

Meanwhile, a succession of girls were coming to Bicton from surrounding villages, especially those towards Wales, in order to work in the local 'Big Houses'. While 'place of birth' was recorded on each census entry after 1851, what happened afterwards would need similar computer searches. Some were known to have married local lads. In a similar way, the place of birth of an agricultural labourer's children gives a clue to the family's movements from job to job, so that only the very youngest appear to have been born in Bicton. The farmers who employed them show a similar pattern of movements as some tenancies were for only 21 years. Adding all these stories together could reveal just how mobile our rural population was during those Victorian times. The raw data is out there somewhere; it just needs a lot of clicks on the mouse to find it!

Special thanks must go to the volunteer helpers from the family history society at Shropshire Archives.

Census 1851	Stratford-upon-Avon		College Lane		
Henry Harding	Hd	Mar	56	Vicar of S on A	Warks Hampton Lucy
Emily	wife	Mar	53		Salop Berwick House
Georgina	dau	Un	19		Stafford Aldridge
Emily	dau	Un	18		Stafford Aldridge
William Hill	serv	Un	37	Butler	Salop Willerby
Elizabeth Parry	serv	Un	26	Ladies Maid	" Bicton
Martha Lewis	serv	Un	23	House Maid	" Montford
Emma Jones	serv	Un	21	Kitchen Maid	" Baschurch
Harriet Pinfold	serv	Un	21	Ladies Maid	Warks Alcester
Elizabeth Williams	serv	Un	33	House-keeper	N Wales Llan-gadian



Offprint from

Jan 2016
No 594

Bicton Village News

**HISTORY
of BICTON**
by David Pannett

Part 103

www.bictonvillage.co.uk



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 103

Tracing Victorians Lives

Once again Christmas has provided an opportunity to keep in touch with far flung friends and relations via the postal service. This was largely a Victorian invention, along with some other aspects of Christmas celebrations promoted by Charles Dickens and Prince Albert. That century also saw the introduction of better records through which we can learn about our ancestors who lived through that period.

An often repeated comment about the population of Bicton has been the way in which it has been constantly changing. Indeed, the village and parish may be viewed as a 'stage' upon which the 'actors' have made their entrances and exits in 'Shakespearian' fashion.

In practical terms it is easy to see who was in the village at each census, or being noted in the parish registers, but harder to learn about such individuals who were coming and going 'off the local radar'. However, like so many things these days, technology is coming to the rescue.

Thanks partly to the growing interest in family history, many national and local records have been digitised and therefore made accessible through computer systems whose 'search engines' can flick through a mass of data very quickly. As demonstrated by TV programmes, the resulting individual stories can be of general interest and not just to the family concerned, since they can reveal much about the times through which that individual lived. Charles Dickens actually wrote fictitious life stories in order to illustrate some aspects of those times, particularly the social problems.

The real-life story of local girl Martha Lewis is but one of such stories which could be told.

She was born in 1827, the third child of Edward Lewis, gardener to Preston Montford Hall and wife Elizabeth. In 1841, their home was a new cottage built by the Wingfield Estate at the end of Drury Lane, soon after the road had been altered. By this time there were seven children, the eldest of whom, Anne, had already left home. Altogether it was a very typical Victorian rural worker's household from which eldest daughters left early to go into domestic service.

Martha followed and in 1851 was recorded as a housemaid in the large

household of the vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon. There were six other staff, three of whom were also from Shropshire, including Elizabeth Parry from Bicton, who must have been a school friend. The 'mistress' of the house also came from Berwick House near Shrewsbury and therefore could have provided the Shropshire link for the recruitment of staff. All this was a good example of how some Victorian clergy lived like gentry.

As sometimes happened in such households, however, problems arose which families do not like to talk about... Martha returned home as an unmarried mother. Leaving son with Edward and Elizabeth at Montford Bridge, she soon returned to work, however and, in 1861, was recorded as a ladies' maid in a similar household of the vicar of St Giles at Abbey House in Shrewsbury (Carline's old house on the site of Wakeman School). Perhaps clerical networks across the county boundaries were fixing this for her once again.

In the next two decades, by now in her 40s and 50s, Martha was recorded as a seamstress at the County Asylum in Shelton, no doubt for both household maintenance and occupational therapy for the inmates. The development of the sewing machine was an important factor now. By coincidence, by this time Elizabeth Parry, now a widow with one son, had also returned to Bicton to care for her father and run their small farm next to the new school (Hollyhurst).

