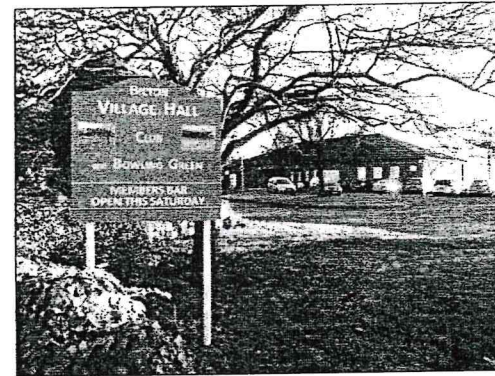


J F Kennedy might have said: "Ask not what Bicton can do for you, rather ask what you can do for Bicton."



W.I. PARTY IN
OLD VILLAGE HALL

Mrs. Galliers, President
Mary Fowles entertains



Bicton Village News

Offprint from

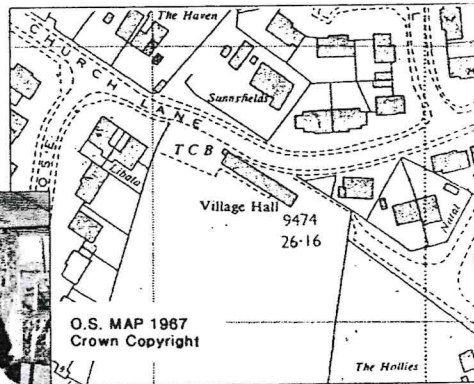
Jan 2015

No 582

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

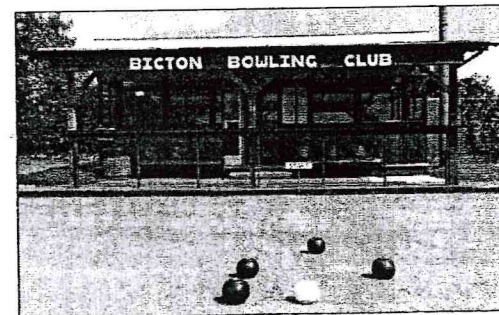
by David Pannett

Part 92



Bicton Horticultural Show 1965

Vernon Mann, ? Loader, HRJ Ward, CG Edwards,
Creswell Butters, Mill Naylor, Mary Fowles



THE OLD
VILLAGE HALL

website www.bictonvillage.co.uk

David Pannett's History of Bicton part 92

The Old Village Hall

Once again we have been celebrating the midwinter with a variety of social gatherings, some of which have made good use of the Village Hall. This year, in particular, memories of past wars have cropped up and it is no surprise that there were war connections even to our first Village Halls. Most of their story has already been discussed by our late editor, Muriel Morris, in these pages over ten years ago, but with so many newcomers to the village it is perhaps worth repeating it now for their sakes.

One 'architectural' contribution made by recent wars was the development of simple temporary huts for troops and POWs at the various camps. With peace, most would have been demolished, but prefabricated wooden structures could be recycled elsewhere. One such might have been that Tea Room erected in the 1920s by the Peoples Refreshment House Association behind the Four Crosses. Besides offering refreshment outside normal licensed hours, this hut became the venue for meetings, such as that of the new WI, and village parties. It therefore started functioning as a sort of 'Village Hall' and demonstrated the need for a 'proper' one for the community. With this in mind, shortly after WWII a committee was formed to promote the idea (after a failed attempt in 1935).

By now the war had produced even more 'huts': steel sheet 'Nissen' which tended to rust, the brick and concrete 'HORSA' (Hutting Operation for the Raising of the School-leaving Age) which only lent themselves to alternative uses on site (e.g. former Grafton School) and that same prefabricated wooden design. Shropshire may have been a safe distance from most action, but for this very reason it was home to several training airfields and POW camps, where such surplus huts were now becoming available.

For two and a half years the committee organised a variety of fundraising events: whist drives, fetes and dances in local fields, school and the old Four Crosses 'hut'. One member, James Paddock senior even gave a plot of land beside Church Lane sufficient for a hall. He later sold the committee the remaining plot as far as the main road, on condition that it would be dedicated to public use. This would prove a valuable safeguard when so many playing fields are under threat.

A suitable building, which even had a stage, had become available at High Er call, once a busy wartime airfield. Funds, however, were now rather stretched, so it was arranged for the National Council of Social Services to

initially buy it and charge the committee a rent. The local farmers, with their trailers and barns, then undertook its removal and also storage of windows, doors and fittings until used.

Problems arose in dealing with architects and officialdom, but Revd. C A Smith, the new vicar of Bicton, who had a knack of dealing with such people, joined the committee and helped secretary Sam Dee keep the project moving forward. In particular, 'temporary planning permission was obtained for twenty years, during which it was expected that funds would be raised for a more permanent structure. The erection was then carried out by George Harben Davies, builder, of Shepherds Lane.

On 8th December 1951 the hall was officially opened by Viscount Bridgeman, Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, assisted by committee chairman Charles Wingfield of Onslow. The first big event in the hall came in 1952 with the wedding reception of Raymond and Mary Fowles, attended by 124 people (Mary had previously celebrated her 21st birthday in the Four Crosses 'hut'). Otherwise, regular meetings of local organisations could also take place, including Parish Council, PCC, School Managers, WI, Scouts, Amateur Dramatic Society and Horticultural Society. The associated field was laid out as sports pitches in 1955.

As years went by it was realised that rental income alone would not be enough to go towards a new hall and therefore other ideas would be needed. With this in mind, one end of the hall was altered to accommodate a social club and bar, which could contribute its profits. (It was mainly a DIY job led by George Davies, also commemorated on today's hall doors).

In 1972, a five year extension to the planning permission was negotiated but with the requirement to find a replacement building before this expired. This really concentrated the mind, leading to the obtaining of local government grants and renewed efforts at fundraising, even including selling waste paper from the village.

By coincidence, it was to be Muriel Morris' daughter, Susan, who held the last wedding reception in the old hall in December 1974, as the new one was being prepared beside it. This then opened for business in May 1976, since when it has seen many alterations, but that is another story.

The old hall was not totally discarded, as it was moved yet again the short distance to Grove Farm where it spent a further twenty years housing chickens. Its story had illustrated a wonderful community spirit in which so many people really worked hard to achieve their goal. As the late President

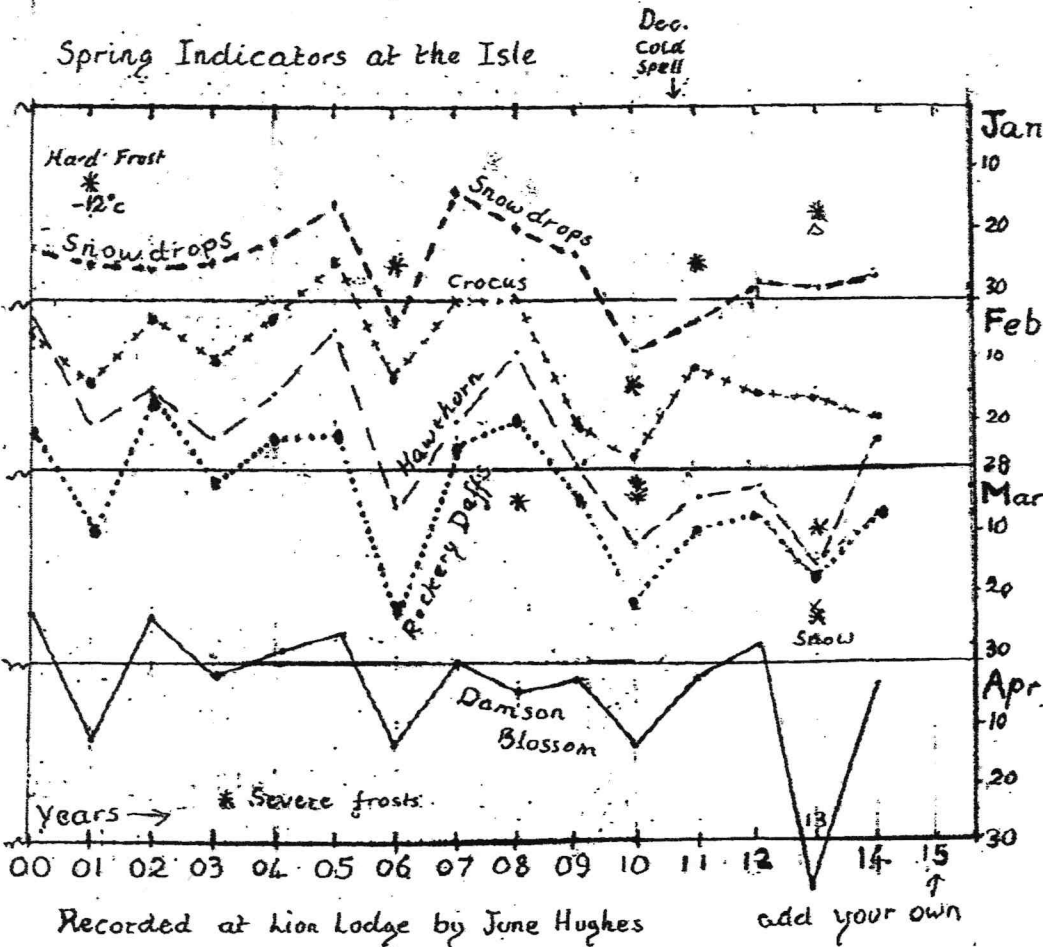
reduced and towns no longer maintained as a result.

After this event, however, the dominant weather became more settled with warmer and drier conditions, which all helped the development of new Anglo Saxon Kingdoms. Later, conditions even encouraged the Vikings to settle in Iceland and Greenland!

If nothing else, all this changing weather has given the English something to talk about other than religion and politics, although historically they were very much linked.



Offprint from
Feb 2015
No 583



Bickton Village News

**HISTORY
 of BICTON**

by David Pannett

Part 93

Our Changing Weather
 and Climate



David Pannett's History of Bicton part 93

Our changing weather and climate

Each February we must still expect our ration of winter weather, but as the days get longer we look out for those first signs of spring – bulbs emerging from the ground and blossom bursting on the trees.

