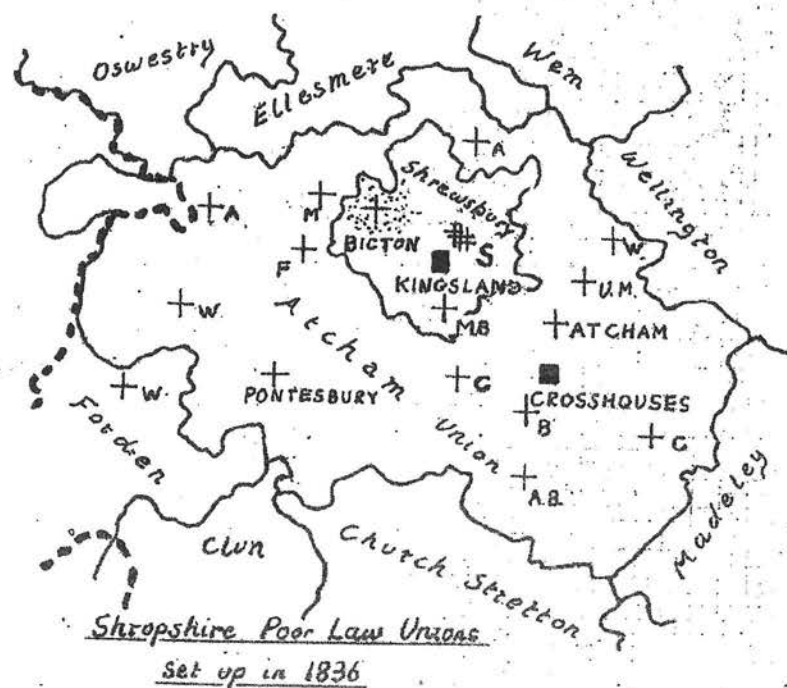


In the 1870s, when Shrewsbury and Atcham Unions were properly amalgamated, the Cross Houses site was enlarged to accommodate 600, allowing the Shrewsbury House of Industry to be closed down. This building therefore provided a new home for Shrewsbury School away from its confined town centre site.

In the early 20th century new forms of 'out relief' and social security replaced the old system leading to final closure of Unions by 1930. Their buildings generally continued as part of the normal hospital system, but in modern times the expansion of the Copthorne and Princess Royal sites has made them redundant. Cross Houses has been successfully converted to residential use in the centre of a housing complex.

During the 19th century, these Unions were convenient units for organisation of other aspects of Government, such as the ten year national census.

When, in the 1880s, several Acts of Parliament created the modern County Councils and the system of Urban and Rural Districts, the large Atcham Union could easily form the basis of Atcham R.D.C. However, it did not include the borough of Shrewsbury, as defined in the 1832 Reform Act, which therefore remained separate but surrounded by it, while leaving the new Civil Parish of Bicton under the R.D.C.



Offprint from

Jan 2012

No 546

HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Bicton Village



News

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



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 57

The Atcham Connection

The festive season, with its family activities, is a reminder of how much Victorian writers, such as Charles Dickens, promoted this form of Christmas. They also pointed out contrasting conditions which could be found in their workhouses at that time.

These have long gone, but they have left some reminders in the form of some very impressive buildings, and also some curious local government boundaries.

At the recent reorganisation, Bicton found itself in an odd-shaped county constituency stretching around the north of Shrewsbury to the Tern Valley at Withington. The historical background for this is an echo of the former Atcham Rural District, which likewise wrapped itself around the borough of Shrewsbury, before eventually becoming united with it in the 1960s. Bicton was part of it.

This R. D. was one of those set up in the County during earlier local government reorganisation in the 1880s-90s. Its delegated powers included local planning control and provision of rural housing, as illustrated by the Rural Cottages built about 1921 in Montford Bridge, Ford and Bicton Heath. The District covered a large portion of the central area of the county, with its headquarters in Oakley Manor, Belle Vue, Shrewsbury.

In view of this, one wonders why it should have borne the name 'Atcham', as opposed to Shrewsbury or any other local village. The answer lies in its evolution from the Atcham Poor Law Union, which had been established under the National 'Poor Law' reforms of 1834-6.

Originally poor relief was administered by individual parishes, some of which ran small 'workhouses' provided accommodation for paupers who were encouraged to engage in some sort of work to offset the costs. These were mainly covered by the 'Poor Rates' levied on the local landowners and businesses.

At that time, Bicton was still part of the parish of St Chads, Shrewsbury, and therefore shared its town-based 'poor house' managed by the overseers. Meanwhile some local benefactors were founding almshouses in some parishes. In 1676 Richard Taylor left money to build one in Bicton, but there is no record of what happened to it.

During the late 18th century, some parishes decided to pool their resources in order to build larger workhouses, which they could share. In this way, the Shrewsbury parishes and Meole Brace clubbed together in 1784 to purchase the old 'foundling hospital', now no longer needed by the London charity which had built it in 1760. They named the new institution the 'House of Industry', stressing its role in improving the state of the poor through useful work. All this set a good example which was followed by other groups of parishes, including ten east of Shrewsbury, centred on Atcham. After 1792 a new workhouse was duly built for them at Cross Houses, actually in Berrington parish, just outside the Attingham Estate. Nevertheless, the name 'Atcham' was given to this parish group.

Following the example set by the Kingsland House of Industry it was a substantial building designed and built by local architect John Hiram Haycock. Some small parish workhouses could then be sold off to help with the cost, but otherwise capital was raised through loans.

Following an Act of Parliament in 1834, a national system of 'Poor Law' management was introduced involving 'Poor Law Unions' on this same model. Shrewsbury could therefore carry on much as before, but Atcham was enlarged to include 43 parishes stretching across to the Montgomeryshire border, thereby encircling Shrewsbury and becoming one of the largest unions in the County. Its first chairman of the management committee or 'guardians' was Sir Baldwin Leighton of Loton Park, Alberbury, a man of very positive ideas, who strove to make this Union a model to how things should be done. He also campaigned for the establishment of a County Lunatic Asylum, in order to lessen the responsibility for specialist mental care in workhouses. This led to the creation of the nearby Shelton Asylum in 1845.

The typical inmates of the workhouses included young children 'taken into care' or actually born there to single mothers with no other family support (similar children apparently taken in by aunts or grandparents in Bicton, show up in some census records and were therefore more fortunate by comparison). Other typical inmates were older men, probably made homeless by losing accommodation tied to work, usually on farms. In spite of the grand architecture the regimes were more like those of a prison, as if punishing the destitute for being there, as illustrated by Charles Dickens. They were clearly places 'of last resort'. However, as the century progressed they came to be more like infirmaries and alms-houses.

Sir Thomas Kniverton, dominated the rest of Rossall. Such is the mismatch between owner, and tenancy records, this gentleman does not appear in the sale of the property going on around the same time. Edward Gosnell, a London Merchant was buying it from Sir Robert Clayton, also of London, and is credited with building a new mansion for himself, which survived into the 1960's.

As at Dinthill and Onslow, a new rich owner took an existing house appropriate to his status, before changing it to suit his new tastes. What these original houses actually looked like is a mystery, with only those at Woodcote providing some clue.

After experiencing the Great Fire of London in 1666, Edward Gosnell must have been particularly eager to rebuild in brick. About this time too, many locals attending St Chad's church were being asked to contribute to relief funds for other 'burnt out' villages and towns around the country and no doubt thought the same way. Fire can still happen in modern houses, so do take care!!



J.C.B. Knight
1958



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No 547

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

Part 58

TAXING TIMES

Bickton

Village

www.bicktonvillage.co.uk



News

Hearth Tax

1672

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 58

TAXING TIMES

At this time of year our minds focus on two issues: checking tax returns and worrying about keeping warm, as we look for the first signs of Spring. This is nothing new:.....

Over the centuries governments have devised various forms of taxation, either based on people, like the poll tax, which triggered some medieval revolts, or one based on wealth, usually measured by landholding. In the late 17th century, following the restoration of King Charles 11, after the commonwealth; a novel tax was devised based on the number of hearths in each house. They were obviously viewed as an index of relative wealth publicly displayed by the number of chimneys. Naturally such snooping into private homes was as unpopular then as it is today, so that after the 1670's it was replaced by a tax on windows.

Surviving tax records in general are useful to local historians, tracking past wealth and population distribution, while the 1672 Hearth Tax also provides some clues to the nature of the buildings in each settlement. Just at this time timber was giving away to brick, especially in the provision of good chimneys, which contributed to fire safety.

The late 17th century is a particularly interesting time locally as many changes were going on, but documentary evidence is rather thin. Surviving deeds allow the local estates to be traced back to near this period, but beyond it we are left with more guesswork. Moreover, deeds are related to land ownership, which can be very complicated with mortgages, family inheritance and marriage settlements, beside simple sales. They more often showed the owners to be 'absentee', including Shrewsbury businessmen, so one is left in the dark about who actually lived here working the land.

The Hearth Tax fills in this gap in our knowledge by listing actual occupiers, whether owners or tenants, but their names, although grouped in Townships cannot easily be linked to any particular estate or precise location. Also the poorest were 'exempt', providing they obtained a certificate of exemption from the parish officials. They were duly listed for the whole of Shrewsbury Parishes but not specifically linked to any particular township. In spite of

such limitations, the tax records can still make a useful contribution to our understanding of this parish, posing questions as well as answers.

In the township of 'Bicton and Calcott' seventeen taxed households reflect the well-known settlement pattern. Three with three hearths each, John Griffiths, George Griffiths and Widow Harries, and also five with two hearths each, correspond to the number of farm sites in the village itself and south towards Calcott. The nine with single hearths would have been the numerous cottages already colonising the heathland area. Amongst names recorded, Roger Tipton maybe the founder of a long lasting local family. Otherwise, few can be recognized in earlier or later records.

Next door in the township of 'Preston Montford and Dinthill' there is likewise a simple pattern. Thomas Cheely's seven hearths belonged to an earlier Dinthill Hall rebuilt in 1754. Mathias Calcott of Preston Montford lived in a more modest farmhouse before it was joined by Samuel Adderton's new Hall around 1700. Six single hearth households certainly represented the roadside settlement at Montford Bridge including Thomas Griffiths with a name later linked to the Swan Inn (Wingfield Arms) and John Barber, known to be a tenant of the Borough of Shrewsbury at the time. (Drury Lane)

In nearby Onslow, George Berisford had an eight hearth mansion, which like Dinthill was later replaced by its new owners, who also tidied up the landscape rebuilding two multi hearth farm houses and five single hearth cottages.