During the next two decades Martha retired from the Asylum, but remained a dressmaker in order to earn a living. She occupied cottages, first in the Isle Lane, then Bicton Heath. Finally, she returned to Montford Bridge near to sister Anne, who had also returned to the old home where she likewise practised dressmaking. Anne died in 1914 at the age of 91, while Martha died the following year, aged 87, in the 'Berrington Workhouse Infirmary'. This had been the old Atcham Union Workhouse, now evolving into the geriatric Cross Houses Hospital, thus shedding its Victorian image. Both are buried somewhere in our churchyard.

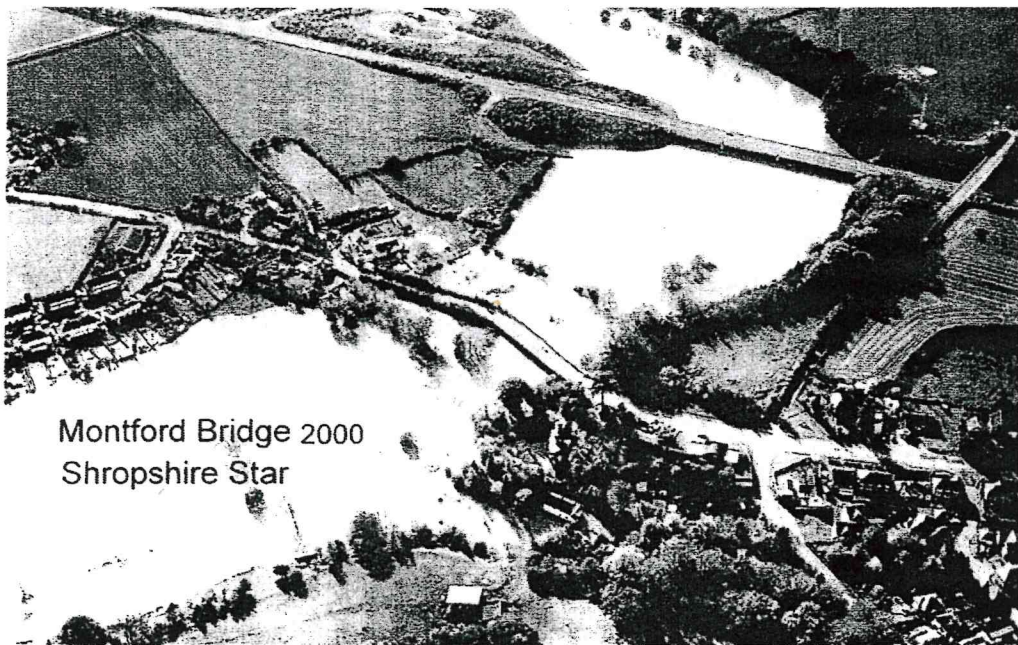
Throughout their long lives, these women had witnessed a changing world, which after the war was about to change even more. We wonder how Charles Dickens might have spun their stories into one of his novels. Being single, they had to keep working to support themselves in a world in which marriage was the norm. Perhaps they lived for a long time because they escaped the strains of multiple pregnancies which marriage might have involved!

may have triggered the 'Little Ice Age' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

To add confusion to this, volcano dust and sulphur can cool the Earth, especially if there is a really 'big bang' from a 'super-volcano' like those 'simmering' under Yellowstone or Naples (Italians like to keep quiet about this one). The collapse of 'Bronze Age' civilisations has been blamed on such eruptions.

So what has all this got to do with Bicton? As often remarked, our landforms owe so much to the last Ice Age, since when very little has happened, except the occasionally really big flood. As regards the human landscape, the main settlement pattern developed during the medieval warm period, before the Little Ice Age stimulated economic and political changes.

In the autumn a climate change conference gathered in Paris but probably did not recognise the same climatic story in the great medieval cathedral of Notre Dame and the following political and social upheavals which produced the modern French State. However, politicians were inspired by the meeting so it might be wise to buy a thicker sweater and a box of candles just in case we run out of power.