Over the last 26 years, June Hughes, our garden correspondent, has been doing this, noting the dates at which each type of spring flower appears in her garden. The results, plotted as a sort of graph, have already been discussed in these columns, but now there are further years to be added (since 2010).

The earlier pattern showed that no two years were alike, but each tended to contribute to an almost regular rhythm over the course of a four or five year cycle. Also each flower type appeared in its turn, broadly in step with the others. Such was this regular rhythm one might be tempted to project the same pattern into the future...

The spring of 2013 did, however, turn out to be much cooler than expected with even a dose of winter weather coming much later than usual. In 2012, on the weekend of March 24th we experienced warm sunny conditions ideal for enjoying the 'great outdoors', but on the same weekend in 2013 a blizzard arrived to keep us indoors. On the hills it was a disaster for sheep farmers and it was no wonder that damson blossom did not appear until May.

In the following year conditions were more average and may point to an early spring in 2015. We must just wait and see – there is space for your own observations in the chart.

The mechanisms underlying these patterns operate here at a sort of climatic 'crossroads' between polar and tropical air masses and also between moist oceanic and dry continental influences. The movement of depressions and slow moving anticyclones can alter the balance of these influences, allowing one or the other to be dominant. Such outside influences are particularly important in winter when local solar heating is at its weakest, i.e. we do not make weather, just import it.

These short and long term fluctuations which we experience have been well recorded by instruments for a century or more. Earlier data comes from a variety of observations such as those in ships' logbooks. Chronicles, including one from Shrewsbury, have always been good at recording extremes, such as storms, floods, frosts and droughts from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

The general impression given by all this that the variable nature of our weather, which we now experience, has been going on for centuries. The frequency and magnitude of extreme events can change slightly however, to give whole decades higher or lower averages. Thus the 'Little Ice Age' starting in the fourteenth century was not without its warm spells.

Weather variations naturally influence agricultural production so that fluctuations in the price of grain can provide clues to them. A run of bad years may have a yet prolonged effect if there is too little seed remaining and so famine occurs.

Annual growth rings of trees reflect each year's weather conditions and a run of years can produce a distinctive pattern. By studying the rings in successive older lumps of wood with overlapping sequences, whole centuries can be dated. Apart from the value of this in dating wooden structures, rare extreme climatic events can be seen. For instance, well preserved timber from around Irish peat bogs shows that trees were severely stressed in the years 546-9. The cause could have been volcanic dust blocking out sunlight, as it has done on several occasions since, but back-up evidence from dated layers in the Greenland Ice Cap is not clear. A comet/asteroid crashing into the sea has even been suggested.

Apart from bad harvests, which must have afflicted northern Europe, it may be no coincidence that in the following years there are records of a plague sweeping through the Roman Empire, helped by trade routes. Did the climatic shock alter the behaviour of rats and fleas, as it might have done with the Black Death of the fourteenth century?

The significance of all this to our local area is the way in which a new mediaeval pattern of settlement and administration developed during the 'Dark Ages', replacing the Romanised world. Older history books may have given the impression of Anglo Saxons sweeping into the country destroying all before them, when in reality the local population had already been much

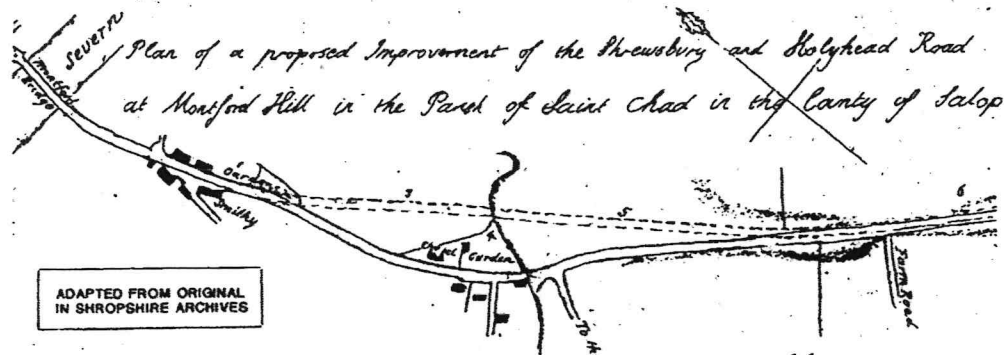
carried on the trade while also raising his own family, which included son Charles, listed as a building contractor in 1900.

Robert Lewis, a tailor, appears to have started his business on the Bickton side of the road opposite the Wingfield Arms, but had crossed to Drury Lane by the 1860s where he contrived to trade for the next 30 years.

The world has changed so much since the nineteenth century and this is reflected in the present buildings and inhabitants of Drury Lane. Nevertheless its character still owes a great deal to the historical development of its 'framework'.



Offprint from
Mar 2015
No 584



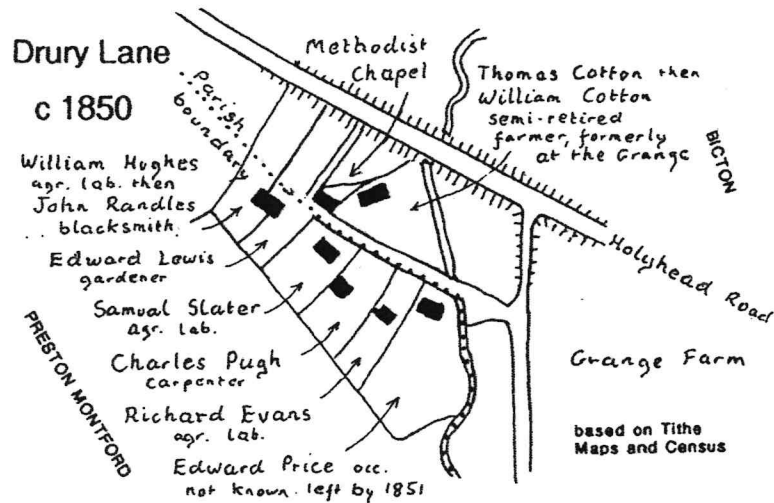
The line of the present Road is coloured yellow
 The line of the new intended Road is coloured red

John Provis
 Nov. 25 1835

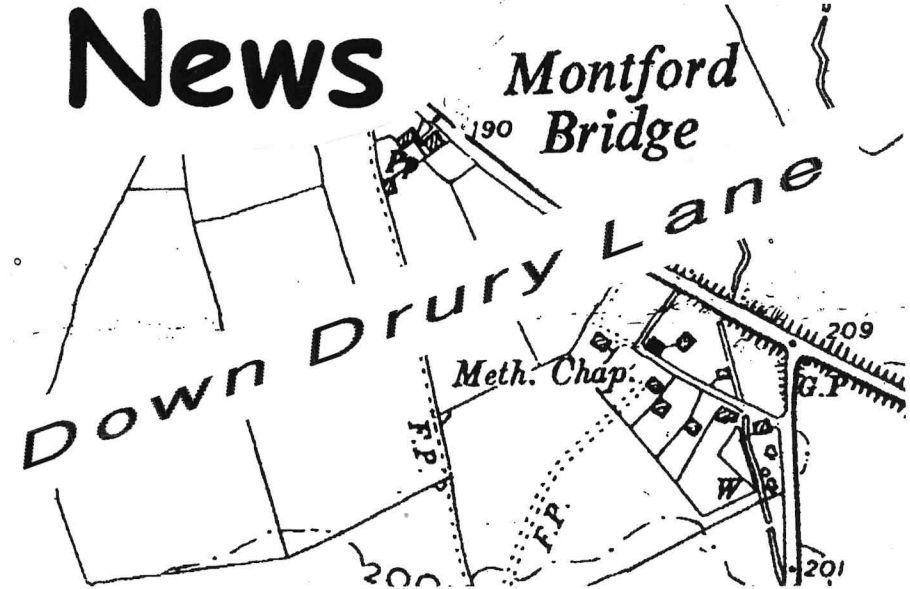
Bickton Village News

**HISTORY
 of BICKTON**
 by David Pannett

Part 94



www.bicktonvillage.co.uk



David Pannett's History of Bickton part 94

Down Drury Lane

How this short stretch of trackway acquired its name is not clear, but what is certain is that it was once part of the old Shrewsbury-Oswestry road before Telford's Holyhead Road improvements. It survived only because it was lined with a varied collection of houses, whose number has been increased recently, filling up almost all available space. The old road was also the parish boundary, so that before 1853 this community was once split between Preston Montford (St Alkmund) and Bickton (St Chad).

Today, the area is so screened by trees, fences and the road embankment that many passing by may be unaware of its character or even its origin.

Here, at the base of Grange Bank, the old road crossed a stream and its space broadened out across the damper ground. As population rose during the sixteenth century, such roadside waste would offer space for cottages, whose builders had both opportunity and necessity to pursue some non-agricultural activities. Such waste was of course 'owned' by the local lord of the manor, who would demand a 'fine' or rent for the ground. Since such 'lordship' in Preston Montford happened to be held by the Borough of Shrewsbury, we learn from its records that Richard Nesse occupied a cottage here in 1580. He may even have been 'Richard the weaver' accidentally drowned in the River Severn in 1582. Certainly John Griffiths, weaver, was charged for a cottage here in 1610.

At the time the cloth trade had been very important in both Shrewsbury and Oswestry and therefore this was an ideal location for such craftsmen.

In 1658, Robert Hughes and John Barber were granted 21 year leases here and John, at least, was also taxed for 'one hearth' in 1672.

In the following century, Preston Montford was acquired by the Adderton family, whose wealth had come from this cloth trade. However, in subsequent marriage settlements the property passed first to the Chambre family of Petton and then to the Hills of Hawkstone, who only used the Hall as a 'Dower House'. In this way, Hannah Chambre (nee Adderton) returned here as widow and continued to improve the estate. Thus in 1770, for £60 she bought from Shrewsbury Corporation "*five cottages and huts with gardens ... adjoining the turnpike road at the prill of water and small bridge occupied by Samual Morris, Thomas Porter, widow Hall, Thomas Jones,*

Edmund Phillips and Richard Phillips ... with full liberty to repair or rebuild ... all or any ...".