In 'Woodcote and Horton' at least two multihearth timber framed houses survive from this period, showing their prominent stone and brick chimneys. Four others have since experienced the usual rebuilding, along with seven single hearth cottages.

The record for the 'Isle' certainly includes Richard Sandford's eight hearth mansion, which must be the nucleus of the present house, much altered in the eighteenth century. Five multihearth households no doubt reflect the principle farms of the estate, including Udlington, confirmed by a reference in St Chad's register to Hugh Poole, one of the taxpayers living there. Only one single hearth cottage is recorded, reflecting lack of typical roadside and heathland settlement, in contrast to Rossall which had five of them, having claimed lordship of Rossall Heath. A mansion with eight hearths occupied by

still in India in 1880, while younger son Edward also became a colonel and likewise remained in India after retirement. Their wives and in-laws also had similar Indian and military connections reflecting how spouses met within a tight social circle.

Meanwhile, other young men from local gentry families were also venturing to the same part of the world, often suffering from wars and diseases and are also commemorated in the church. More stories to tell another time! Now the flow is in the opposite direction as young men (and women) come here from India to advance their careers in commerce or medicine.

Our legacy in India includes the unifying force of the English language and many civil institutions, which have helped it to become a successful modern state. Today, we have many daily reminders of our historical links with the sub-continent and therefore we should not forget how all this began.

Special thanks to Rod Warren of Bickton who has researched the Jenkins story in India.

website www.bicktonvillage.co.uk



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No 548

**HISTORY
of BICKTON**

by David Pannett

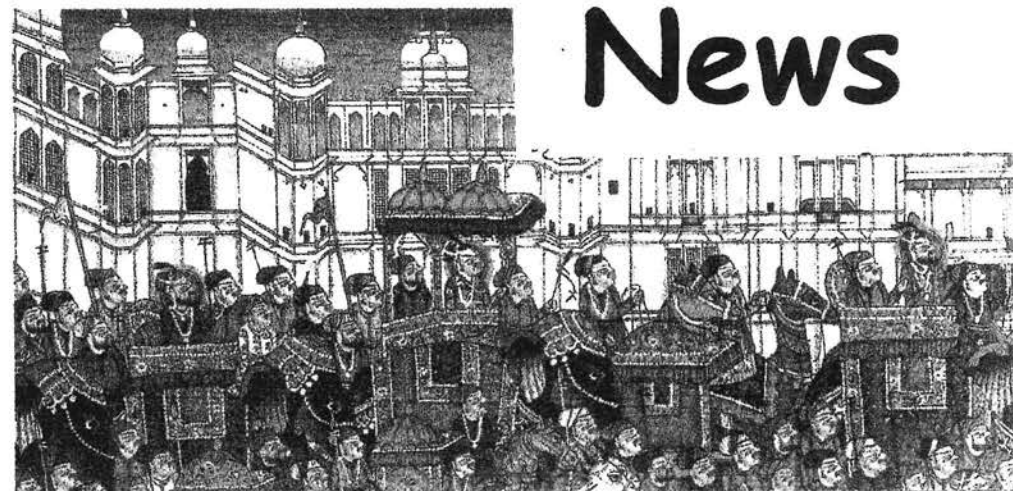
Part 59

Bickton

Village

Sir Richard Jenkins
and India

News



Sir Richard Jenkins and India

During the eighteenth century, the British East India Company was extending its trade contacts around south east Asia, often competing with similar Dutch and French companies as part of their respective imperial ambitions. The Napoleonic wars, however, weakened this competition leaving Britain a free hand to expand its influence even further, into India. The whole sub-continent had once been controlled by the Mogul emperors based at Delhi, but as their power declined the different princely states jostled for local power, allowing the company to get involved in politics as well as trade. In all this the company acted as an agent for the British Government, even to the extent of maintaining its own army, however, following the `Indian Mutiny` in 1857, the government actually took over. Queen Victoria was made Empress of India (the jewel in her crown) and the sub continent was officially added to the British Empire, although still largely managed through the existing states and a local civil service .

Robert Clive, originally from Market Drayton played a prominent part in all this during the eighteenth century and is commemorated by a statue in Shrewsbury's Market Square . By contrast, few appreciate that Bicton produced a similar hero, Sir Richard Jenkins, but here his memorial is only a humble plaque from the `old church` reminding us that he is buried under the floor there. Now with the roof gone the grave lies open to the elements, except where partially hidden by fallen brickwork. Surely our local hero deserves better than this!

Although the family held Bicton Hall he was actually born in Cruckton in 1785. Then in 1805 as a young man he went to India and straight away became acting British resident or Ambassador at Nagpur, the court of the Maharajah of Gwalior, Dowlut Rao Scindia. After 1810 he became the permanent resident here until he returned to England in 1827.

This was not to be a quiet posting, however, for in 1817 he had to repel an attack on the residency from Appa Sahib, the new Maharajah

whom he then imprisoned. A year later, after further warfare, Gwalior became a principality under British protection, with Nagpur becoming the capital of the `Indian Central Provinces` . The skilled manner in which he handled this situation made him a trusted advisor to the Governor of Bombay, Mountstuart Elphinstone.

At this time he also married Elizabeth Spottiswood the daughter of a company civil servant and started a family with two daughters while in India.

Upon his return to England, he was elected a director of the East India Company in 1832 and the company chairman in 1839, at a time when it accounted for one-fifth of all economic activity under British control. In recognition of such achievements he was made a fellow of the Royal Society and given an honorary doctorate in civil law by Oxford University.

As a reflection of his popularity locally, he was elected MP for Shrewsbury on two occasions 1830-1 and 1837-41. Such interests nearer the capital however, meant he did not stay in Bicton very long and moved instead to Blackheath in SE London. Perhaps thanks to his parliamentary contacts, he was already acquainted with the Cotes family of Woodcote, whose three unmarried daughters were to become long-term tenants of Bicton Hall.

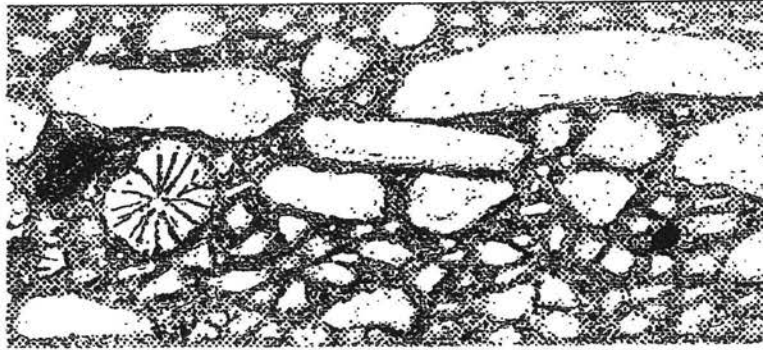
Bicton was nevertheless not forgotten for at his death in 1853 he was brought back here for burial in the old church, amid much ceremony. (The new railway system no doubt helped to make this possible). In any case, his younger sister Frances had remained in Bicton, living in Lower Calcott and was later buried in the old churchyard just outside the door. Another sister Emma had married Rev. Charles Wingfield a member of the local family who became the new owners of the Hall estate.

Otherwise, India was now in the family blood with no children keen to return to the village and country life. Eldest son Richard, although born in Bicton in 1828, became a colonel in the 1st Bengal cavalry and died

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No 549

HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett



Alberbury Breccia/Cardeston Stone

By the end of the century, this fashion was over, but structures still remain. Now conservationists and local communities are sensitive to the appearance of our local landscape and therefore the need to appreciate our truly 'local' stone is as important as ever. Do take a closer look at it when passing! (Or visit Alberbury Village Hall)

Bickton Village News



*Stone and brick cottage c.1840
Wingfield Estate, Preston Montford*

More Stories in Stone

From time to time, in this history series we have pointed out the distinctive stone used in Bickton Church and its boundary wall (built by William Lewis of Old School House). It also appears in the school boundary wall, the 'Yews' at Montford Bridge and a cottage at Preston Montford. To the geologist it is 'Alberbury Breccia' and to the Mason 'Cardiston Stone', consisting of angular white limestone fragments set in a brown sandy matrix. The mixture has a decorative effect, but this makes it difficult to work into regular shapes. At first sight, the fragments may appear a jumbled mass, but closer inspection can reveal how many large pieces have been laid flat by the flow of water which had transported them. Some are even limestone fossils, while other darker pieces represent quite different rocks. Their angular nature suggests that they had travelled only a short distance from their source, not enough to turn them into rounded pebbles.

All these characteristics provide the clues to the rocks geological history, while more human history explains why some appeared in local buildings.

The first story started some 350 million years ago, when a clear, warm, tropical sea covered much of Central England and Wales, as our drifting continents lay near the equator. It was the ideal environment for varied marine life such as corals and crinoids (sea lilies) to build up deposits of lime-rich mud, which consolidated into limestone. The original Welsh Mountains and Shropshire Hills had by this time been so worn down that they were either covered up or could contribute little sediment to spoil the scene. Things change, however, when pressures from the south disturbed our local crust, allowing parts to rise up and others to sink along fault lines. Now, material washed off the hills began filling the new basins causing them to sink even lower, while the hills, relieved of weight, continued to rise, as if on a see-saw.

By coincidence, our drifting coastal plate had by now moved from the wet to the dry tropics, as if moving from Lagos to Timbuktu. One result was the formation of the Alberbury Breccia as a fan of gravel spreading out from 'wadis' in the hills, completely removing their cover of limestone layers south

of Llanymynech. In this sort of climate, the infrequent rains usually came as short, but powerful, storms.

Further sinking in the basin, bury this fan under layers of windblown sand and also tilted it away from the hills. Now, fast forward many millions of years of yet more burial and final erosion, it outcrops as a ridge from Alberbury to Cardeston rising out from those softer sands on either side.

At the Alberbury end it provided rough ground for a mediaeval deer park, as well as stone for local castle buildings. There are several references to it being dug during the Middle Ages, but it always faced competition from better sandstones nearby. For this reason, agricultural reporters at the beginning of the 19th century did not include it in their list of Shropshire building stones, but did record it being burned for lime at Cardeston. However, during the rest of that century attitudes changed thanks to several interrelated factors.

Firstly, by this time the Loton estate was already setting a good example of providing better housing for its workers and tenants, replacing old timber and mud cottages with something better. (Sir Baldwyn Leighton's role in the improvement of poor law and mental care has already been discussed).