Montford Bridge 2000
Shropshire Star



Offprint from

Feb 2016

No 595

Bicton

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

Village

Part 104

News

Thoughts on
Climate Change

website www.bictonvillage.co.uk



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 104

More thoughts on Climate Change

At the moment we should be either suffering or enjoying winter weather after an autumn which even confused plants and animals. We could be reminded of the report by the Shrewsbury Chronicler for the year 1573:

"This yere from the begyninge of November until within xiiij dayes of Candelmas the season was so pleasant and fayre without frost or any snowe to specke of that there apeeryd leaves upon hathorn and ploomtresse before X'mas and the Kooocow was hard songe and also seene x days before X'mas....."

We did, however, suffer from storms and floods as they did in 1570:

"..... the Vth of October there fel sutch a terryble tempest of wynd and rayne bothe uppon sea and lande which dyd mutche hurt in overflowing medows pastures and houses to the utter undoinge of the queenes subiects of this realme".

The news of such events this time likewise concentrated upon the fate of the people rather than exploring the reasons for such 'overflowing' in certain places. For instance, one wonders why some suburbs of Carlisle had been built on land which needed expensive flood defences. Such defences, which prevent a river from spilling into its 'floodplain', may cause the water levels in the confined channel to be a lot higher than usual and therefore pose a greater risk. At the same time, intense rainfall may not be able to drain from the protected area.

Dredging is regularly discussed but makes no sense on natural river channels where enlarged capacity simply slows speeds and encourages deposition of sediment.

Locally, the Severn spilled on to its floodplain a few times, but caused no problems to Bicton simply because nobody has built houses on such land. Meanwhile, away from the river the old pools on the proposed site of the 'Shrewsbury West Sustainable Urban Extension' still maintain their eighteenth century size (things seem to have gone a bit quiet on this issue.....).

Historically, extreme conditions striking one area or another were not

unusual: Lynmouth 1953, later Boscastle. Such settlements, like Pennine mill towns, occupy narrow valleys surrounded by hills and are therefore particularly vulnerable. However, one must realise that periodic extreme episodes have been the natural forces which cut the valleys in the first place. Between rare events builders could be lulled into a false sense of security.

Once upon a time, the landscape features were blamed on the draining away of Noah's flood, but as scholars rejected such biblical legends, they realised that the cumulative effects of periodic 'events' spaced over long geological time were responsible. Any individual, whether dinosaur or man, might not notice much change in a single lifetime, unless they were particularly unlucky to be struck by one!

As spring approaches, we will be on the lookout for the first signs of renewed growth, as June Hughes, our gardening correspondent, has done over almost thirty years. Her results, reproduced in this history series, have shown a marked cyclic pattern which, if projected forward, might suggest a late spring this year. We must just wait and see!

Fluctuations in weather and climate at different timescales are in fact quite normal. The natural mechanisms in control can sometimes cancel each other out; while at other times reinforce their effects.

Carbon dioxide is regularly cited as a controller of average temperature through the 'greenhouse effect' and this is supported by the history of the earth and its 'long term' carbon cycle written in the rocks. Volcanoes spew out carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, while weathering of exposed rocks traps it by chemical reactions producing 'carbonates' which are flushed into the sea to become new sediments. As continents split apart, more is 'produced' than 'consumed', raising temperature while colliding continents forcing up fresh mountains swing the balance the other way. Thanks to the Himalayas and the current configuration of continents, we are in a 'cool Earth' phase with relatively low concentrations of carbon dioxide and a vulnerability to 'Ice Ages'!

These Ice Ages come and go in another cycle driven by fluctuations in the Earth's orbit and the seasonal attitude of the northern continents towards the Sun. Then, of course, the Sun has its own cycle of activity, so astronomers keep a careful watch on it. No sooner had sun spots been discovered, than they disappeared for many years and such a 'quiet' period

A Garden Diary



It's been a funny old winter hasn't it. So mild that flowers are out of season. And

yes I've got daffodils out too, but I'm sure mother nature will compensate.

Some of you will know I keep records of "Spring Indicators" and I have to say, sensible as they are, my control groups of snowdrops and aconites, underneath a north-facing hedge, have only just come through the ground, where elsewhere they are in full flower. It all depends on where they are planted, and the little micro-climates that are created by brick walls.

An old schoolfriend, living in Surrey has some February Gold daffs in full flower, and has not seen them that early before. Its usually April before they bloom on my cold wet clay.

But undeterred I've planted my loo rolls up with peas, ready to transfer to the polytunnel later on. Saves the mice getting to them. And some cabbage seed in a pot indoors. Nice early veg from the tunnel, even though I do sneak a few flowers in when hubby isn't looking.