After her death, the Hills later sold the estate to John Wingfield of Onslow in 1829. It now included cottages and gardens occupied by Edwin Paddock, William Thomas, June Price, William Hughes, Samual Slater, Hannah Griffiths and William Lloyd, most of which must have been this same group. By this time these estates had tidied up the layout of the plots.

Meanwhile, on the Bickton side, a Methodist chapel had been built in the corner of a field owned by farmer and blacksmith William Cotton, who also built Brook House (the details of which have already been discussed in this series).

When in 1835-7 the improved Holyhead Road bypassed this community, the Wingfield estate expanded the cottage gardens into the centre of the old road, reducing it to the present narrow lane.

From now on, census returns, directories and Tithe maps reveal more about the people and their activities here.

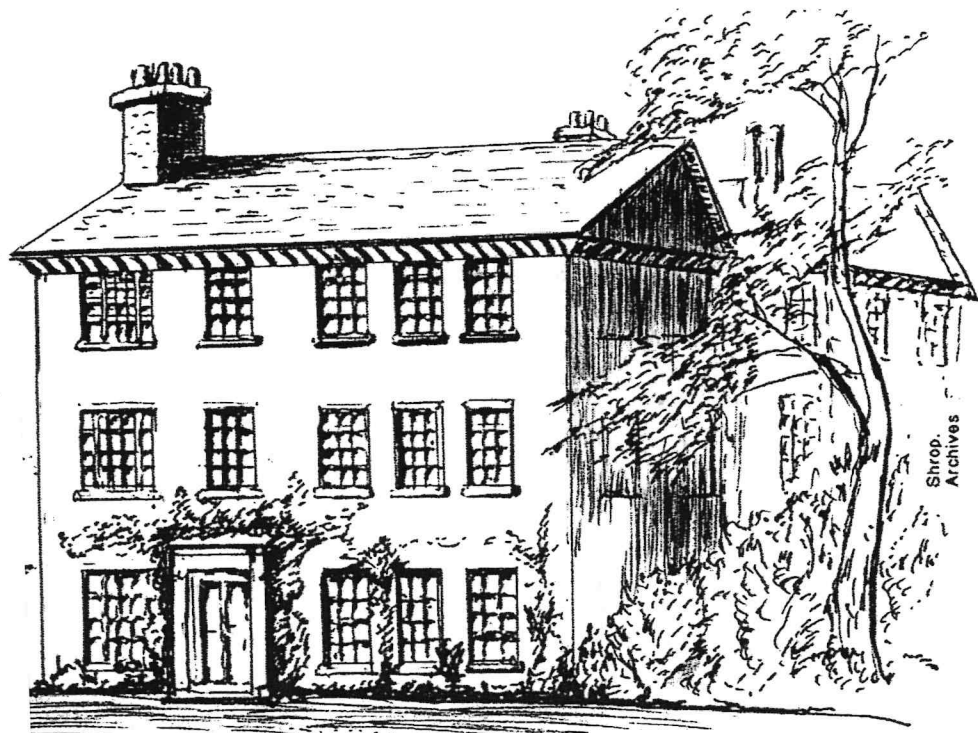
A typical feature of such cottage communities at this time was the way in which agricultural labourers moved frequently from job to job, while only self-employed tradesmen tended to stay longer in one place. This is only partially true of Drury Lane, since some labourers also spent several decades here, probably because of special roles within their landlord's estate. This must have been true for Edward Lewis, gardener at Preston Montford Hall and his neighbour Samual Slater, both originally recorded in 1829. Edward and wife Elizabeth raised a large family in a new estate cottage, which was subsequently also occupied by their daughter, Anne, until her death in 1914. Samual and younger wife Mary do not appear to have had any children, but provided space for several different lodgers over the years, while Mary continued in the cottage for many years as a widow.

Most of their other neighbours were, however, tradesmen, such as John Randles, the blacksmith, whose shop was by the Wingfield Arms. He even employed two helpers in the 1860s, but later, after the death of his wife, appears to have retired for several years before being buried in our churchyard in 1905 at the age of about 94.

Another neighbour, Charles Pugh, ran a successful carpenter's business also employing two other men in the 1860s, but died soon after. Son Andrew

A supporter then remarked that "Richard Jenkins' speeches are so calm and moderate that we expect good voting for him in Parliament, more particularly as it is evident that all the moderate men in the House will forsake the violent contests suggested by the old Tories and will not thwart the Queen's Government, to which all the waiters on Providence must now look for succour."

As a mark of respect for the man, the Mayor and corporation lined his route through Shrewsbury that January day in 1854. Now, perhaps as a mark of respect we could improve the state of his grave!..... and use our vote.



Bicton Hall 1879

BASED ON DRAWING
BY STANLEY LEIGHTON



Offprint from

Apr 2015

No 585

Bicton Village News

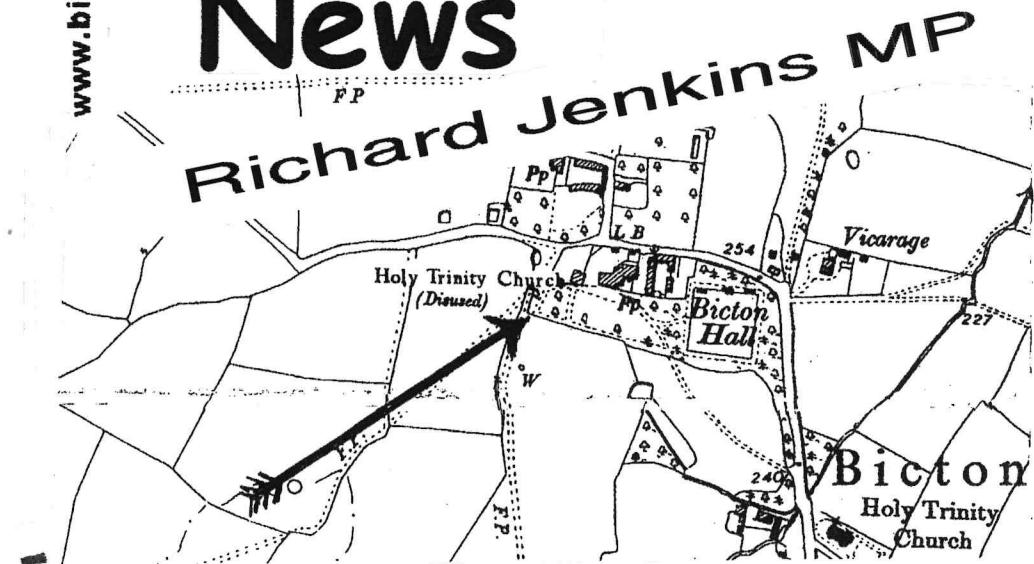
www.bictonvillage.co.uk

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

Part 95

Richard Jenkins MP



David Pannett's History of Bicton part 95

Richard Jenkins MP

This year we have an election while we also celebrate the role of Magna Carta in the evolution of our constitution. Meanwhile, international news includes the failure of new governments elsewhere, which exposes the problems of transplanting our democratic systems almost 'overnight' into societies with a different history. Political leaders must take note! Part of such political history can be seen in the life and times of Sir Richard Jenkins, who now lies under the floor of Bicton's old church, standing next to his family seat of Bicton Hall. His burial, 6th January 1854, was one of the first entries in the new parish register after the old chapel had been upgraded to a parish church. He had actually died on the 30th December 1853 at his home in Blackheath near London, but his family obviously still felt he belonged to Bicton.

Fortunately, the new railway system was making this relatively easy, even with snow problems that very same week. Other families appear to have been doing likewise as in the same month the body of Charlotte Edgerly was brought to Shrewsbury from Dover, while that of Mrs Bather was carried from Brighton for burial at Meole Brace.

Although Bicton Hall had been the main family home, Richard was actually born at Cruckton, the home of a relative, in 1785. At the age of 15 he joined the East India Company, with which he enjoyed a successful career already discussed in these pages (March 2012). He played his part in helping the Company spread its influence and power throughout the sub-continent.

He returned home in 1828 and, amongst other things, may have been responsible for improving the Bicton property. However, life did not become a quiet retirement to the country, but rather an opportunity for continued involvement with the management of the Company. He was awarded the 'Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath' in 1838, thus becoming 'Sir', by which time he had been twice elected as an MP for Shrewsbury 1830-31 and 1837-41.

It was said that, as an MP, "*he spoke little in the House, but when he did it was about Indian affairs, for which his views were much respected.*" (The wider professional experience of MPs is still an issue today!) Thus, "*although*

not gifted with eloquence or with the grace of education, he was always received with marked favour." Locally he was appreciated for helping several other young men gain cadetships with the Company.

Company and parliamentary business obviously made it more convenient to live nearer London, leaving Bicton Hall for tenants. It could have been no coincidence that these were to include the unmarried Cotes sisters from Woodcote near Shifnal, whose family was supplying a succession of MPs for north Shropshire.