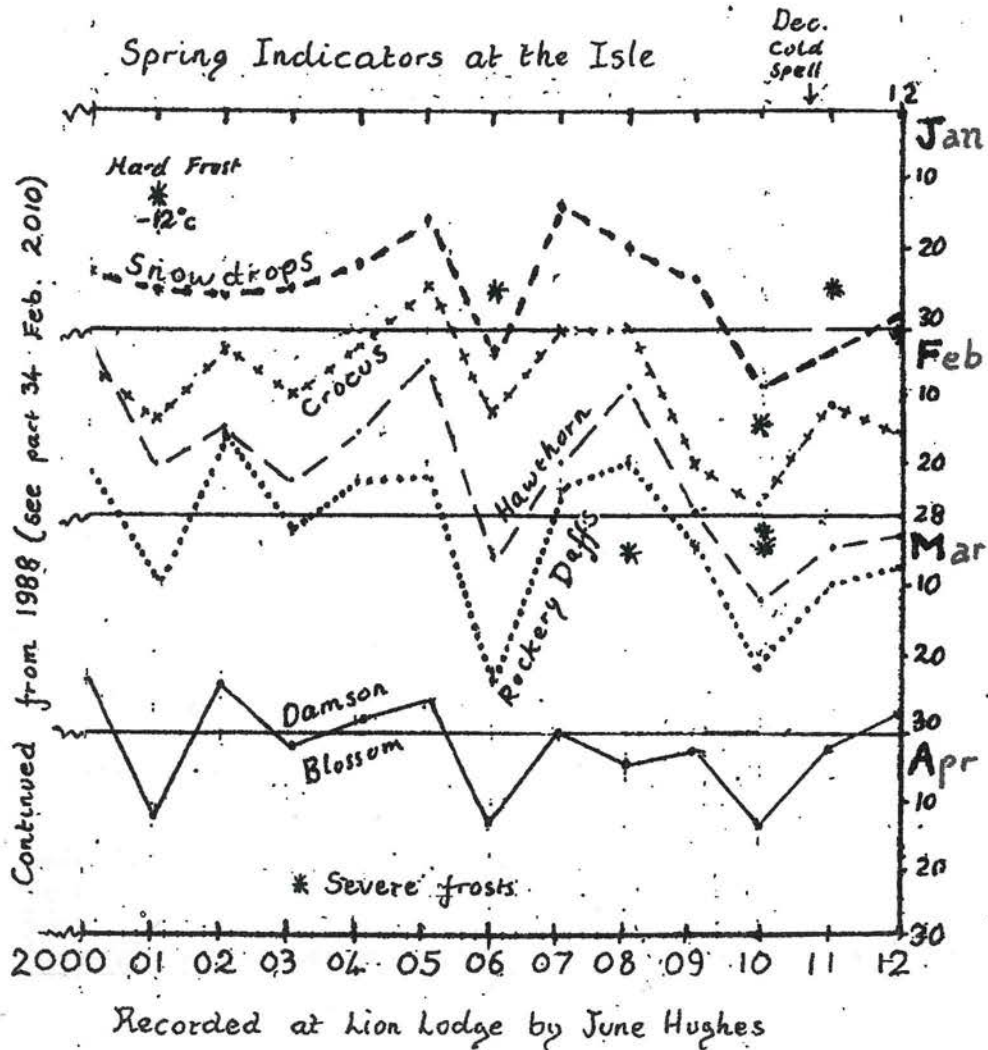
As all this was expensive, using materials from within the estate, including the stone, was an advantage. Moreover, bricks were now subject to tax and could thus be used only where it really necessary in chimneys and window and door jambs, difficult to cut from the rough breccia. For the same reason, stone was also used in low value farm outbuildings.

Another factor, continuing from the 18th century, was the desire of many land owners to decorate the estates with 'picturesque' structures. Some even built useless follies, but most blended function with appearance in such buildings as gate lodges in which romantic versions of antique styles were popular. Onslow, for instance, once had 'classical' lodges, while later in the century, mock Tudor or 'black and white' styles appeared, as with the Quarry Lodge in Shrewsbury. The breccia fitted well into these romantic ideas as the rough surface appeared 'old' even when newly built and proved to be a favourite with the restorers of local churches and the castle at Rowton. Thus it was an obvious choice for new churches at Oxon and Bickton.

At the domestic level, the Wingfield estate joined in this trend by using the stone for cottages on its land at Preston Montford about 1840.

It is still possible to see a snow shower in early May if the wind comes from the North. Nevertheless, the old saying 'don't cast a clout till May is out' refers more to May or thorn blossom, rather than this month.

Some aspects of the 2012 spring have been remarkable in breaking some records, but looking back we can still recognise many familiar elements. We are still dependent upon our changeable weather patterns as we were in the 16th century, but fortunately they are less of a 'life or death' matter today.



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May 2012
No 550



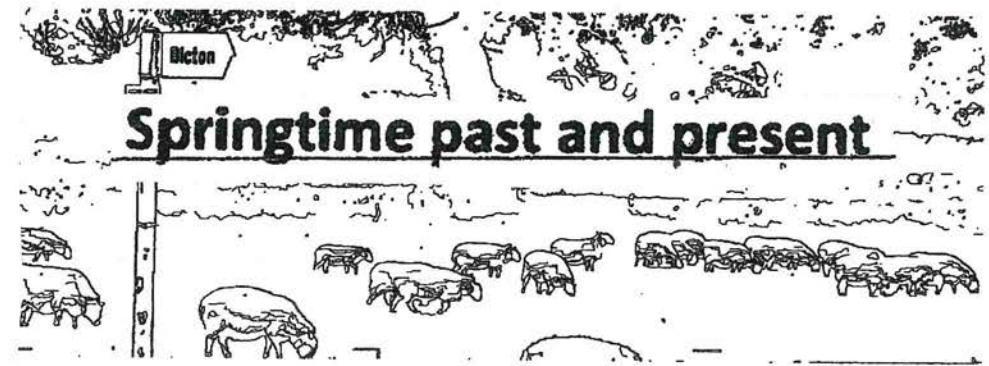
Bickton Village

**HISTORY
of BICTON**
by David Pannett

Part 61

News

website www.bicktonvillage.co.uk



Springtime past and present

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 61

Springtime past and present

Spring is the season when winter gradually gives way to summer, but, such is the variable nature of our climate, events do not always appear to progress in a logical order. March is reputed to 'come in like a lion and go out like a lamb', but this does not always happen that way round!

Spring at this latitude is the season for sowing summer crops and generally celebrating the mystery of 'life' returning to the world. It is no coincidence that the early church chose this time for the Easter Festival.

A major cause of variability in our weather is the meeting of cold polar air with warm tropical air, which interact to cause depressions. These 'low pressure' systems generally travel from West to East off the Atlantic, bringing wind and rain. Extreme examples can bring damaging gales and floods which 'hit the headlines' or stay in our memories. For instance, January gales in 1977 wrecked a greenhouse at Merton Nurseries, while press reported a 'killer storm' in January 1980 and a similar one in February 1997. Much earlier, our local Chronicle recorded such events in 1601 -2. In 1584, a gale blew embers from a fire which set half of a Shropshire village alight.

The paths of these depressions are steered by the 'jet stream' in the upper atmosphere and also pass around slow moving areas of high pressure. Since such 'blocking highs' linger in one place for some time, they can control the location and duration of particular weather types for days or weeks on end.

For instance, such high-pressure in the North Atlantic will steer winds in a clockwise manner towards us from the North, which bring lower temperatures and blustery showers, especially in April. If the high actually moves over us, we experience calm conditions and clear skies allowing bright warming sunshine, but also chilly nights as some of that warmth escapes into space. Gardeners must then worry about frost damage to their young plants encouraged to grow by the warm days. A high further east, however, draws in mild tropical air from the mid-Atlantic, raising temperatures irrespective of local sunshine and introducing a real feeling of summer, whatever the date.

It high-pressure moves even further east, settling down on the cold waters of the the Baltic, it can direct dry cold Siberian air towards our eastern shores. Fortunately, Bicton is sufficiently west to avoid the worst of this cold blast, which reaches us after picking up some moisture and warmth from the North Sea to give dull overcast skies.

Such weather patterns often occur in March, when the continent is still cold and here provide dry conditions which are ideal for sowing barley or rye. An old saying claimed 'a speck of dust in March was worth a King's Ransom', such was the national importance of a successful grain sowing season. The alternative could cause problems, as recorded by our local Chronicle in 1585.

"This year and almost all of the month of March was wet which caused corn to be a great price".

The spring of 1590 was similar, when sodden ground prevented sowing before April. Low temperatures could be just as bad:

'This year (1572) the winter and spring was so long, cold and dry that it was very far into the month of May before any leaf or blossom appeared upon any tree'.

All this reminds us of our own experience in 1964, and illustrates how the relative proportion and duration of each weather type can give an individual character to each year's Spring.

Records of rain and wind and temperature certainly confirm this, as do records of emerging plant life responding to them. For over 20 years June Hughes has been observing such growth in Bicton, which, when plotted as a graph reveals a regular rhythmic sequence of 'early' and 'late' springs. By running this pattern forward one might even guess what might happen in the future. Shall we take bets on late springs in 2015 or 16?

The controlling factors of such growth patterns are clearly a mixture of soil temperature and moisture, as well as fluctuating air temperatures and increasing day length. Some late frosts in an otherwise mild spring appeared to have delayed the damson blossom in 2008. Anyway, it is often cool about blossom time giving the old country term 'plum winter', when just one night frost can wreck that year's fruit crop.

field boundaries also replaced these with a terrace of three dwellings with long gardens behind. Later, another pair of cottages was added further down the Lane.

The 'enclosure' also allowed the redesign of the entrance drive at 'Ross Hall'. After John Harley bought the estate in 1852, he built a new lodge and planted a screen of trees beside the Lane. To enhance a grand entrance the lodge has a picturesque style complete with carved barge boards and tudor chimneys' and housed one of the estate gardeners. Now, with demolition of the Hall, the drive and gate no longer function, but the lodge remains to remind us of it.

By the 1950s, that belt of woodland became the site of the newest estate cottages, whose design is similar to many local authority houses at that time. This is no accident, since the original council houses, such as the A.R.D.C. 'rural cottages' in the parish, reflected the best of estate designs, while, even in the 1950s, parts of Monkmoor, Shrewsbury, projected a 'village green' image. Even some modern developments have used a 'cottage' style.

In the 1850s, these "cottage buildings" together had 11 households with a total population of 46. By the 1900s, even with the addition of four more dwellings, the population was still much the same.

In 1850, families were, all but one, linked to farm work, but this figure had halved by 1900, reflecting a national trend of a falling agricultural workforce, thanks to mechanisation. Other occupations now included bricklayers, labourers, gardeners and even the retired and an army pensioner.