Strawberries have been a disappointment of late, must try some new stock. There is nothing like a strawberry picked fresh from the garden, warmed by the sun. Knocks spots off these rock-hard shop fruits which taste of nothing in particular.

Oh dear! I'm on my hobby horse again. Why can't we go back to seasonal fruit and veg and enjoy them all the more for it? Instead of all year round offerings which have travelled miles to get here and taste of nothing in particular. Bring back sprouts that's what I say. Preferably with turkey and stuffing.

And those first fresh peas from the garden will taste all the better from not being frozen.

See, hobby horse again.

Happy Gardening

June

RAIN RAIN and more RAIN

Tony Brereton has measured and kept a record of Bicton Rainfall for many years.

Here is a list of his readings for the past 16 years and on the right last year's monthly rainfall.

It surprised me how much the rainfall differs from month to month but I was not surprised to see December was the wettest month in 2015!

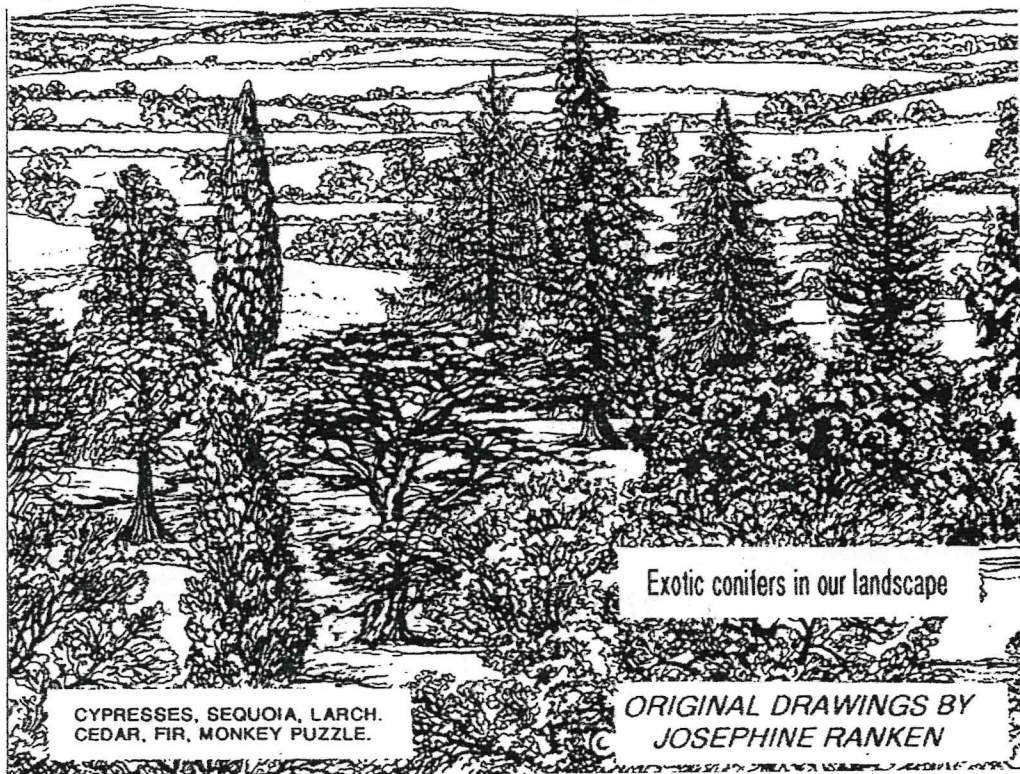
Thanks Tony - keep up the good work.

YEAR	BICTON	ANNUAL	RAINFALL	
	MLS.	INCHES	2000 - 2015	YEAR 2015 in ml.
2000	949	37.4	JANUARY	71
2001	693	27.5	FEBRUARY	27.8
2002	739	29	MARCH	52.1
2003	651	25.6	APRIL	15.8
2004	676	26.6	MAY	75.7
2005	595	23.4	JUNE	30.7
2006	640	25.2	JULY	73.1
2007	904	35.6	AUGUST	83.6
2008	791	31	SEPTEMBER	37.5
2009	644	25.3	OCTOBER	35.7
2010	510	20.1	NOVEMBER	84.7
2011	451	17.7	DECEMBER	102.1
2012	947	37.3	TOTAL	689.8 mls
2013	682	26.9		27.2 inches
2014	831	32.7	* JULY 2007	182 mls
2015	690	27.2		7.2 inches *

by them. Prince Albert also introduced us to the Norway Spruce and European Fir as a Christmas tree, such trees now contribute to our commercial forests in the hills. While all these varied forms of conifer illustrate well the forces of 'natural selection' acting through long geological time, in more recent decades, nurserymen and plant breeders have been using 'unnatural selection' in producing 'cultivars' more suited to small suburban gardens.