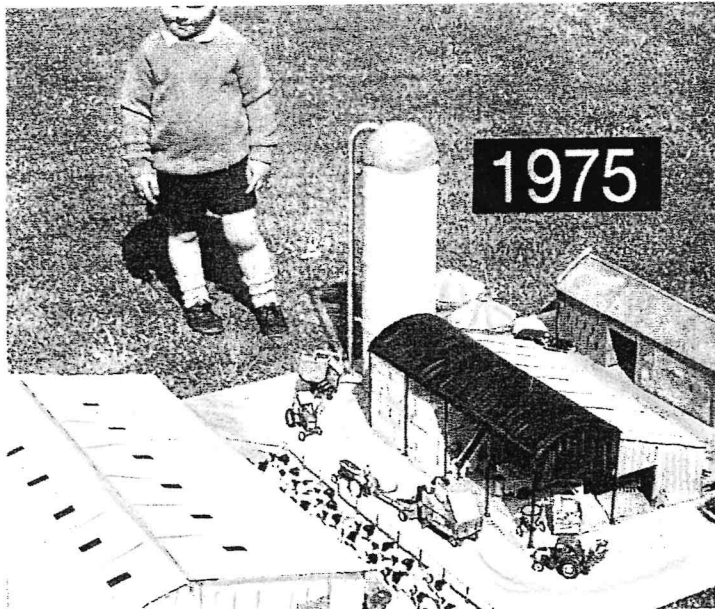
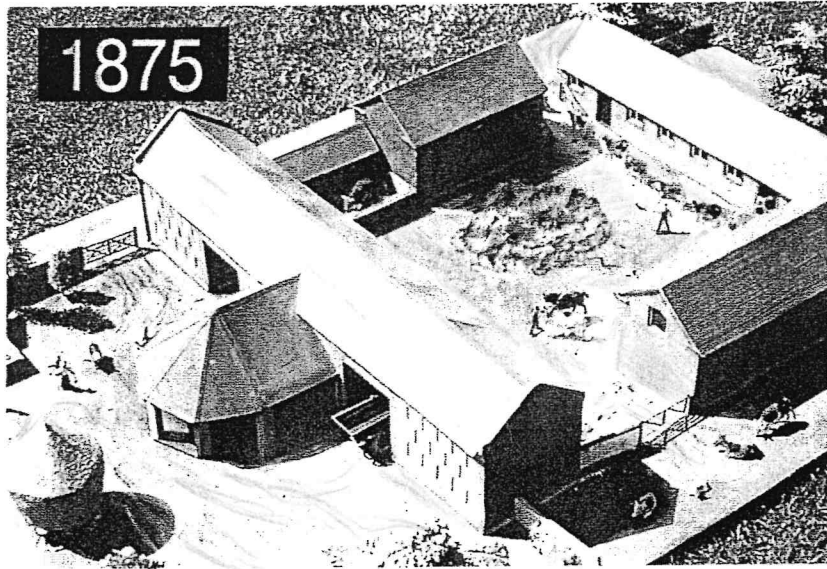
Some historians have commented that the British were "Romans in their colonies, but Greeks at home". We were creating an empire in which good government, peace, justice and trade were more important than allowing any democratic voice of the peoples. By contrast, Greek culture was associated with such democratic voices and the classical bias in public school education would have made our rulers aware of all this. Thus, while the empire expanded, helped by the likes of Richard Jenkins, back home there was agitation for reforms, which provoked much parliamentary debate. The Great Reform Act of 1832 was but one example, which improved national representation. Locally, however, not a great deal changed and Shrewsbury continued to send two MPs, while north and south Shropshire also had two each.

Because the vote was restricted to men of minimum wealth and property, only about 10% of the population could actually do so. The ordinary rural worker in a tied cottage would have to wait longer for the right, while women did not obtain it till the following century. Nineteenth century reformers were mainly male, who still thought women politically inferior.

We did, however, begin to enjoy a fairly free press, so that the obituary writer in the Shrewsbury Chronicle could point out that the paper did not always agree with Richard, but nevertheless had to admire his achievements. Earlier, at the 1837 election, the paper actually gave more space to the speeches of Mr R A Slaney, the other MP for Shrewsbury, who was a reformer.

Richard, as a Tory, was a great supporter of church and monarchy who would oppose reform, such as further change in representation, but nevertheless he would aim to address any grievances which the electorate had. At the election the reformers won more seats.

Meanwhile the original model maker has remained in Bickton and is still helping with the interpretation of the landscape in other ways. Look around yourself to discover many of these changes. 1975's three-year-old son Jeremy is now a father himself, but his own childhood collection of farm toys are still in the loft!



Bickton Village News

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Offprint from
May 2015
No 586

**HISTORY
of BICKTON**
by David Pannett

Part 96

Farmyards
then and
now

David Pannett's History of Bicton part 96

Farmyards then and now

Forty years ago this month, in 1975, the West Midland Agricultural Society celebrated its 100th anniversary at its show in Shrewsbury. As a contribution to this event, the newly formed County Museum Service put on a display in its tent showing how farming had changed over that period. To do so, apart from the usual museum artefacts, it used twin models summarising the 'then and now' changes around a typical farmyard. 'Britains' toy animals and machinery proved the best way of illustrating this, so the whole model followed their 1:32 scale.

Although designed to illustrate the general county-wide picture, the models, nevertheless, had strong connections with Bicton and neighbourhood. Firstly, the buildings, mainly put together from polystyrene ceiling tiles and cardboard, and the whole layout was the work of a small team at Preston Montford Field Centre led by David Pannett. (Warden, Charles Sinker was encouraging his staff to get involved in local organisations and had himself helped to establish the Shropshire Wildlife Trust). Also, local farms, visited by students on geography field courses, provided much of the inspiration for the design, as well as useful measurements to help get the scale correct. It even turned out that the Centre's catering coffee and bean tins were just the right size for grain bins and a silage tower. Knowing that the models would be viewed by a critical farming audience (as well as the Queen) was a stimulus to getting things right!

The 1875 farmyard was shown as a courtyard lined with brick-built cowshed, stables, granary and barn with the 'midden' in the centre. The shape of each unit reflected its function housing the small milking herd and the horse teams. The barn had wide doors and a through passage to the stackyard, but otherwise doors were rather narrow. On the far side of the barn an extension (based on one at Montford) housed the 'horse gin' which drove simple barn machinery, such as root chopping. The rest of the stackyard had more space for wagons and stacks of grain or hay raised up on mushroom-like 'staddle stones' as protection from damp and rats.

The small milking herd had to be repainted to reflect more varied traditional breeds. Pigs lived in small sties, while chicken and ducks roamed more

freely. There was a 'little bit of everything' here on the farm.

Fast forward to 1975 and this stackyard had now become the centre of activity with more space for moving machines and new buildings of metal, concrete and asbestos sheets. Perhaps the earliest amongst these had been the 'dutch barn', giving shelter to straw and hay, now in rectangular bales, as well as assorted machinery. More recently the large cattle shed had been added, now housing a large uniform 'black and white' milking herd. They now walked on concrete surfaces which had replaced cobbles.

Winter feed was stored in a silage tower, many of which had become common features of our farming landscape. Grain was held in bins rather than in sacks. Various machines now handled the harvesting of fodder and the distribution of manure. Tractors had replaced horses and the ubiquitous 'Land Rover' now replaced the farmer's pony and trap. (The quality of the toys was most appreciated here).

The population of the other stock was now much reduced, with pigs and poultry raised in specialist units elsewhere, while the one time resident bull had by now been replaced by a visiting 'man in a white suit' not actually shown here.

If the opportunity and need arose for an up-dated model, the Bicton area would certainly suggest yet more changes. For instance, obsolete cowsheds and stables are being converted into desirable county residences housing an increasing number of Bicton residents. With amalgamations and specialisation some whole farmsteads have been given over to other uses. Larger farm units now have even bigger tractors, some of which have been specially designed for road as well as field work to link up with detached parts of an enterprise. The model maker would find that Britains toys are also keeping pace with these trends, so that their educational value remains high.

Bicton's skyline changed with the removal of the Woodlands silage tower, replaced in part by large round bales in black polythene bags. Old 'staddle stones' are more likely to turn up as garden ornaments.

After the show the models went into the museum store, but because of their fragile nature the structures did not survive. They were not used at the Acton Scott Farm museum since that was, after all, the real thing.

he had been born out of wedlock. As an old bachelor he did not suffer the children to come unto him.

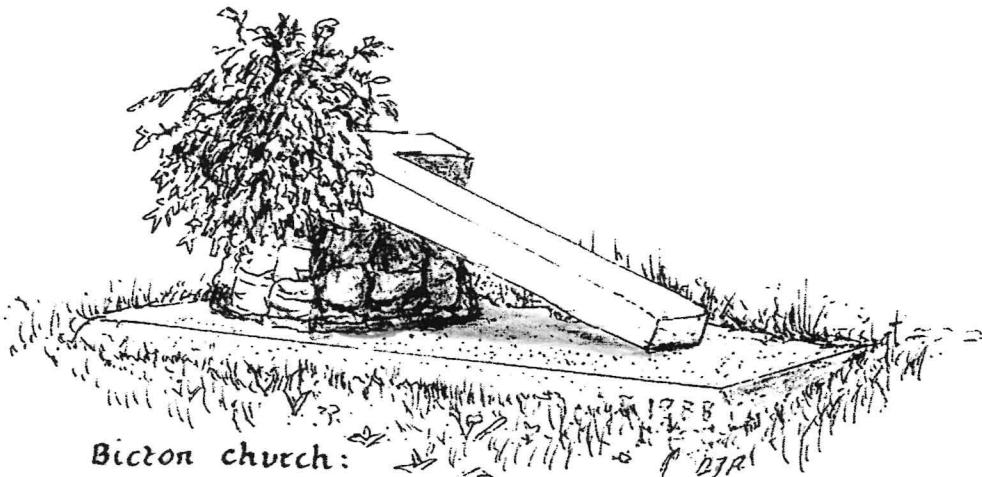
In his later years, Edwards employed a succession of curates to share the load, before he retired in 1918 and eventually died in 1924.

During a brief hiatus, before the next appointment, various local colleagues filled in, while there was also the unfortunate episode of another Rev. Roberts trying to move in. He had a petty dispute with the furniture removers, which was well reported in the Shrewsbury Chronicle, so it was no surprise that he did not stop. Bicton had a lucky escape! (June '10)

Meanwhile, John William Purser had been working for the church Missionary Society in Uganda, before taking a degree at Durham. There followed the usual succession of curate's posts, first in the Warwick area and then for several years at Wem, making him well placed to move to his first permanent post at Bicton.

His successor in 1926 was Anthony Lawson, whom we have already discussed in the series (Jan '14). The story of his successors we must continue later.

By this time, women had won the right to vote, bringing fairness to political life. However, church life long remained male dominated like those Oxbridge colleges, but all this is slowly changing.....