As was typical with farm workers they only lived here a few years at a time. The recorded place of birth of the numerous children reveal their migration from job to job, mainly in the borderland. By 1900, the improved railway network meant that many have moved from even further afield. Compare all this with today!

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No 551

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

Part 62



Bickton Village News

**'The Cottage
Buildings'**

Isle Cottages

Lodge

O.S. MAP
1884

Uddington Villa

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 62

'The Cottage Buildings'

The provision of 'affordable housing' for essential local workers is a constant subject of debate in rural communities. This is nothing new.....

During the 19th century the debate focused on the improvement of accommodation for agricultural workers whose low wages condemned them to the cheapest rented cottages available. The issue was therefore one of providing a form of 'social housing' in order to improve their lot. At that time, of course, that had to be provided by the landed estates.

At the beginning of the century, Archdeacon Joseph Plymley discussed the subject as part of his report on the state of agriculture in the county. He was concerned about overcrowding in cottages in general and also provision of small plots to help the families to produce some of their own food as a compensation for low wages. He commented on good examples and recommended other estates to follow.

Nationally other writers were recommending improvements in design which should include enough bedrooms for separating the sexes, while outside, providing necessary space for privies, wash houses and the pig. Government sponsored enquiries, however, including those for Shropshire, continued to report the slow pace of improvements. One is, therefore, reminded of the words of Mrs Alexander in 1848, which we no longer consider part of 'all things bright and beautiful', as they suggest this acceptance of the 'status quo':

*The rich man in his castle
The Poor man at his gate
God made them high or lowly
And ordered their estate "*

In Bicton, many cottages started life as encroachments around the heath or by the roadside at Montford Bridge and each have their own stories of alterations and improvements since the 18th century. In the Isle Lane, however, stand a group of cottages which illustrate very well the direct role of landowners over the same period. Their location here is no accident, since they lie at the junction of at least three estates at the Bicton - Rossall

township boundary and reflect each estate's desire to house its workers well away from the 'big house'. Although appearing to be one group, these cottages are the product of different stories.....

At the southern, 'Four Crosses' end stand the pair of modernised Victorian houses which began life as part of a terrace of cottages built for factory workers. In the 1790s John Jenkins, father of the more famous Richard, had a tunnel dug across the narrow neck of the Isle loop to provide water power to a textile mill on part of his land. The adjacent Isle and Rossall estates were not involved, and, anyway, since much of the land was still Rossall Heath, the workers cottages were sited further down the lane just inside Bicton township, on the land of William Smith.

The factory closed down in 1824, but the site continued as a corn mill until the 1850s, when the Isle estate took over. By this time Folliot Sandford had already bought the cottages in 1840 upon the death of John Smith, William's son. The 'factory cottages' therefore became the 'Isle cottages' although locals knew them as 'Bug row', perhaps as a comment upon what had become a rural slum.

In due course, improvements were made by the new owners along with other farmhouses and cottages on their land. Projecting wings were added at each end using the latest fashion of decorative brickwork, but the terrace continued to be divided into eight small dwellings, by now mainly for agricultural workers.

Fast forward to modern times, with sales and adaption to the present scene, the two 'new' houses have each been created out of three old units, while others have been demolished to separate them.

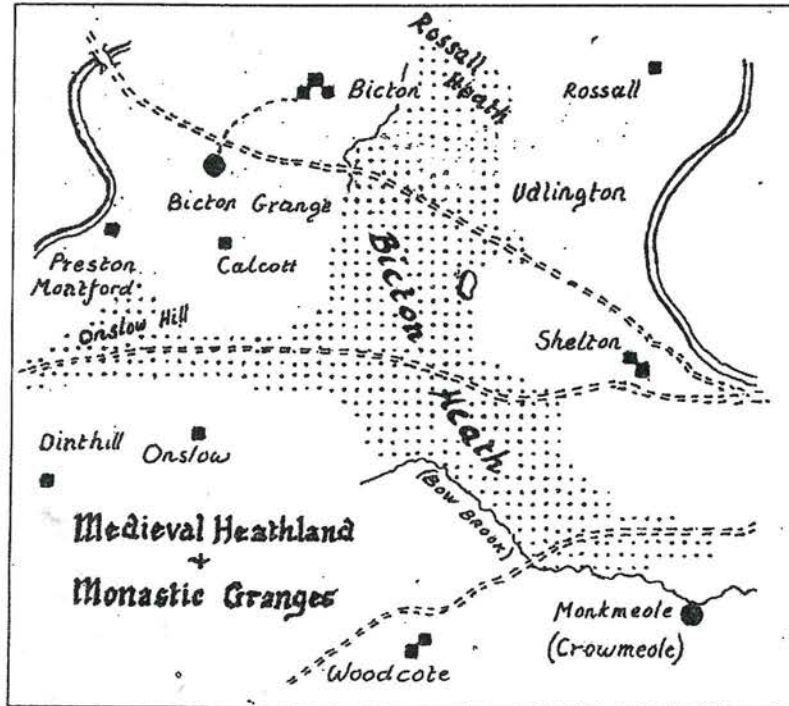
Meanwhile on the opposite side of the lane, in the corner of Uldington (Villa) land, a pair of cottages were built in the late 19th century, but being rather 'basic' have been removed rather than improved.

Further down the Lane, just across the township boundary stands a short terrace of improved and modernised Victorian cottages associated with the Rossall state. Here their story starts with the closure of Rossall Heath in 1829 - 30, which, unlike Bicton Heath, had been kept clear of cottage encroachments. One exception was right here, where messrs Tipton and Morris had their cottages and small irregular closes around them. The 'enclosure' process, which produced a new landscape of straight roads and

produced in Wales helped to make Shrewsbury prosperous, as can be judged from some fine timber houses which survive from those times.

As already discussed in this series, the heath has long since disappeared as each township enclosed its portion or allowed it to fill up with cottages. During this process, John Mytton of Halston challenged the Borough of Shrewsbury by claiming Lordship of the Manor of Bicton on the grounds that he owned the old monastic property at Meole and Bicton which included rights over the heathland. Therefore, at the 'inclosure', in 1768, he was allotted all the recent cottage encroachments. (Later sold in 1824)

John Mytton eventually sold Grange farm to Sir John Hill, in 1791, thus adding it to the Preston Montford estate, which, in turn, passed to the Wingfields in 1829. The name alone reminds us of all that monkish history, while, at the other end of the heath, we still have Mytton Oak road. In between, one can now appreciate the significance of 'Shepherds Lane'.....Baa.



P.S. Our local Shrewsbury Chronicler reported in 1576 "This year the whole month of June was so unreasonable weather of wind and great rain that the people where in great fright of dear breadcorn" - sounds familiar.....



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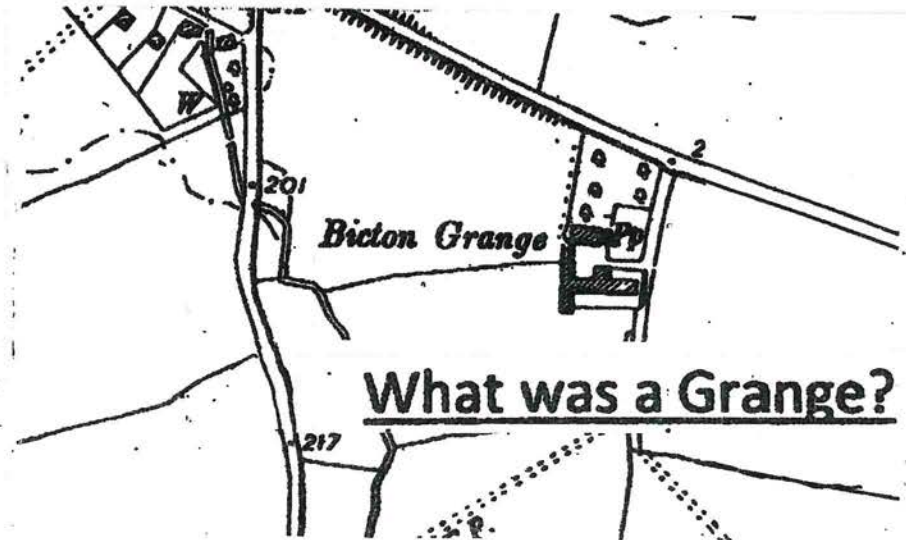
Bicton Village News

HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Part 63

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



What was a Grange?

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 63

What was a Grange?

From time to time, new building developments around Shrewsbury have been labelled a 'Grange' or 'Manor', in order to convey some up-market image. Since the Norman conquest the English language has adopted many such French words for the same reason, as in the case of 'mansion' (maison) to describe a large 'house'. The meat eating, French speaking aristocracy likewise consumed Anglo Saxon cows as 'beef' (boeuf), sheep as 'mutton' (mouton) and swine as 'pork'.

In this context, the term 'Grange' was reserved for the agricultural enterprises of the French inspired monasteries established in the 12th and 13th centuries, several examples of which were around Shrewsbury. Grange Farm at Bicton has already been pointed out in this series, but now needs to be more fully explained. It was one of the properties of 'Buildwas Abbey' which had been founded by Roger de Clinton, Bishop of Lichfield, in the 1135. Soon after, the Abbey joined the Cistercian order, named after the original 'mother house' at Citeaux in Burgundy. The ethos of the order was a simple self-sufficient life with emphasis on hard manual work rather than scholarship. Their buildings were plain and on sites chosen partly for their commercial possibilities. In the case of Buildwas, the sites lay on the navigable Severn just where the stream descended from Wenlock Edge to drive mills and fill fishponds. Early growths of land included pastures on the Stiperstones, suitable for sheep ranching.

Locally, the Bishop of Lichfield (for a brief period relocated at Chester) held the manor of Meole Brace and therefore it would be no surprise that in 1192, Roger's successor granted the Abbey more land here on which to build a grange. This estate therefore acquired the name Monkmoole, now known as Crowmeole in Cophthorne, where it also gave access to a belt of heathland stretching as far as Bicton and Preston Montford, ripe for exploitation.

In 1236, Roger of Onslow granted the Abbey 'common of pasture' on his part of the heath for sheep from the grange, which Roger promised not to impound if they strayed. In return, the Abbey promised to appoint their own Shepherd and allow Roger to keep 120 sheep.

In 1247, William de Bykton, granted the Abbey a 'grange' and lands in Bicton, including common of pasture for 18 Oxen, 24 cattle and followers, 4 horses and 300 sheep. Significantly, no deals were struck with Preston Montford, which was owned by another monastery, Lilleshall Abbey.

With all these deals, it is no wonder that a later valuation of the properties in Meole showed some decline on the arable production, but increase in the value of stock!

