metamorphic limestone, proved most popular for all ranks in the community. Simply cut, it could display dark inscriptions very well, but also as Romans and Michelangelo long ago demonstrated, this material was ideal for sculpture, which could now reflect victorian sentiment, as in the memorial to Jane Tisdale, 1890. Lichens also enjoy colonising marble surfaces so that there may be more around than 'meets the eye'. Almost lost amongst these stand two typical war graves, one from each war, using Portland Stone from Dorset. This material may have been chosen by the War Graves Commission for its essentially English associations, having been used for important national buildings from Wren's St. Pauls onwards and therefore appropriate for British cemeteries all over Western Europe.

Although classed as a limestone, the mason can treat it as a sandstone made up of ground up seashells instead of quartz. Just think of those gleaming white sandy beaches illustrated in travel brochures for tropical island holidays! 150 million years ago our continent was still in those latitudes, but has since drifted north.



Marriage and a new family followed on, while his local liquid milk trade expanded. Eventually in 1988 they all left the Wingfield Estate to take up another farm at Felton Butler, which son John still holds today. During the next war it was no surprise to find Len involved in the Home Guard. He died about 1975.

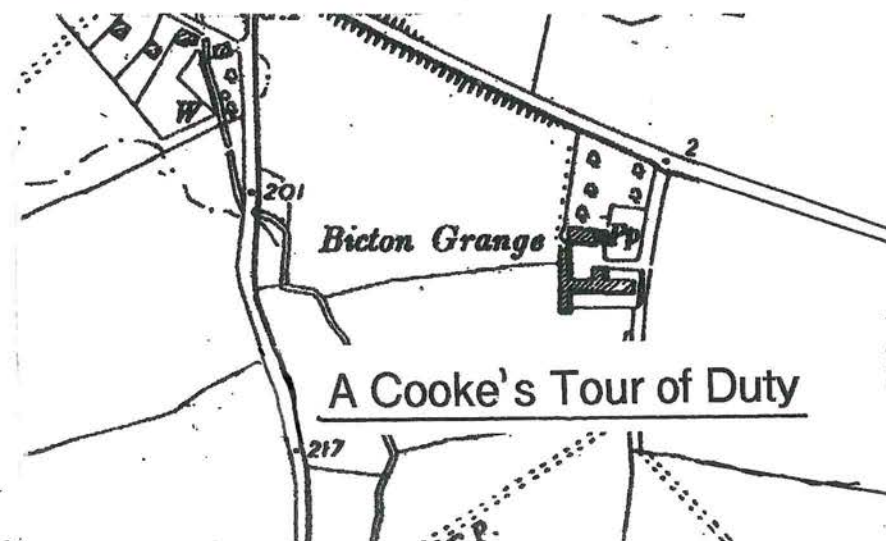
# Bicton Village News

## Part 55



Many thanks to Ruth Cooke for providing the information about her late father.

website [www.bictonvillage.co.uk](http://www.bictonvillage.co.uk)



## David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 55

### A Cooke's tour of duty

Once again, in November, we remember the fallen in past wars, especially that of 1914-18. Many who enlisted then did, however, survive and return with stories to tell, or perhaps some they preferred to forget. Leonard Cooke of Grange Farm was one of those.

It has often been remarked that many young men joined up seeking adventure as an escape from dull lives in crowded homes and the endless drudgery of many jobs, including those in agriculture. This certainly applied to Len Cooke, who packed his bags and left the family farm at the age of 18, as soon as war started in 1914. Relationships within the family also played a part.

The family story in Bicton started when his grandfather, John Cooke of Wem, took the tenancy of Churncote Farm on the Wingfield Estate in the 1880s. It was a truly family enterprise, involving two sons and a nephew in addition to hired staff. Census records show a really crowded household of 10 or more.

Relations with the landlord were obviously good, which enabled John to secure the tenancy of another Wingfield farm, 'The Grange' for his son, Joseph, now with wife and family. Other family members also acquired Wingfield tenancies.

The Grange was a modest farm unit of about 60 acres overlooking the Severn Valley at Montford Bridge, a mixture of boulder clay and sand upon the old glacial moraine, good for both arable and grass. The Wingfield Estate had acquired it in 1829 as part of the Preston Montford estate, then owned by Hills of Hawkestone. It had been added to that estate by purchase from John Mytton of Halston in 1791. Much further back, the site must have been held by Buildwas Abbey, hence the name.