Bicton church:

Grave of George Newton Lloyd 1831-1888.
vicar of Bicton

Bicton Village News

Offprint from

Jun 2015

No 587

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

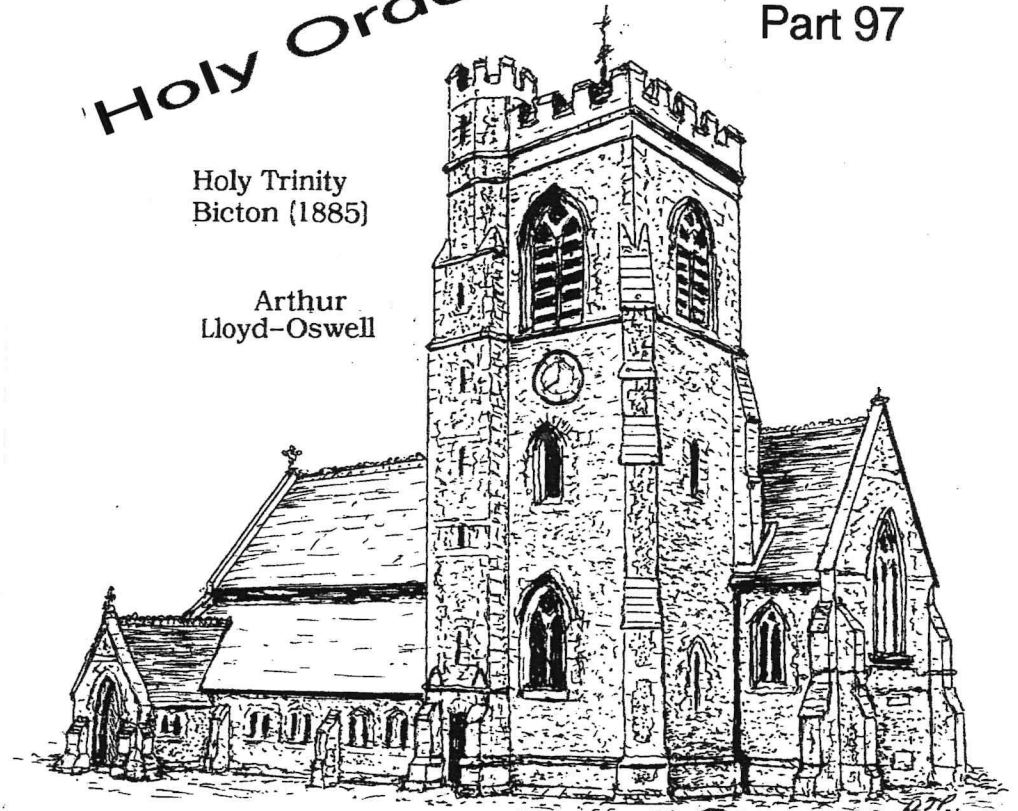
by David Pannett

Part 97

Holy Orders

Holy Trinity
Bicton (1885)

Arthur
Lloyd-Oswell



David Pannett's History of Bicton part 97

Holy Orders

This summer Bicton area will be welcoming a new vicar and this prompts us to reflect upon some past holders of this post, with the help of Crockfords Clerical Directory, census records and parish registers.

The present independent parish of Bicton was only established in 1853 after being part of St Chads parish, albeit with its own chapel, since the 17th century. The first vicar was the newly qualified William Sandford, seventh son of Humphrey Sandford of the Isle, for many years the curate at Bicton chapel as well as Rector of Edgton in South Shropshire. Fourth son Edward also briefly held this chapel post just before William took over.

The link between these people and places was that Edgton was also Sandford property where they had the gift of the 'living', thus illustrating a common connection between Anglican parsons and landowning squires, summed up with the term 'squarson' by some historians. It was also frequently commented that, amongst the sons of such landowners, the eldest would inherit the estate, the dim one would join the army, while the brightest would be educated to join the church. The law was also an alternative, but 'trade' would be looked down upon. Indeed, at that time the resources of an estate would have been needed to finance higher education enabling the Sandfords to have good links with St John's College, Cambridge.

In the landscape we can still see examples of fine Victorian vicarages, fit for the sons of gentry. Locally, at Montford, for instance, the Rev. Wingfield preferred to live in Shrewsbury rather than occupy the old parsonage house on offer. Its impressive replacement later housed a member of the Clive family, owners of the estate. The Bicton story has some similarities....

A new vicarage was duly built at Bicton and William moved in, joined later by new wife Emma Cantrow from Bury, with whom he started his own family. Then, in 1868, William's younger sister Charlotte married Charles Ingram Roberts, curate of St Chads, upon which there were some domestic changes. Charles became 'curate in charge' at Bicton and occupied the vicarage, allowing William to move to Shelton Hall. Sadly, while there, in 1871, his eldest son died aged 8 (old churchyard) so the improved accommodation did not protect him from the usual Victorian health risks.

At William's own death in 1875, aged only 48, Charles moved on to a proper

'living' near Rochester in Kent. Meanwhile numbers of the wider Sandford family continued as lawyers as well as churchmen. One died while a missionary in India, (brass plaque in church), while in the following century, another Humphrey Sandford spent 40 years as Bicton's church warden.

The new vicar was George Newton Lloyd, who incidentally was being ordained about the same time as Charles and William in the 1850s. He came from a long line of professional churchmen, rather than country squires and was a graduate of Durham rather than Oxford or Cambridge. Grandfather, father and uncle between them had been rectors of Selattyn and Whittington over the years while his mother was also the daughter of a parson. George himself travelled further afield, first as a curate at Shrawardine, then as rector of Killesk in county Waterford, Ireland, before coming to Bicton.

During his time here it was realised that the original old chapel building was proving too small to be a proper parish church when population was rising and C of E was facing competition from non-conformists. George would have been actively involved in the plans for a new church building and associated graveyard, but did not live long enough to enjoy the benefits of them, except for becoming one of the early occupants of that new graveyard. Sadly, his heavy granite and sandstone monument is now listing like a ship and sinking to the ground as ivy covers its top! Towards the end he may have been suffering ill health, requiring help from neighbouring clergy at times.

His successor, after 1888, was Frederick Stephen Edwards, who was said to have been a solicitor. However, since he was ordained at Lichfield Theological College in 1864 at the age of 27, one wonders what time he had actually spent in that career.

For the next twenty years he held a succession of short term curate's posts in the Midlands, (where he was born) and in Lancashire and never found time to find a wife. Perhaps for this reason, his younger sister, Mary Ellen, also unmarried, joined him at the vicarage in Bicton. Like their predecessors, they also employed a succession of young domestic staff, normally two at a time, which included, at different times, the sisters Adelaide and Gertrude Rosier from West Bromwich, who subsequently married into the local Glover and Lewis families. Mary Ellen, being a kind lady, also gave a home to an orphan, John Allen, from Stafford. It was said that this irritated her brother, who had offended one local family by banning a child from the choir because

In modern times, smaller families, reduced domestic and farm staff, better housing for remaining workers and farm amalgamations have made such large farm houses less necessary. It has proved more profitable to 'downsize' to small modern dwellings or even 'barn conversions' so that the old house can be sold to a non-agricultural owner able to invest in improvements. Old, traditional buildings may look 'desirable' but an input of outside capital may be needed to modernise them in a way in which an agricultural enterprise alone may not be able to afford. The church authorities have, meanwhile, faced the same problems with oversized rural vicarages. This situation is illustrated in Bicton with a new, modern vicarage in Brookside replacing the Old Vicarage at the top of Bicton Lane.

Bicton Village News

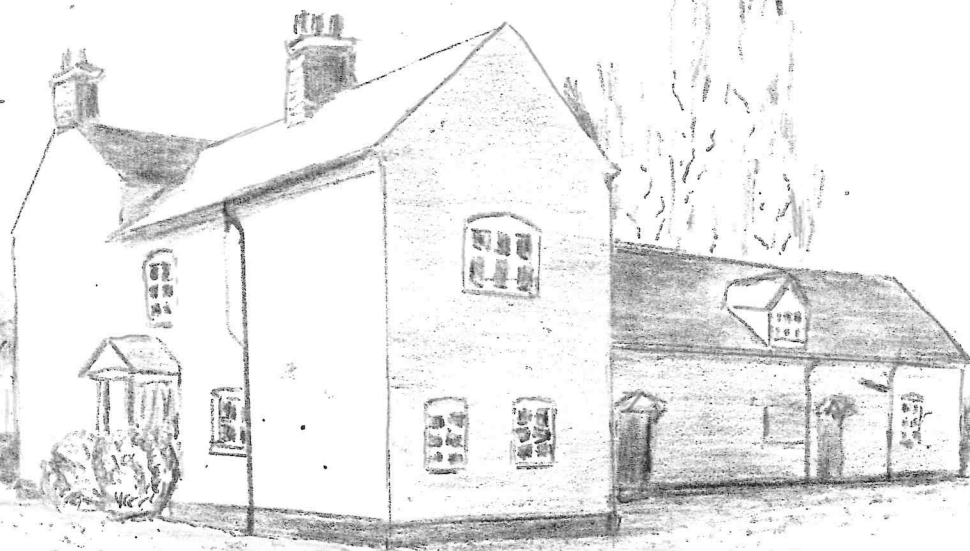
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**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

Part 98

At home
on the farm



Preston Monrford Farm.



*Bicton
Farm*

David Pannett's History of Bicton part 98

At home on the farm

After discussing our changing farmyards, it seems logical to also look at their associated farm houses, at least one of which has recently appeared in the property pages of the Shrewsbury Chronicle.

In the parish most appear to date from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which was a general period of agricultural improvement and investment by landowners, especially in the boom years of the Napoleonic wars. In the old village, deeds suggest that original smaller farms were amalgamated during the inclosure of the 'open fields' so that improved accommodation was needed. The resulting 'Georgian' and 'Victorian' buildings reflect both their age and the individual stories of the varied owners involved.

In the wider parish the Hearth Tax records of 1672 suggest that almost all the main farms were already in existence, but only the fine timber houses at Woodcote have survived with little change from this period. As homes of local landowners and Shrewsbury businessmen, Hosiers and Warings, they had been built to a high standard and did not require rebuilding when occupied by later tenants. Perhaps elsewhere 'Georgian' brick may actually conceal original timber structures, as it does in many houses in Shrewsbury. There is certainly a hint of this at Bicton Grove, which otherwise appears to be the work of Thomas Wright, a successful nurseryman in the early eighteenth century. Later owners, Jenkins and Wingfield, did not need to change it for their tenants.