All this fitted the national picture in which the Cistercian houses behaved like a Multinational Development Corporation exploiting the commercial potential of hitherto undeveloped areas. As the wool trade was very important in the British economy, monasteries clearly wanted part of the action. British wool was in great demand from continental weavers and this stimulated a thriving export trade. Lawrence of Ludlow, for instance, was able to build Stokesay Castle from his profits in this business.

At first, the granges would have been run by the direct labour of 'lay brothers' belonging to the Abbey, but, later in the Middle Ages, after disturbances in Welsh wars and the The Black Death, they were usually let or 'farmed out' to laymen. The monastery therefore took only rents rather than actual produce, like many orders had done from the start. Preston Montford, for instance, had been an endowment of St Alkmund's church Shrewsbury (Preston = priest's tun), which was taken over by Lilleshall Abbey, while rents from Calcott supported St John's Hospital at the Welsh Bridge in Frankwell. Bicton itself was held by the 'College of Canons' at St Chad's Church.

Nationally, religious institutions had become very important landowners, but in the 16th century all this was changed with the activities of Henry VIII. His quarrel with Rome over his divorce from Katherine of Aragon led to the dissolution of monasteries and confiscation of their properties. These were redistributed amongst the multitude of existent landowners loyal to the King. Here, the Bicton and Meole granges went to Edward Grey, Lord Powys, whose son passed them on to the Foxe and Leyton families. Further land deals then involved the Mytton family, who, in fact had already been involved as tenants over many years.

By now the wool trade had also changed, with the increase in domestic manufacturing, rather than the export of raw materials. Trading in cloth

landowners and the merchant classes of Shrewsbury needs further investigation!

The hearth tax of 1672 implies four main farmhouses at the Woodcote end of the township, including one occupied by a Waring, most likely at Upper Farm, while Lower Farm, with its 6 heaths, still clearly visible today, was occupied by Richard Langford. Local farm workers obviously occupied seven cottages spread between Woodcote and Horton.

In the 18th century, Lower Farm was owned by Charles Jones, whose descendants sold it to John Wingfield of Onslow in 1825. Upper Farm was likewise added to the Onslow estate in 1826 after the Waring family, like the Jones', had simplified the complex family interests in order to facilitate the sales. Now, all within one estate, farm boundaries could be modified and most recently these two farms have actually been amalgamated.

Since, through much of this time the land was actually worked by tenants, landlords had little incentive to modernise their dwellings, so that they remain as monuments to these formative years in the creation of our modern farming landscape.



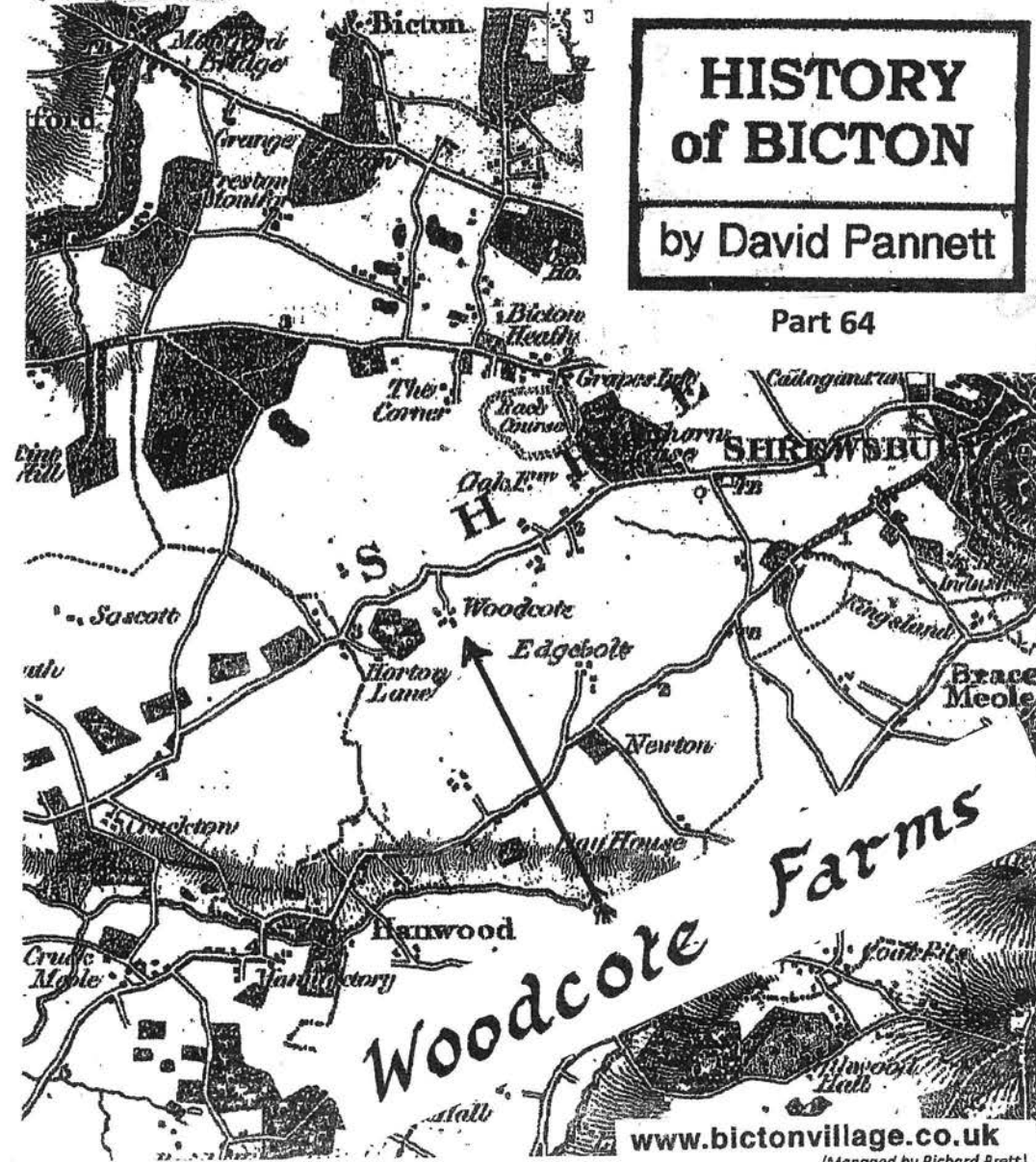
Lower Farm
Woodcote

Bicton Village



News

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Aug 2012
No 553



HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Part 64

Woodcote Farms

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 64

Woodcote Farms

Many people in Bicton, north of the Welshpool road, may not realise that the parish also extends south beyond the Montgomery Road to include the farming settlement of Woodcote. The township of 'Woodcote and Horton', like Rossall and Onslow, was once another outlying portion of St Chad's parish, which was added to the new^{civil} parish of Bicton in 1883.

The farmland here occupies an area of undulating glacial landscape in the headwaters of the Rad Brook between the main Severn and Rea Brook valleys. Boulder clay ridges and damp hollows made it unsuitable for large-scale arable farming and therefore its early history was dominated by woodland and heath as part of the former 'Han Wood', hence the name. In this area it was one of a group of small mediaeval settlements straddling the borders of Pontesbury and Meole parishes: Onslow, Dinthill, Sascott and Edgebold. Onslow and Horton were in fact partially in Pontesbury parish.

Names with 'cott' or 'cote' imply small hamlets and indeed Domesday Book of 1086 record no more than one or two plough teams in each. Nevertheless, the communities still worked 'open field' systems with intermixed strips and shared pastures. Aerial photographs show traces of typical mediaeval plough ridges preserved under pasture at Onslow and Dinthill, while 'furlong' field names persisted in Woodcote at least.

In many ways all these were typical of many parts of western Shropshire, where a history of original Welsh settlement and difficult glacial landforms produced a pattern of small hamlets rather than the larger villages found in the English Midlands. As a result, some may now only consist of the single modern farm.

The history of Woodcote actually illustrates very well the stages by which this original system of cooperative smallholders evolved into the modern farming landscape, a process often summed up as being the transition from 'feudalism to capitalism'.

During the 12th and 13th centuries, the population of England expanded during a favourable warm spell. New land was often taken into cultivation by clearing woodland, called 'assarting'. The irregular outline of Woodcote Coppice certainly suggests such activity, while, all around, 'Han Wood' has all

but disappeared. Land deals within the township used the term 'virgate', which denotes a peasant holding in an 'open field' system. Builwas Abbey even acquired one or two, perhaps to gain more grazing rights over the waste.