The Cookes continued to manage it as a typical mixed farm, including a small milking herd now supplying the local liquid milk market. Indeed, there was work for all the family. To son Len, Joseph was therefore both a father and demanding employer, a situation ripe for a show of youthful rebellion now made possible by the war. Once Len had departed his younger brother was obliged to give up school and cover his workload instead.

Ironically his escape from farm type work was not altogether complete, since the military welcomed his experience with horses and placed him in the transport corps. To widen his skills he then spent several months training to handle mules, before eventually moving to the action in France.

Transport duties there involved quite a lot of night-time work stocking up the front line with ammunition and other stores, then returning with the dead for burial. Len wrote regularly to his Mother, but censors prevented him from discussing too many details of this. He commented on the billets which he occupied behind the lines and often requested some food parcels and spare clothing to match the changing weather. Living in French farming communities also made him homesick at times.

Although not directly involved in front line fighting, he could see its results in the damaged bodies which he transported and also share the hazards of long-range shell fire. The rolling chalk lands of northern France are naturally well drained, but their veneer of red stony clay was soon turned to deep mud by this constant traffic. Nevertheless, the superiors still wanted shining steel and well scrubbed leather on the harness. They even sent our infantry into action with polished badges, which no doubt helped the aim of German snipers!

So much for the adventure which he had hoped for, and now perhaps he felt to be 'in a rut' in more ways than one. Others around, however, recognised in him some potential for leadership and suggested he tried for a commission. After initial hesitation, he did so and was accepted for training, which involved a course shorter than the one he had for mule driving! The nature of this warfare was creating a rapid turnover of junior officers, so there was 'no time to lose'.

While on such training, his mind turned to the expanding opportunities in the air and therefore applied to join the Royal Flying Corps in 1917. Apart from basic flying lessons, which took place in England, training involved becoming familiar with the ever-changing improvements stimulated by the needs of war. As 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant and a 'sound pilot', he returned to France in September 1918, by which time the German Army was in retreat. Action therefore spread over a wider area with sorties devoted to both bombing and reconnaissance, but then after a hectic couple of months, the war finally ended with the armistice.



memory of the Village. Reasons for coming here are not clear, but may be through family connections by marriage to the Herberts, Earls of Powys. She is remembered as a stern but kindly lady, who became a sort of 'fairy godmother' to much of the community: treats for Sunday School, sponsorship of scholars and loans to businesses. She was a loyal member of the Church and was particularly supportive of the young vicar, Anthony Lawson (1927-31), since he also came from Yorkshire.

She regularly came to church by pony and trap, but in later years had to be pulled and pushed there in a traditional 'bath chair'. She actually died in June 1935, while taking communion there, but was buried back in her native Yorkshire near Bedale.

During this same period, George Percy Mead, actually a surgeon by ~~training~~ profession, had bought the Woodlands Farm, where he specialised in breeding Jersey Cattle. Now in semi-retirement, he moved to the Hall, while keeping up his herd until his death in 1958 at the age of 92. The Hall now had a succession of new owners including Jack Overy, the outfitter.

By now, the days of those armies of servants had long gone and therefore the opportunity was taken to remove the whole top floor before a further sale in 1964.

Today, Shrewsbury businessmen are still involved..... back to where we started!



Bickton Hall 1879

BASED ON DRAWING  
BY STANLEY LEIGHTON



# Bickton Village News

www.bicktonvillage.co.uk  
(Managed by Richard Brett)