One typical feature of investment by owner occupiers was their aspiration to create a smaller version of a 'Big House', in contrast to tenanted houses on big estates, which were more integrated with the farmyard in a functional manner. 'Big Houses' of the gentry would keep such functional buildings at arm's length, present a fine architectural front and enjoy views over parkland, across which ran a private carriage driveway. Bicton Hall, seat of the Jenkins family, and Bicton House illustrate this well.

Accounts reveal new building taking place at Bicton House in 1778 for the owner, Rev. Henry Hanmer.[†] Elsewhere such precise dates may be difficult to pin down, but the arrival of a new owner may provide a clue. Thus in Bicton old village 'Red House' was rebuilt by Richard Gittins after about 1800 to face the fields instead of the street. Likewise, at the Woodlands, John Lloyd, about 1830, altered the house to face north over the fields and also enlarged

†

the garden. The needs of modern farming now mean that buildings now obscure that view.

By contrast, the Grange, Upper Calcott and Churncote illustrate the simple, functional tenanted layouts, although not lacking in architectural style. The Preston Montford farmhouse, however, is rather different, perhaps not to compete with the adjacent Hall, built c. 1705. It looks as if it has been put together from different parts without the same regards for architecture and records give some support for this idea. In 1793, then landlord, John Hill, reimbursed tenant, John Yale, for the cost of "taking down a piece of building at Preston Montford and erecting it to adjoin the farmhouse in his occupation converting the same into a cheese room, parlour, lodging as well as other repairs....£111,-00" Shrop. archives. 731/2/3211

For some years after the Wingfields had acquired this property in 1829, it was called the 'Cottage' and was occupied by Miss Katherine Wingfield and her maid servants, while other members of the family lived in the Hall. Where the tenant farmer fitted into this accommodation is not clear. When tenant, Butler Lloyd, took over in the 1850s he filled it with family and both domestic and farm staff. Still standing in its own grounds away from the buildings makes it now ideal for non-agricultural occupation! One of the main reasons for building large farm houses, when so many rural cottages were rather small, was the housing of staff as well as the farmer's family. Sons were often kept at home to help; dairy maids processed the milk for butter and cheese, while young, unmarried workers and even older widowers were given a home. Census records show varied examples including that for Churncote in 1891:

John Cooke	Head	married	45	Farmer
Sarah Cooke	Wife	"	45	
Joseph "	Son	single	18	Farmer's assist.
John "	Son	"	16	" "
Margaret "	Daughter	"	14	Scholar
William Griffiths	Nephew	"	29	Waggoner
Robert Cooke	"	"	21	" "
Edward Williams	Servant	"	30	Cowman
William Jones	"	"	22	?
Thomas Cooke	Nephew	"	15	Milkman
Sarah Jones	Servant	"	14	General servant

both curates and domestic staff!

Over the years departures have been by well planned retirement or moving on, but Richard Philp had to leave suddenly in 1949... Later, local playwright, Lionel Brown, who lived at Lyndhurst, actually wrote a play based on this affair which the BBC broadcast, but which has sadly since been lost.

Recruitment is normally by advertisement, but some personal contacts can help. It could not have been just coincidence that Robert Jones not only

followed on from Arthur Smith at Fulford in Staffordshire but also followed him to Bickton a few years later.

Lastly we must not forget the wives and families behind these gentlemen, who also played their part, but do not feature so much in the records.



Revd. Robert Jones and his team – 1961. Horace Everall, James Paddock and Mr & Mrs George Slater (receiving a presentation upon leaving the village).

TODAY'S TEAM

Priest in Charge	The Revd Mary-Lou Toop 15 Brookside, Bickton, Shrewsbury SY3 8EP	(01743) 851375
Assistant Priest	Canon Robert Parsons The Vicarage, Baschurch Road, Bomere Heath, Shropshire SY4 3PN	01939 291494
Lay Readers	Mr Malcolm Dawson	01743 248925
Church Wardens	Mrs Clare Dixon Mrs Wendy Horan	01743 361906 01743 850237
Treasurer	Mrs Shirley Ansell	01743 850543



Bickton Village News

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More
Holy Orders



Holy Trinity
Bickton (1885)

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HISTORY
of BICKTON

by David Pannett

Part 99

David Pannett's History of Bicton part 99

More Holy Orders

Vicars of Bicton 1853 – 2015

1853 - 1875	William Sandford
1870 - 1875	(curate in charge: Charles Ingram Roberts)
1875 - 1886	George Newton Lloyd
1886 - 1890	(various locums)
1890 - 1918	Frederick Stephen Edwards
1918 - 1920	(various locums)
1920 - 1928	John William Purser
1928 - 1931	Anthony Clifford Lawson
1931 - 1949	Richard John Vernon Philp
1949 - 1950	(locum: Russell Stephen Renfree of Oxon)
1950 - 1953	Arthur Edward Smith
1953 – 1955	(locum: Russell Stephen Renfree of Oxon)
1955 - 1970	Robert Edward Jones
1970 - 1990	Francis George Smyth
1990 - 1998	Kenneth John Forbes McClean
1998 - 2000	(priest in charge: Peter Frank Barnes of St Georges)
2000 - 2006	Mark Rowland Godson
2007 - 2015	Christopher Harold Deakin
2015 -	Mary-Lou Toop

At last we can add a lady to our list of Bicton vicars after twelve or more males, who, on average had served about 13 years each, some more, some less. We must not, of course, also forget the neighbouring clergy, who on several occasions helped plug gaps between the appointments, as well as lay readers and Church Wardens who 'held the fort'!

The education and experience of these men were quite varied although mainly based on a College – Curate – Vicar sequence. The detailed stories of the first half have already been discussed (June 2015) so we will concentrate now on the rest.

As part of their experiences, some were of a generation which got caught up in the wars, not to fight, but to provide a chaplain service. Anthony Lawson, with a Yorkshire congregational background suffered from the mental strain

of comforting others and was grateful for support from fellow chaplains, who then helped him join the Anglican team in Shrewsbury and later Bicton. Meanwhile Russell Renfree was 'mentioned in dispatches' for his work on the front.

In the second war, Robert Jones, from Wales, served for five years and perhaps this contributed to his 'down to earth' manner which so endeared him to his rural flock.

Otherwise, there were also two contrasting career patterns, in which some had sought ordination early in life soon after normal education, while others had followed other professions first, which offered them early retirement (e.g. as with Archbishop Welby). For instance, Francis Smyth and Kenneth McClean were initially in the army, albeit in education rather than fighting. As a result their subsequent church careers were more compressed so that Bicton became their last appointments before retirement. Kenneth then moved to Shrewsbury, but Francis returned to be buried at Bicton in 2010. Meanwhile Christopher had been pursuing his first career in music and teaching.

Others, including Richard Philp, Arthur Smith and Mark Godson were dedicated to a clerical life from the start. Mark in particular, like many professionals, enhanced his career through a rapid succession of moves and also involvement with the health services as chaplain. To quote his own words '*days of vicars spending up to thirty years in a rural parish are over!*' Thus after just six years he moved on to head a clergy team in Hampshire. Indeed, others while in Bicton had also had other duties: Francis Smyth as Prison Chaplain and Richard Philp at Holy Trinity, Belle Vue. Early in his career Arthur Smith had some varied roles within the diocese of Manchester, as well as being Rural Dean of Trentham later. With such organising experience, he was able to help with establishing the Village Hall in Bicton in 1950, as well as staging a grown-up nativity play there, casting Mary Fowles (née Paddock) as Mary.

In 1970, when both Francis Smyth and R.W.D. Biddle of 'Montford with Shrawardine and Fitz' retired, the opportunity was taken to unite the parishes. Also Bicton Vicarage was replaced. When Christopher Deakin took over, 'Lea . . . ton with Albrighton and Battlefield' was added on too. The appointment of Robert Parsons then created a sort of team ministry now common in the Church of England. The modern clergy must wonder how their Victorian predecessors managed to fill their time in one parish and with

Shrewsbury parishes were now acquiring their own independent facilities, financed by their local landowners.

In this context, the chapel of St John the Baptist at Albrighton was rebuilt in 1841 of red sandstone in a 'Norman' style. A longer chancel was then added in the 1870s using the 'Early English' style, all paid for by W M Sparrow of Albrighton Hall.

The choice of red sandstone, when the superior pale Grinshill stone was available may be explained by a desire to give a more antique look, matching some real medieval churches, by now losing their protective render and exposing such stone.

Next door, in the new parish of Leaton, created in 1859, the architect S Poultney Smith made sure his church of the Holy Trinity had the best Grinshill stone. It was all financed by John Lloyd of Leaton Knolls, the sole landowner, who at the same time was enlarging his parkland and diverting the main road past this site, while, by coincidence, the new Chester railway was also being built across his land.

The new church and vicarage appear rather isolated here since the original Leaton hamlet had for a long time been reduced to two large farms, while most people lived in cottage communities scattered around former common land, such as at Bomere Heath.

Although quite a striking 'Victorian' gothic revival building from the outside, one of its impressive features is actually the fine medieval style roof, only seen from the inside. It is perhaps no coincidence that the same architect was also responsible for restoring Battlefield Church in 1861, giving it a splendid 'hammer beam' roof, as well as other timber fittings. The cost was covered by members of the Corbet family of Sundorne Castle.

Finally, this architectural tour brings us back to Bickton, where one can now appreciate the story which led to another fine 'gothic revival' Victorian church in 1886, also financed by local gentry, including the Wingfield family.