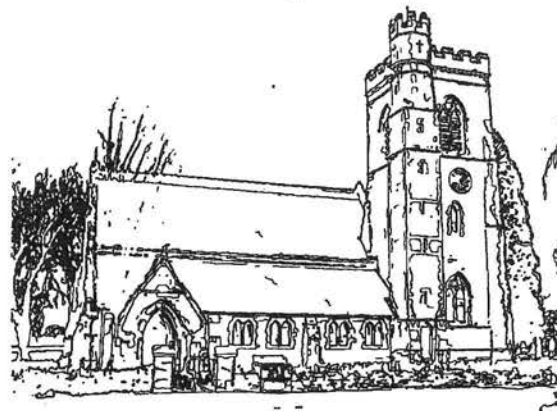
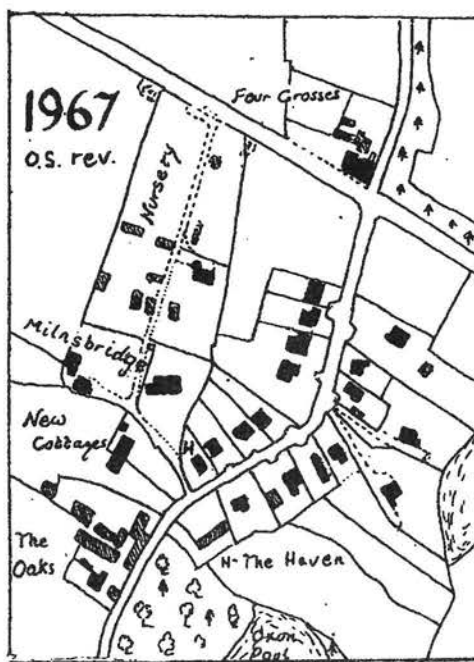
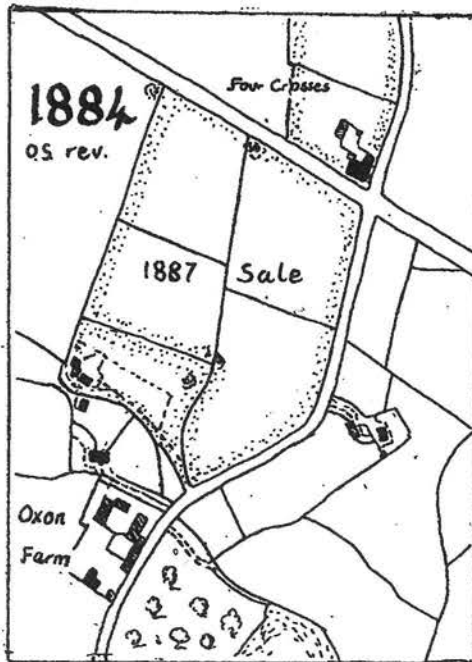
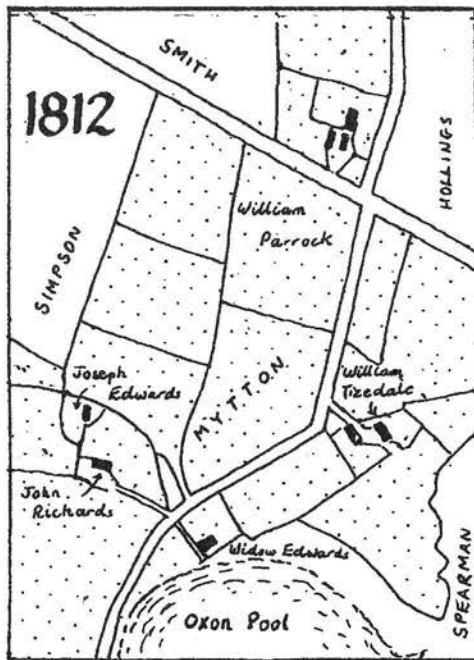
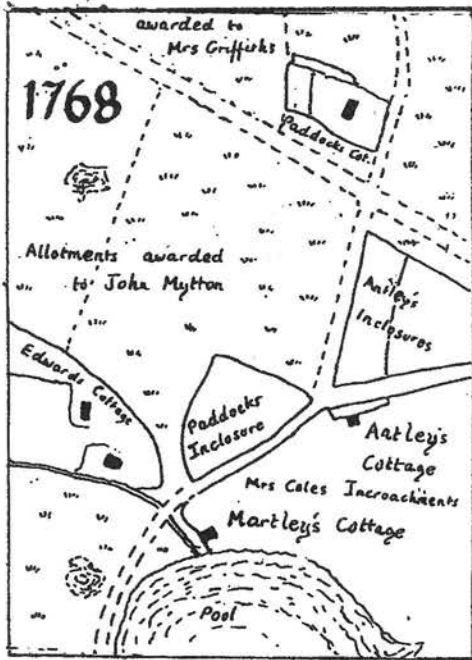
In the 1327, eight inhabitants were taxed in Woodcote, but, soon after, poorer weather heralded the trend towards the 'Little Ice Age', before a further disaster arrived in 1348, namely the 'Black Death', which reduced the national population by at least a third. In farming communities this left fewer people to work the land in the old ways. On the other hand, more land was available to individuals who survived, offering more commercial opportunities. In particular, there was a shift to more stock farming and in the following centuries some landlords in the Midlands even evicted remaining tenants in order to run commercial sheep and cattle 'ranches' on the former village land.

Here in Woodcote, we have a record of how related changes took place: in 1483 the three landowners agreed to redivide their property between them in a simpler way, replacing an intermixed ~~or~~ muddled pattern inherent in three 'open fields'.

Thomas Horton, who also claimed to be 'Lord of the Manor', took the field towards Horton, John Baylis took the second field and meadow towards Onslow and the heath, while Nicholas Wearing took the third field towards Hanwood and Edgebold and also a 'moss' on the other side of the Montgomery Road. Significantly, each of these portions included not only the new owners own farmsteads or 'messuages', but also others of former tenants or owners, all of which added up to that same 1327 figure of eight. Only Thomas Horton actually lived in one, suggesting the other two were 'absentee' landlords.

This agreement certainly allowed a new kind of farm unit within its own ring fence, complete with more hedges to confine stock. Farmsteads could also be built out in these new fields, as at the Oak and Woodcote Barns, leaving only two in the original hamlet. Judging by what can be seen today, these were obviously modernised. Lower farm is of particular interest as it includes one part whose features point to the end of the 16th century, rather like Owen's mansion in Shrewsbury High Street. The Shrewsbury Chronicler reported that in 1575 the dwelling house of Mr. John Hosyar was burnt down here in Woodcote. Could this be a rebuild? The role of new

THE FOUR CROSSES 'CLUSTER'



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HISTORY
of BICTON
 by David Pannett

Bickton

Part 65
THE FOUR CROSSES
'CLUSTER'

Village News

www.bicktonvillage.co.uk



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 65

THE FOUR CROSSES 'CLUSTER'

Since the creation of the Shropshire Unitary Authority i.e. Shropshire Council and the issuing of new ideas by the government, there has been a review of local planning matters. One aspect has been the designation of small rural communities outside the main 'villages' as 'clusters' in which limited expansion of housing would be allowed after years of restriction. In Bicton Parish the area around the Four Crosses is one example. How did this area develop here?

The story of the Inn itself has already been explained in some detail in this series (June '09), but we must now look at the surrounding settlement using the evidence from a succession of maps: inclosure, tithe, sale catalogues and Ordnance Survey to explore its origin.

Like many parts on the south side of Bicton, this story starts with open heathland, where small cottage encroachments had been established by the eighteenth century (Dec '07). Then in 1768, the principle landowners agreed to 'inclose' it, employing surveyors to plan a new landscape and allotting each a share. Since John Mytton also claimed to be 'Lord of the Manor', he was allotted those cottage encroachments, then mainly occupied by farmworkers and assorted local tradesmen.

A map of Bicton made by John Saxton in 1812 for Shrewsbury School shows the new landscape and lists the owners and tenants, of which only the Edwards family appeared to continue here as tenants from the 'inclosure' period. Most land here was part of the Mytton estate, but thanks to the wild lifestyle of the famous Jack Mytton, it had to be sold off in 1824 to pay his debts. The inn and fields across the main road were offered as 'one lot', which John Smith added to his Bicton estate. Other land went to the Spearman of the adjacent Oxon Estate (see tomb in old churchyard)

Edward Morris then acquired this estate in 1832, although the tithe map of 1843 shows Andrew Spearman still holding land west of Shepherd's Lane, where he had erected some farm buildings. Around the same time Morris and Spearman lowered the level of Oxon Pool by digging a culvert under Shepherd's Lane (Feb 11)

Later in the century, perhaps when Charles Morris had taken over Oxon, old cottages were removed from near the pool and trees planted to create a better landscaped park around the Hall. A new pool may have been started too. Spearman's original farm buildings, were also taken over and equipped with a house to form 'Oxon Farm'.

Meanwhile, the Four Crosses had been rebuilt and continued to be run as a small farm in which a new cottage had been built at the south end. When the little estate was then sold off in 1887 this cottage was offered as a separate lot, and was bought by Miss Armine Sandford, daughter of Humphrey Sandford of The Isle,

who named it 'Milnsbridge' after her mother's Yorkshire home. Significantly, the adjacent old 'Edwards cottage' was soon removed. Across the lane the cottage and barn were cleared away only, leaving faint clues in the soil of the modern gardens. In view of their age and status this was quite appropriate. The last to go south of Milnsbridge, was replaced by a pair of 'New Cottages' built to a higher standard by local man Edward Paddock.

Further changes came after the first world war in 1920, when the 'People's Refreshment House Association' (already tenants since 1910) actually bought the Four Crosses and enlarged it (look at the brickwork when you next visit) and then, in 1927, built 'The Haven' at the corner of their land as staff accommodation.

Then in 1930, the Oxon estate, was put up for sale and, as a result, several sitting tenants were able to buy their own, while the main house and most land was acquired by the County Council. This enabled them to create smallholdings as part of that post war idealism aimed at helping entrants to the farming. Several estates had become available at this time and the characteristic smallholder cottages of hipped gables and white walls appeared in many parts of the county. Here, however, Oxon Farm was simply split and combined with 'New Cottages', which prompted a name change to 'The Oaks'. The sale also opened the way to the first housing development on the Oxon side of the lane from 1935 onwards.

After the second war even greater changes came about. In 1952 the PRHA disposed of their land attached to the Four Crosses, since small farming was no longer part of the business. It was bought by William Harold Williams of Shelton Farm, who straight away started selling plots to individuals for building, thus continuing the pattern started by 'The Haven' before the war. Behind this frontage members of the Lewis Family of Milnsbridge bought the remaining fields upon which developed a Nursery. The settlement as we now know it was virtually complete by the time of the OS Map revision of 1967.

When such development started, Bicton was under the Atcham Rural District Council, whose planners, in keeping with the inter-war mood, had a relaxed attitude to rural housing. However, by the time the District had joined with the Borough, restrictions were becoming tighter. Even the county council could not promote development on 'smallholder' land when they sold it, after recognising such schemes no longer fitted modern farming.

The result has been a minimal growth of housing since the sixties, although many have been busy with alterations and enlargements where some original properties were small.

Likewise, 'The Oaks' has become a business park, the garage has moved from the forecourt of the Four Crosses to adjacent land, the inn has been enlarged and the nursery land developed for the Brethren Meeting Hall.

The future, under the new rules, remains uncertain, but whatever happens will take place within a framework laid down in the eighteenth century upon a surface left by the last 'Ice Age'!

Nathaniel Ness of Bicton and a child of Timothy Waring from the Isle were buried at Fitz.

By coincidence, in 1689, a new church was built at Minsterley in a classical style using the same materials as seen at Bicton – brick walls with stone quoins and jambs around rectangular doors and windows (Bicton later acquired a gothic east window). Another similar building is the old 'free school' at Cardington, erected in 1720. All this points to the general period, but the actual date of the chapel still remains a mystery.

At this time Sir Christopher Wren was busy rebuilding churches in a 'classical' style after the Great Fire of London in 1666 and no doubt his ideas were spreading.

In 1687, a new Act allowed greater freedom of worship to non-conformists and in the following centuries their chapels and meeting houses were to appear in many part of the County, including Bicton parish.

In 1853, the Bicton Chapel was upgraded to a Parish Church, but later replaced by our new church in 1886, leaving the old building to decay. However, even as a ruin, it remains a rare monument to that century which gave us a modern world through so much 'trial and error'.