Offprint from

Dec 2011

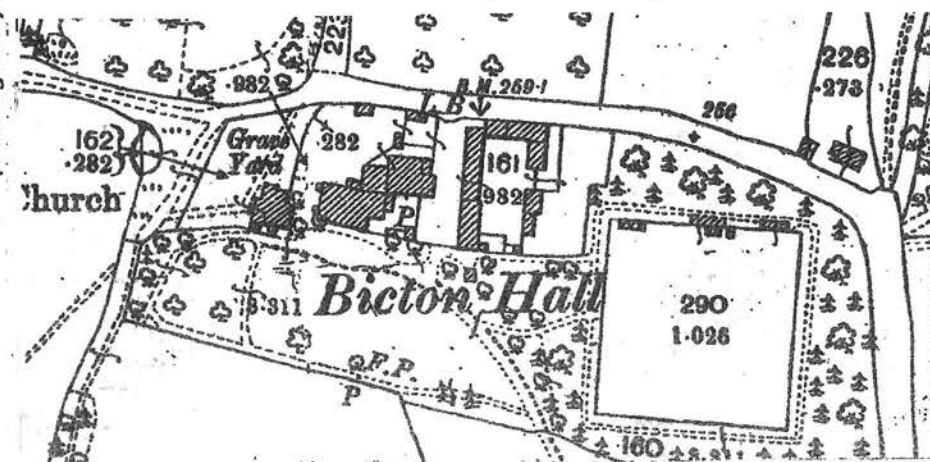
No 545

At Home  
in the HALL

**HISTORY  
of BICKTON**

by David Pannett

Part 56





## David Pannett's History of Bickton Part 56

### At home in the Hall

As Christmas approaches, our thoughts turn to homes and family gatherings. It is therefore appropriate to reflect on the story of those who once lived in the largest house and home in the Village, Bickton Hall.

The story can be traced back to those years of change around 1700 when the old 'open fields' were enclosed, property boundaries tidied up by sales and exchanges and brick began replacing timber amongst newer farmhouses. A new chapel was likewise built of brick.

Arthur Tonge, a Shrewsbury businessman and Mayor in 1693, had purchased one tenanted farm in 1694, but it soon passed by marriage to another Shrewsbury Gent, John Muckleston, who chose to live there, however, in such unhealthy times, he died in 1722 leaving his daughter, Letitia, born 1713, as sole heir.

Meanwhile, back in Shrewsbury, Thomas Jenkins of Chalton had become High Sheriff of Shropshire and had therefore built a fine new house in Abbey Foregate, where his family included two sons, Richard and Thomas. Then, in 1730, Richard married Letitia, by now barely 18, and thereby acquired the Bickton property, which was to become the 'family seat' for the next three generations: John (who married Cousin Emma, daughter of Thomas), Richard I and Richard II.

At some stage, during all this, they enlarged the original Muckleston house to create 'the Hall'. Architecture suggests the hand of Richard I who took over in 1771 and married Harriet Constance Ravenscroft in 1781. Deals with neighbours also suggest he was also improving the surrounding parkland and acquiring property in Rossall. He even promoted the textile mill at the neck of the Isle.

However, his son Richard, later 'Sir Richard', became much more famous for what he did elsewhere, especially in India, during the spread of British influence there, while his widowed mother remained at the Hall. He returned in triumph in 1827 and spent some time adding further improvements to the grounds (walled garden and 'Muriels' Little Wood'). However, his stay was short since after the death of his mother in 1832 and then upon becoming an M.P., he moved permanently to London. Details of his life and work are worthy of longer treatment some other time.

The 'Hall' did not remain empty for long however, since there was a ready market for rented property amongst other members of the gentry overflowing from ancestral homes, particularly dowagers and unmarried daughters.

The first of a succession of such female tenants was Lady Boughey and her daughter, supported by a staff of nine, also mainly female. As before, the farmland attached to the estate was let to the tenant of the adjacent Bickton Farm.

Meanwhile, at Woodcote, by Sheriffhales on the Staffordshire border, the Cotes household was becoming crowded. John Cotes, at one time also an M.P. for Shropshire, had died in 1821 leaving two sons and six daughters: Charlotte (1784), the eldest by first wife, Lucy, and others including Sophia (1802) and Emily (1805) by second wife, Marie. When son John (1799) took over and started his own family, he must have found it a problem to have three sisters still at home passing their marriageable 'sell by date'. In view of the family's political connections it is therefore no surprise to find them moving to Richard Jenkins' Hall at Bickton, where they were to be tenants for the next thirty years or more.

During this time, the sisters ran a typical Victorian Country House with an average of ten staff, mainly female. Thanks to a constant turnover of youngsters, in the end they must have employed a total of over forty individuals. Only Mary Jones from Fitz stayed for the whole time in the Laundry!

In the middle of all this, their Landlord changed twice. Sir Richard Jenkins died in 1853 and was brought back to Bickton with great ceremony for burial in the old church next door. Then, partially thanks to family connections, the property was purchased by John Wingfield of Onslow. In 1874, a further deal between members of that family meant that the estate passed to Charles Wingfield.

Charlotte died in 1854 and was buried in the old churchyard, followed by Sophia in 1885. This left Emily on her own till 1890, so the household finally closed down, leaving the house empty for a few years. Staff moved on, as they always did, including maid Sarah Morris who married Thomas Edwards, gardener from Shepherds Lane. Meanwhile, back at Woodcote, nephew Charles had also become an M.P. and took his household to London. Under the Wingfields, the next tenant was Miss Edith Dorothy Milbank from Yorkshire, who also spent over thirty years here, entering into the living.