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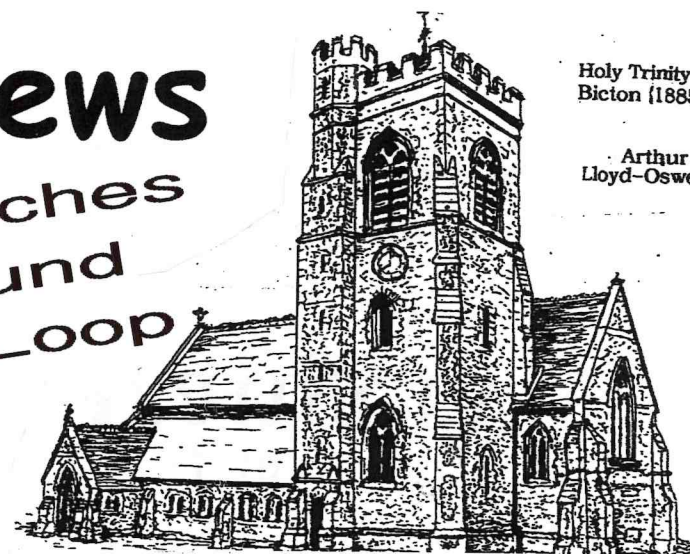
Bickton Village News

Churches
around
the Loop

HISTORY
of BICKTON

by David Pannett

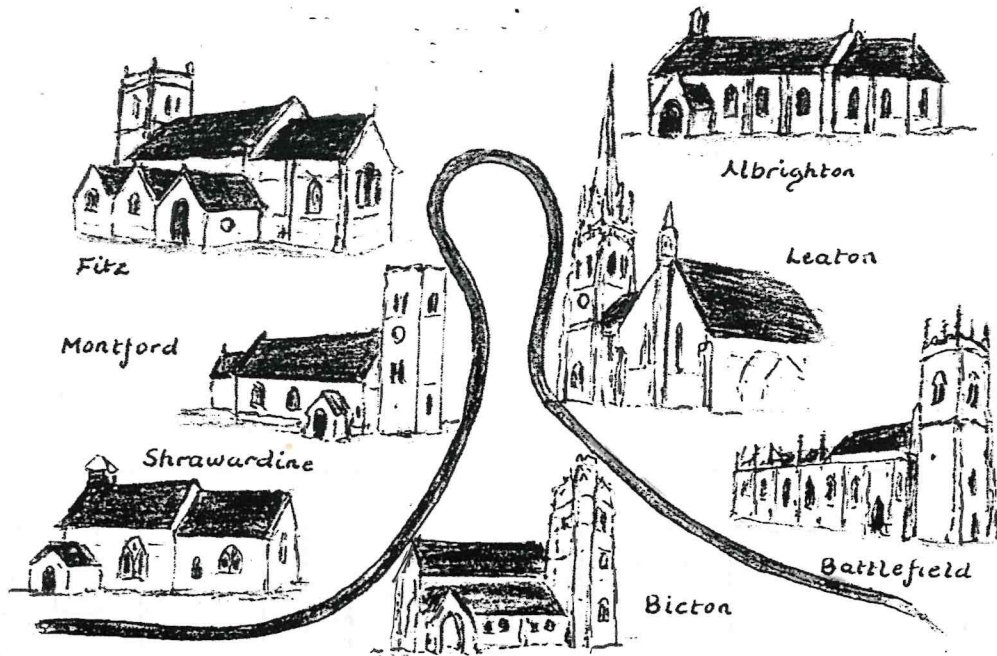
Part 100



Holy Trinity
Bickton (1885)

Arthur
Lloyd-Oswell

David Pannett's History of Bicton part 100



Churches around the loop

As we welcome new vicars to our village, we are reminded that Bicton is now part of a 'united benefice', which embraces six parishes containing seven church buildings (and one ruin). Domestically, vicars may be part of the Bicton community, but professionally their duties must be spread around the wider area, with the help of only one assistant. How different it must have been in Victorian times. Directories record that, after some parish reorganisation, the same area in 1870 was served by six vicars and four curates. In 1940 there were only five, still all products of Oxford, Cambridge and Trinity Dublin, except Richard Philp at Bicton.

It is no wonder that many Victorian clergy were able to devote their spare time to antiquarian research or observations of natural history. Even Charles Darwin was attracted to such a life for these reasons, before the voyage of

the Beagle altered everything.

Geographically the six parishes are adjacent, yet separated by the great bend of the River Severn, hence the 'loop'. Parishioners at one end may have little opportunity or need to visit distant parts, although the 'unofficial north west by-pass' to Shrewsbury between Montford Bridge and Harlescott via Cutberry Hollow steers many people right through them. These parishes do actually share some common features thanks partly to their location on the rural fringe of Shrewsbury. Taken together their churches tell an interesting architectural story...

The oldest building is St Mary Magdalene at Battlefield which was founded as a memorial after the battle of Shrewsbury in 1403. For the next century and half a college of priests here offered prayers to the fallen, as well as serving the local community, thus replacing an earlier chapel at Albright Hussey. Most of this time the college had five members until closed down at the reformation, when its domestic buildings were removed, leaving only the church. The fine quality of the Grinshill stone has enabled its walls to remain with little alterations since. In the twentieth century its little parish was united with Albrighton and more recently the church has been taken over by the Churches Conservation Trust. There is still an annual service each July to commemorate the battle, however.

A later civil war affected St Mary the Virgin, Shrawardine in a different way. It had to be rebuilt in 1649 after suffering damage in the 1645 siege of the castle, using red sandstone from Nesscliffe.

Later, in the same century, the brick and stone chapel was built at Bicton, but this now lies in ruins, since its replacement by the present church.

Similar building styles of brick with stone dressings and round-headed windows appeared again at Fitz, when the medieval church of St Peter and St Paul was rebuilt in 1722 (the chancel was later rebuilt in 1905, retaining the original style). Likewise at the same time in 1722 a new matching chancel was added at Shrawardine.

Soon after, in 1737, St Chads Montford was also rebuilt using the same red sandstone and similar Georgian windows. Otherwise, the eighteenth century saw many churches suffering neglect and therefore in great need of repair during the later 'Victorian' era, when architects showed more interest in the medieval styles while church leaders were reviving traditional liturgy. Also, locally, as with Bicton, former chapelries in outlying portions of ancient

David Pannett's History of Bicton

Editorial Comments

After eight years and a hundred essays, perhaps we ought to devote some space to reviewing their past and discussing their future, mainly for the benefit of new readers.

Bicton has always had its share of newcomers and it was the wish of then editor, Muriel Morris, that they should be introduced to the Village to which they had come. Indeed, the first thing which one discovers about the history of the local population is that it has always been changing, with very few families staying in the area over several generations. Part of this story has also involved the dispersal of locally born children in search of work. In the age of large families this would have been necessary simply to find work, while today improved education provides a wider choice of careers elsewhere.

Every essay is still available as an 'offprint' to help newcomers and exiles alike, especially if one covers their particular corner of the parish. We have tried to seek topics widely around the parish, so that no corner has been left out, while the backgrounds to topical issues have been dealt with as they have arisen. In this connection, when appropriate, politicians, local government officers, prospective developers have been given relevant copies when necessary. As it is important for democracy that the general population should be as well-informed as any of these potentially influential people, all concerned can see how the Village News is making this possible.

With the website such information can reach an even wider audience and, with this in mind, the operation is currently underway to convert the essays published so far to a downloadable format, which will then be accessible from www.bictonvillage.co.uk.

These local studies actually started many years ago with adult courses at Preston Montford Field Centre and at the Gateway in Shrewsbury. Bicton was not just conveniently 'on the doorstep', but was also particularly interesting because of the variety of aspects of landscape and related social history which are found in the parish – medieval farming villages and hamlets evolving through the ages, the role of estates and landowners including monasteries, heathland settlement, modern 'suburban' development etc. etc. Also, since 'no place is an island', wider 'national' history is usually involved, so that one can learn history 'through' Bicton and

not just 'of Bicton'. This has allowed the local story to also appeal to readers from beyond the parish boundaries.

At the local level, the essays aim to help people look around and recognise landscape features of all kinds, both natural and man-made. It is so easy to just accept these without questioning as to why? when? and how?

Current pressures for development arise from the desire of so many to escape cities and to enjoy this rural environment. One is reminded of the words of Shakespeare in 'As you like it', when his hero was exiled to the forest: "*And this our life remote from public haunt, doth find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything.*" In this way he introduced a new 'Renaissance' view of actually looking at the world afresh rather than just accepting the interpretation of medieval church. Although obviously poetic, his words continue to inspire the writer of these essays today.

Over recent years several communities have seen their local histories published in book form by a team pooling their skills and knowledge and supported by lottery funds. Is there scope for one in Bicton? A key requirement would be some teamwork – something to discuss!

Already, several readers have kindly contributed material and information for particular essays and there is always scope for more, either derived from 'family archives' or revealed by additional research. For anyone willing to help out with such local history, there are still more topics to explore, using a variety of skills; from books to IT:

- History of Bicton School, buildings, staff and pupils .
- Who was who in the churchyards, recording inscriptions before they fade and checking against records. Scope for active conservation
- Photographic survey of the parish – the collection in the Shropshire Archives is very thin at the moment
- Roundup and copy any old local photographs
- Transcribing census records so that all can read them
- More detailed survey of hedges and vintage trees; a conservation issue as well as historical interest
- Desktop publishing of simple interpretive leaflets or signs to cater for Montford Bridge and Preston Montford tourists, as well as walkers along the Severn Way and church visitors
- plus any more which are of special interest to individuals

similar way his sisters continued teaching and remained single. More recently such deaths by firing squad have been commemorated at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, where Denis now appears on yet another memorial list.

This war story apart, there remains a lot more which could be written about the Blakemore period in Bickton School, which spanned 38 years. Volunteers needed!

(Special thanks must go to volunteers from the Family History Society who help in Shropshire Archives.)



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No 592

Humour at
the front

EXTRACT FROM
THE WIPERS TIMES

NOVEMBER 1917

Three Tommies sat in a trench one day,
Discussing the war, in the usual way,
They talked of the mud, and they talked
of the Hun,
Of what was to do, and what had been
done,
They talked about rum, and—'tis hard
to believe —
They even found time to speak about
leave,
But the point which they argued from
post back to pillar
Was whether Notts County could beat
Aston Villa,
—o—o—o—
The night sped away, and zero drew
nigh,
Equipment made ready, all lips getting dry,
And watches consulted with each passing
minute
Till five more to go, then 'twould find
them all in it;
The word came along down the line to
“ get ready ! ”
The sergeants admonishing all to keep
steady,
But out rang a voice getting shriller and
shriller :
“ I tell yer Notts County can beat Aston
Villa ! ”

Bickton Village News

HISTORY
of BICKTON

by David Pannett

Part 101

www.bicktonvillage.co.uk



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 101

The Blakemore Saga

November, and Remembrance Day comes round again and prompts us to discuss some war stories, especially about those on the Bicton memorial: On and off during this series we have mentioned Denis Jetson Blakemore, son of George Lloyd Blakemore, the Bicton Schoolmaster. Denis is also listed on the St George's Memorial, since, at the time of his death, in July 1917, the family had moved to Frankwell.