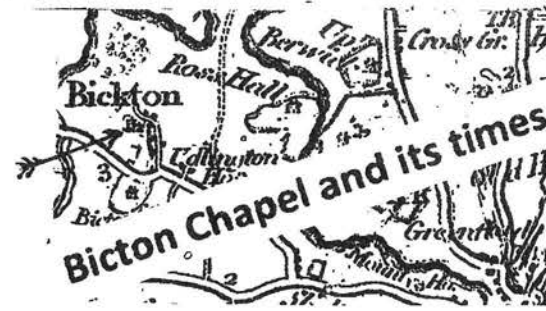
P.S.

Baptisms in St. Chads parish register:

1681 Sept 9. John son of John and Catherine Edridge of Bicton [entered in margin, suggesting ceremony had taken place elsewhere i.e. Bicton Chapel]

1685 June 24. John son of John Davis bricklayer dec. and Martha [shows necessary tradesmen had been available in the parish]

1698 March 6. Sarah daughter of Thomas Wright of Shelton baptised at the chapel [Bicton?]



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Bicton Chapel 1879. based on drawing by Stanley Leighton

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**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

Part 66

News

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 66

Bicton Chapel and its times

When discussing the school curriculum, some historians note that the seventeenth century does not always get the attention it deserves. By contrast, the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I always attract popular attention, while here in Shropshire the later Industrial Revolution is well appreciated. However, the period 1600-1700 saw more changes than in any other century, laying the foundations of our modern world, with the creation of many institutions which are still with us today in the fields of religion, politics, finance, science and international trade. Naturally, Bicton was caught up in all this, partly thanks to its close association with Shrewsbury.

The century opened with the death of Elizabeth and the arrival of James Stuart from Scotland (James VI), uniting the kingdoms. Religious and political struggles continued in Ireland requiring Shrewsbury to contribute its quota of soldiers, which included Edward Cloob, a butcher from Montford Bridge. The local chronicle also reported on yet more bad weather and poor harvests and also the return of plague to Shrewsbury.

Religious debate following the protestant reformation remained bound up with politics and loyalty to the Crown. We still celebrate Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot (1603) and more recently the anniversary of the King James Bible (1611) which was to have a lasting impression on our language. On the one hand, leading bishops, especially Archbishop Laud, were promoting traditional forms of worship, while others, inspired by Calvin, preferred simple forms based upon the words of the bible. In doing so, they challenged the authority of the bishops and felt restricted in their freedom to choose. Emigration, such as with the Pilgrim Fathers, became the answer for some.

For centuries, monarchs had promoted their particular state religions, through which, in return, they claimed divine authority to rule their subjects. Like some other European kings, Charles I, who succeeded James, still believed in this, but his parliament did not. To cut a long story short, there followed Civil War, his execution in 1649 and the establishment of the 'Commonwealth'.

Both nationally and locally, the loyalties of leading gentry and businessmen were split. Humphrey Sandford of the Isle held Royalist

sympathies, while Thomas Mytton of Halston, who also held land in Bicton, actually gained the rank of Major General in the Parliamentary army. No fighting took place in Bicton, but a small parliamentary garrison controlled the road at Montford Bridge. (Incidentally, the bridge had recently been repaired so well by the borough authorities in 1628, that it was to survive very damaging floods in 1634 and 1672).

In the end, Oliver Cromwell, 'Lord Protector' of the Commonwealth, began behaving like a dictator so that, after his death, Charles II was welcomed back from exile and the mood of the nation changed. After the Commonwealth 'Presbyterian' management, the Church of England reverted to its traditional Episcopal structure, prompting many changes of local ministers.

Throughout this time Bicton remained part of St Chad's parish where the town centre graveyard was always crowded, especially after the recurrent plagues of 1604, 1630 and 1654. It is therefore no surprise that some people from Bicton and Rossall made use of nearby rural churches instead. For example, Richard Hussey, 'gent' and his wife were buried at Montford in 1625 and 1622 respectively, while Humphrey Sandford and his niece of the Isle were buried at Fitz in 1654-5. Others from Preston Montford and Dinthill, part of St Alkmund's parish, also used Montford and Ford. Relationships between them and particular priests and ministers may have played a part as well as 'geography'.

With the Restoration, the Church of England was eager to assert its position as a state monopoly with the help of the 'Act of Uniformity' and a new book of Common Prayer in 1662 (350th anniversary!). It also tried to steer a middle course between old Catholic rites and those favoured by puritans, but failed to stem the rise of non-conformist congregations meeting in their own homes and chapels.

Perhaps it was in this religious environment that Bicton Chapel was built to avoid long journeys to the town and temptations to join other groups. However, the records of St Chad's are strangely silent on the matter, so we must rely instead on other clues for its actual date.

In 1677, the Borough of Shrewsbury granted an enclosure on the heath for the use of the Preacher at Bicton and also in 1676 John Taylor of Bicton left a bequest to finance a teacher in the chapel. Nevertheless, he himself was buried in St Chad's with his daughter. Likewise, as late as 1687,

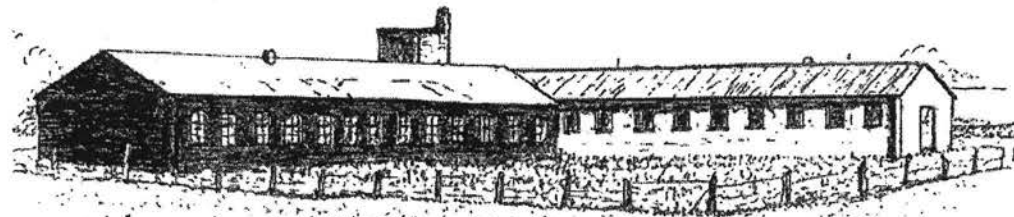
Montford Hall and then after 1957 they served as student accommodation for the Field Centre which had then taken occupation. One special group visiting each summer was the University of Birmingham archaeology courses excavating Wroxeter Roman City and through them the Walker Trust provided an extension for a classroom.

About this time a new handyman was appointed at the Centre, who, when being shown around, had to admit that he already knew the building from his wartime youth, including how the window catches worked...!

The long-term policy was to replace this accommodation, but lack of funds meant that staff had to keep on patching it up until; at last, compensation from the by-pass saved the day. Over the years, thousands of mainly young people must have slept within its walls leaving them with varied memories.

The building did, however, live on as offices and workshop for Heritage Glass, before being rented back as extra office space for the Field Studies Centre headquarters, which had moved to the Centre. Now with yet further improvements inside, it is being converted into a private home and workshop. Outwardly it has remained remarkably similar and is therefore a tribute to those original builders whose 'temporary' and 'for the duration' structure is still functioning after 70 years.

There must be many more stories of wartime here and elsewhere in the village, which we would very much like to hear about before they are forgotten forever.



Preston Montford huts - Field Centre Annexe 1967



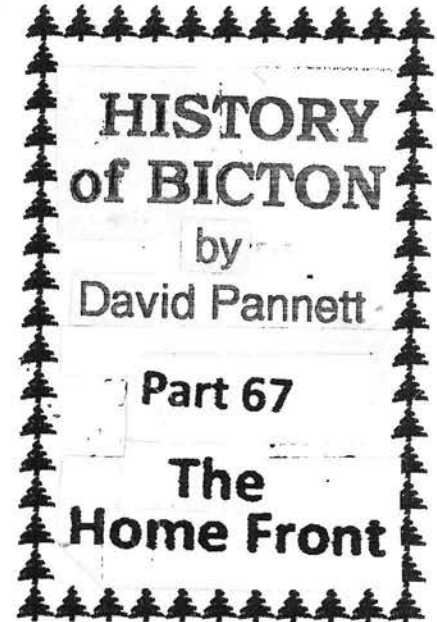
Bicton Village

News

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HISTORY
of BICTON

by
David Pannett

Part 67

The
Home Front



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 67

The Home Front

Each November we remember the events of past wars and, this year, thanks to the T.V. series 'Wartime Farm', we are prompted to think back to the impact of the last war upon British rural life. The various aspects highlighted by the programme include the drive to increase production, partially through mechanisation and the improvement of labour supply, while also dealing with the resulting problems of accommodation. War also brought the cultural impact of a military presence in the area.

As the war started, here in Bicton Jim Paddock was moving from the Pound to Red House, replacing James Roberts. Mrs Lloyd Jones was giving way to the Everalls at the Woodlands where George Percy Mead had been for many years, before retiring to the Hall. James Paddock ran Bicton Farm, while further out, Trevor Roberts had replaced Len Cooke at the Grange and Bernard Cassels occupied Bicton House. Several smallholders farmed in Calcott and along Shepherds Lane.

Most were traditional mixed farms, some supplying liquid milk to Shrewsbury, either directly or through local dairymen such as William Dudley at the Villa. Mechanisation was developing slowly, with the odd Fordson tractor already supplementing the Shire horses. Nevertheless, work was still very labour-intensive, requiring input from all the family as well as hired hands. Peak times often involved neighbours helping each other with labour or equipment.

In this situation the extra help provided by the Women's Land Army proved very useful. Most 'lived in' the spacious farmhouses which had been built with such workers in mind. Later they also occupied the huts at Preston Montford originally used by prisoners of war, and cycled out to various farms each day.

Prisoners had become available as the tide of war turned, starting with the Italian defeat in North Africa in early 1941 and some came to work in this area, including Churncote. Meanwhile, Rommel's Afrika Korps replaced them with greater success until repulsed at El Alamein in late 1942. A camp was set up in Ellesmere which then supplied German PoWs to local farms, including Bicton on a daily basis.

Three who worked at Red House illustrated the extremes amongst them: Karl Köpper, an older, educated English-speaking 'gentleman' brought up in the pre-Nazi era, who fitted well into the Paddock family and, by contrast, a young pilot, a product of the Hitler Youth, who resented his situation. Karl was to remain in contact with the family after his repatriation and appreciated some food parcels to help with the acute shortages which he found in his shattered country.

The village also hosted young evacuees from Liverpool, which was suffering bombing raids. A relative came to Red House while young William Stracham was billeted next door with Sam and Dora Birch in White House.

Sam was also Sergeant in the local Home Guard, led by Captain Winstanley (from Meole Brace). The hedges and woods of the neighbourhood provided them with battle training ground, where many paths often led to the Four Crosses or the Welsh Harp afterwards!

During the nineteenth century quite a few girls travelled far to work as domestics in the 'big houses' where they met and married local lads (May '09). Genetically this was very 'healthy' for rural communities, avoiding unions between related local families. Cousin marriages have always held medical risks and even Charles Darwin worried about them when marrying his cousin, Emma Wedgwood. Today it is still an issue within some religious communities. However, as the flow of servants declined, 'Land Girls' allowed this useful tradition to continue.

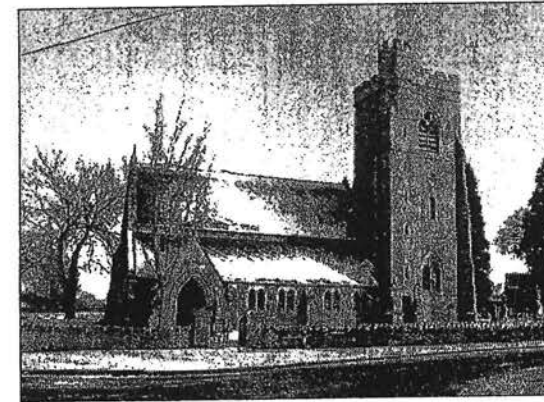
Our late editor, Muriel Morris, for instance, originally came from Liverpool and gained her love of the Shropshire countryside and also a husband while working as a 'Lumber Jill' (Women's Forestry Service). Other 'Land Girls' likewise married local lads in this area. Illicit unions also occurred, one of which involved a reverend gentleman.....!

At the same time, far travelled males came in the form of servicemen, including Americans from the Atcham base who could be met when off duty in Shrewsbury. Thus, one local land girl became a G.I. bride (St Chad's register shows that Dutch troopers of William of Orange, during the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1689-90, had the same effect... So all this was nothing new!)

Apart from some local family histories, one lasting monument to these times are those brick and wooden huts at Preston Montford. After the war they continued in use by the 'Probation Home' which now occupied Preston

planned North West Relief Road.

There is plenty of 'future' to discuss, but such future must take place in a landscape framework laid down during many past centuries.



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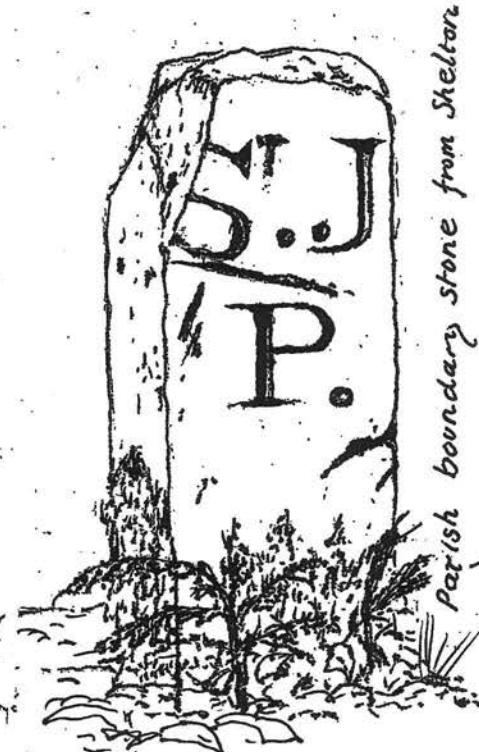
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HISTORY
of BICTON
by David Pannett

Bicton Village News

part 68
Beating the Bounds

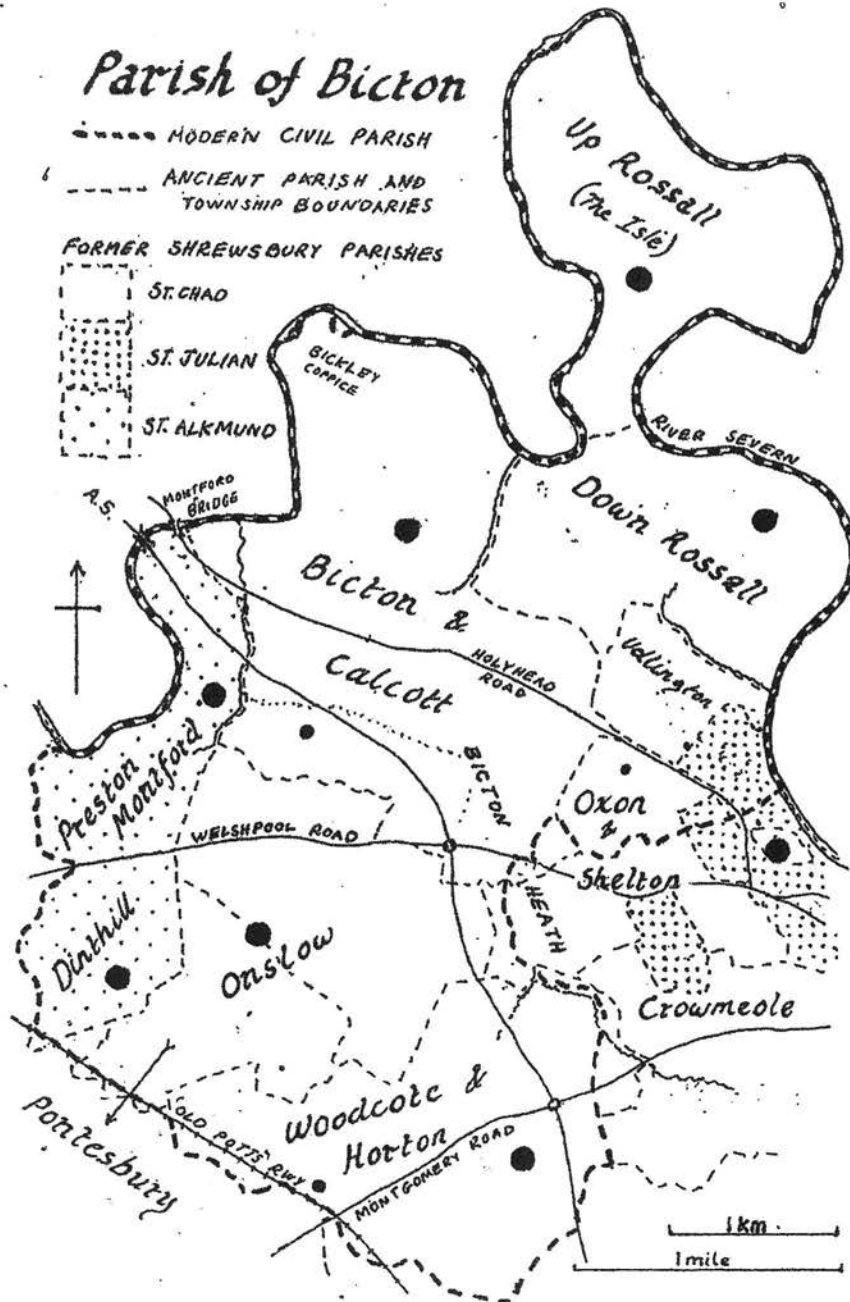


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David Pannett's History of Bickton part 68

Beating the Bounds of Bickton

The recent request for the local community to work out a 'Parish Plan', in order to discuss its future, first of all highlights the need for all to appreciate the actual bounds of the Parish. Since it is quite extensive, those at one end may not know much about the other side, nor how this boundary pattern came about.

During the Middle Ages the township of 'Bickton and Calcott' was but one of several similar units around Shrewsbury which were outlying portions of town centre parishes. Most on this side of the town belonged to St. Chads, except Preston Montford and Dinthill, which belonged to St. Aldmund, while Shelton was a 'patchwork' mixture of St. Chad and St. Julian. Onslow was also unusual in being split between St. Chad and Pontesbury, a situation dating back to Domesday when two manors were recorded here, one of which belonged to an owner with other interests in Pontesbury. Indeed, almost all these townships were recorded at this time, showing how the basic framework of settlements and their respective territories is now over a thousand years old. The southern boundary is still also that between the dioceses of Hereford and Lichfield, which originate from early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

The actual lines followed by the various lengths of boundary are a mixture of natural and man-made features. The River Severn is the most obvious, but note how property and parish boundary still pass through 'barge gutters' around sites of mediaeval fish weirs, even when they have since silted up, as against Mytton near Bickley Coppice.

Small tributary streams are also followed, especially between Bickton and both Preston Montford and Rossall. The Shrewsbury to Oswestry road via Montford Bridge is an ancient route, also used as a local township boundary in places. Around the Welshpool Road some of the lines may have been regenerated during the enclosure of former heathland. Otherwise boundaries follow a mixture of sweeping lines around woodland on former open areas and zig-zags amongst an existing interlocking field pattern. There is scope for more detailed study here, as the structure of boundary hedges may offer more clues to their history.

During the course of the Middle Ages, all these townships became absorbed into the 'Liberties of Shrewsbury', within which the borough authorities were taking on some responsibilities from the old feudal lords. One local

landowner had established a small chapel at the Isle, but this did not survive the reformation, so for most of the area people had to travel into town for services, mainly on foot.

To ease this problem a chapel was eventually built at Bickton in the late 17th century (Oct. 12) as an outpost of St. Chads. By the nineteenth century, as population expanded in the suburbs of Shrewsbury and around Bickton Heath, there was even greater need to improve the church provision in the area. Thus, in 1853, Bickton chapel was upgraded to a parish church serving also Rossall, half of Onslow, Preston Montford and Dinthill and also Uddington including part of St. Julians near Shelton.

In the following year Christchurch was built at Bickton Heath to serve a new 'ecclesiastical district' comprising Shelton, Oxon, Woodcote and Horton and Crowmeole. This certainly simplified those old parish boundaries, which in 1845 had helped determine the siting of the new County Asylum.

In 1855, the 'Divided Parishes Act' established the modern pattern of civil parishes, which now no longer needed to coincide exactly with old ecclesiastical boundaries. Many of the secular functions of the old parish system, such as 'poor law' administration and highway maintenance were, by now, being taken over by new district and county councils or 'poor law' unions. In this way, Woodcote and Horton, together with Oxon and adjacent parts of Shelton were added to Bickton Civil Parish, while remaining linked to the existing ecclesiastical district of Oxon and Shelton. The remainder of Shelton became part of the civil parish of St. Chads, but outside the Borough. In 1934 further changes took place when the Shrewsbury borough boundaries were extended to include Shelton and Bickton Heath. This prompted some adjustments around the borders of Bickton parish at the south end of Shepherds Lane and the eastern corner of Woodcote. The Pontesbury part of Onslow was also transferred to Bickton, so ending the almost comical situation of a parish boundary passing through the middle of the Wingfields' mansion. By coincidence the Shropshire and Montgomeryshire Railway, (Old Potts Railway), had been built in the 1860s roughly along the line of these local parish boundaries and now it proved convenient to actually use it as a length of boundary instead.

Since then, pressure for further adjustments still comes from suburban expansion around Bickton Heath, especially on the edge of Gains Park estate. Indeed, the long-term policy of the Shropshire Council is to expand such development into Bickton Parish at Oxon in conjunction with a section of the