The special aspect of his story is that he was the only soldier from Shropshire who was 'shot at dawn' for desertion. In view of the county-wide significance, Toby Neal of the Shropshire Star has discussed him more than once in that paper, so that one wonders what more could be said in these pages now. We will nevertheless try...

In the War, many of those condemned for desertion were actually reprieved, but in the case of Denis, this had already happened after a previous attempt. Therefore, after being caught again so soon after being released from detention, the authorities perhaps thought they had no choice. He had absconded from his platoon as they prepared for the attack on the Messini ridge south of Ypres, famous for the detonation of huge mines whose craters still scar the landscape. He got as far as the ferry in Boulogne before being arrested.

This was a stressful time for all concerned, but the troops just had to get on with it. The question is, why did Denis behave the way he did in spite of coming from such a respectable and public spirited family? Perhaps a closer look at this background may provide some clues.

Father George, born 1858, was eldest son amongst six children of William and Emma Blakemore of Shrewsbury, where William was employed as clerk to a cabinet manufactory. At first, the family lived in Benyon Street, Castlefields, but by 1871 they had moved to College Hill. Where George received his education is not known, but it could have been the Lancasterian School which had developed the training of pupil teachers.

Meanwhile, in 1857, future wife Sophia Henley was born in Montgomeryshire, where very soon after, the 1861 census recorded her living with grandparents in Llandrinio from whom she took the name Jetson (later passing on to Denis). What family circumstances caused this change is not known, perhaps some tragedy. While many girls like this might have

gone into domestic service in some 'big house' Sophia instead became an apprentice dressmaker in Shrewsbury with Walter Davies, who was also a Baptist preacher.

Somehow a few years later, she met George and they were married at Bicton in June 1879, by which time her apprenticeship would have finished, while George had become headteacher of Bicton School.

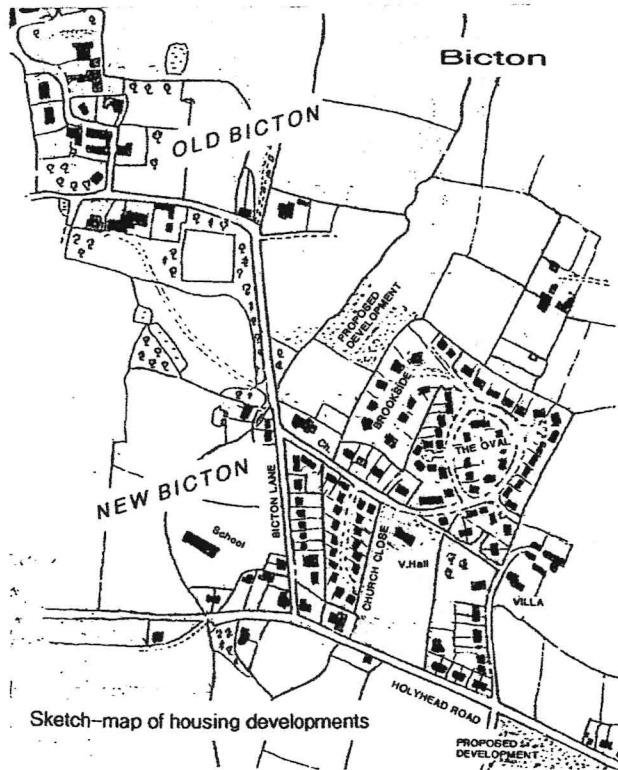
Here, he had already developed a close friendship with the family of William and Mary Lewis across the road in Old School House. There is even a family memory of Frederick, their second eldest spending some time with George when he had just arrived and was a little nervous of being in a big house on his own. Frederick could also escape from a crowded cottage filling up with younger siblings! However, George and Sophia soon began filling the school house with eight children of their own in a similar 'Victorian' fashion.

In such households the pressure of large families was often relieved by the eldest leaving home early, especially girls, who could find 'living in' domestic service, but this household was different. Sophia helped as a sewing mistress, for which she was obviously well qualified, while her children were not only educated here, but tended to stay home afterwards. Moreover, eldest daughters Florence and Alice were actually retained as assistant teachers recognised by the local authority. The school was almost becoming a 'family business'!

The boys did, however, go on to pursue careers outside: George and Ernest the oldest became apprentices (George as a watchmaker perhaps followed Ernest Lewis across the road), Denis a grocer's assistant and Frederick a gents' outfitters assistant. Sister Sophia followed her mother's trade, while Gertrude did secretarial work. All of the jobs were in Shrewsbury 'just down the road', so there was little incentive to leave home early.

One wonders if such a mixture of home and school life 'under one roof' actually shielded the boys in particular from the challenges of the outside world. Also, how was their relationship with their peers affected by being the children of the headmaster? Whatever the high motives and big plans involved in waging war, actual behaviour at the 'sharp end' revolves around the mutual support between 'mates'. This was recognised in the official recruitment of 'pals' for instance. Perhaps Denis had not been able to develop this kind of social skill because of that good upbringing, which unwittingly undermined his ability to cope. In this way behaviour is said to be conditioned by a mixture of 'nature, nurture and networks'. Perhaps in a

farming systems were becoming obsolete. Government pressure was also forcing local authorities to shed unnecessary assets anyway, especially where a profit could be made. With this in mind, the council proposed some housing on part of it, but came up against the Borough's restrictive structure plan, so they had to settle for an agricultural land deal instead. Meanwhile, the opening of the new Shrewsbury By-pass in 1991 meant our local busy A5 was downgraded to the quieter B4380, thus undermining the trade of businesses along the road, including Merton Nurseries, opposite the Four Crosses. The proprietors here recognised that the site had no future and therefore entered protracted discussions over alternative development, with no more success than the County Council. Eventually however, permission was granted for the meeting hall of the Mount Trust, since it was 'non residential' and could claim to be some sort of 'community activity'. Now we have a 'Unitary Authority', which is also being pressed by the government to tear up the old restrictive rule book and allow housing. The results of all this are now 'written in the landscape' for all to see, while that failed County bid for housing is coming back to haunt us, but on a bigger scale!



Sketch-map of housing developments



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Bickton Village News

**HISTORY
of BICKTON**

by David Pannett

Part 102



www.bicktonvillage.co.uk

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 102

Bicton as a Suburb?

At both the national and local level, there is, at the moment, a lively debate about new housing. Bicton is but one of the rural villages around Shrewsbury facing pressure for new developments which may threaten their existing character.

Apart from government policies, some of this demand arises from newcomers wishing to move into Shropshire in general and its rural areas in particular. Their motives include the regional differences in house prices, whereby the cost of a house in the leafy commuter belt of London, such as Surrey or Buckinghamshire, can be double that for an equivalent building in Shropshire. Selling there and buying here could finance retirement or balance transport costs while still working.

Even before the age of railways, the motor car or telecommunications, such regional differences were already apparent. For instance, when reforms to the franchise were being discussed in the early nineteenth century (when Richard Jenkins was local MP) voting rights were extended to householders in properties worth more than ten pounds per annum. Reformers pointed out however, that this would include many skilled tradesmen in London, while excluding some professional classes 'out in the sticks'. They also pointed out that all would be solved if everyone had the vote, but they still had to wait a lot longer! More recent suggestions of a 'Mansion Tax' reveal the same problem!

Locally, Bicton's proximity to Shrewsbury made it a very desirable area, where nineteenth century businessmen could escape the town environment, while retaining their shops and offices there. Some built villas amongst the smallholdings of Bicton Heath, or occupied farmhouses such as at Udlington. Wighting the surveyor, Pritchard the grocer and Richard Sandford the solicitor have already been discussed in this series. A new generation of such families are continuing this tradition.

As traditional farm employment declined in the twentieth century, many cottage dwellers were able to find alternative work in Shrewsbury, thanks in part to improved roads and bicycles. In the 1920s, 'Midland Red' also started a regular bus service from Montford Bridge and the very first motor cars were appearing in the village. Indeed, nationally, such improvements in transport were opening up the countryside to many more urban workers.

For instance, the promotion of new settlements by the Metropolitan Railway west of London is well known.

In view of all this, it was no surprise that a group of 'suburban' houses was built in Bicton in the early 1930s, lining the main road and Villa Lane. Their bright red bricks, grey slate roofs and steel window frames were typical of the period. Meanwhile, suburban expansion was taking place around Shrewsbury where both local authority and private builders were introducing new ideas of low density detached and semi-detached houses instead of those Victorian and Edwardian terraces.

After the last war, further development took place along Bicton Lane and Church Lane, continuing some of those more varied interwar designs. Indeed the cartoonist, Osbert Lancaster, coined the phrase 'By-pass variegated' to sum up their character around our big towns.

By contrast, the adjacent Church Close represented a complete change in design. First of all it was an 'estate' with its own road, fewer variations in design, open plan front garden spaces and room for cars. Gone were the traditional privet hedges, replaced now with isolated trees, including conifers, providing decoration if not privacy, so different from traditional villages.

In the 1960s, the firm of Frank Galliers continued this on a large scale with 'The Oval'. Now it could be debated whether Bicton was still a rural village or just another suburb of Shrewsbury! A trick of development is to leave a gap in the building line to allow for expansion. In this way, after a pause, Brookside was added in the 1980s, filling in a plot which had been almost cut off from surrounding farmland. The style mimics old estate cottages except for the gardens!

Further development, at a higher density, has been proposed for the next field towards Bicton Lane, provoking much heated debate.

Over the years, the planning system covering Bicton has been changing along with the reorganisation of local government. Initially, the civil parish was part of Atcham Rural District, with its own delegated powers of 'development control'. Following the amalgamation with the Borough of Shrewsbury, planners drew up new 'structure plans' for such controls. In particular, land around Bicton was classified as 'green', meaning development would be severely restricted.

A challenge to these restrictions came around Shepherd's Lane, where the County Council was selling off its former small-holding land, when such