Dwarf and prostrate forms, more golden or darker shades now decorate gardens around the Oval, and also the site of Merton Nurseries, which once sold many of them. Gardens are also screened by that 'accidental' hybrid, the Leyland Cypress, instead of traditional privet.

This is but a brief summary of the conifer story drawing attention to their significance in our landscape, leaving scope for more detailed history and botany some other time. In the meantime, do take the trouble to look closely at them and perhaps think of hungry dinosaurs and brave plant hunters.



Exotic conifers in our landscape

CYPRESSES, SEQUOIA, LARCH.
CEDAR, FIR, MONKEY PUZZLE.

ORIGINAL DRAWINGS BY
JOSEPHINE RANKEN

Bicton Village News

Offprint from

Mar 2016

No 596

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

Part 105



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 105

Conifers in our Landscape

Each Winter, leaf fall allows evergreen conifers to stand out more clearly in our landscape even when mixed in with native 'broadleaves'. Our churchyard, surrounding gardens, the roadside by the old school, Udlington and the site of Merton Nurseries by the Four Crosses all contain a rich variety of specimens of all sizes. Further afield, Onslow Hall has a good collection while, beyond the Parish, Nesscliffe Hall has one of the finest collections in the County, well worth a visit.

To some people, such 'exotic' trees are viewed as 'alien' intrusions into our 'native' landscape, but to others they provide additional interest with their fascinating botanical and historical story.

In evolutionary terms they can boast a very long ancestry, stretching back to the Carboniferous Period 300 million years ago, when swamps preserved so much plant remains to form coal. At this time primitive conifers were also colonising the drier sites, where they were less well preserved (except when a volcano buried some of them under its ash near Dudley).

They were clearly well adapted to cope with the stresses of changing climates which caused the extinctions of many of those swamp plants, and could colonise a wider range of sites. This encouraged the development of different 'families' as they spread around the continents, which just at this time were joined together. Having survived those 'extinction' events at the end of the Permian and Triassic Periods, 200 million years ago, they prospered in the kinder conditions of the following Jurassic and Cretaceous Periods, better known for the evolution of dinosaurs. Some of these had to become 'walking compost heaps' with long necks in order to browse on such rough foliage, while the trees themselves developed sharper scales like the Monkey Puzzle and needed to grow even taller to get out of the way.

Natural selection and adaptation at work!

During these periods the continents were moving apart again, thus isolating some distinct populations. Also flowering plants were evolving, challenging the dominance of conifers in the tropics especially, leaving them to the harsher conditions of high altitudes and latitudes (it was curious plant distributions arising from all this which first gave clues to 'Continental Drift'). Nevertheless, some species, including Redwoods, could still hold their own in the new 'mixed' forests and contribute their remains to some European Lignite (brown coal) deposits. However, the more recent Ice Ages made

them extinct in such areas, leaving surviving populations only in S E Asia and N America. Now 'artificially' reintroduced, they can once again thrive here during our current 'interglacial'. From now on they have become part of our landscape history.

During the eighteenth century the English gentry were creating 'ideal' landscapes around their country mansions, using experts such as Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and Humphrey Repton – their 'English Style' gardening also fitted in with the improvements of whole estates for both food and timber production, not to mention fox hunting.

While all this was going on, British merchants were opening up trade contacts around the world and competing with European neighbours for the establishment of colonies. The government even promoted voyages of exploration which included botanists who drew attention to the rich plant life which they observed. The voyage of the Beagle with Charles Darwin was a continuation of this policy.

Landowners and nurserymen also helped sponsor plant hunters in the wilds of North America and the Himalayas and were eager to plant new discoveries on their estates, both for appearance and potential for timber production. Meanwhile, as more of North America was being opened up, the colonists were only interested in chopping down the virgin forests! From the 1850s onwards, landowners were especially eager to plant giant sequoias from California since their reputation for massive growth so impressed them. Its popular name became Wellingtonia, after the 'Iron Duke', but he had nothing to do with them. Even some smaller Victorian villas and our churchyard had one or two which could cause problems later on restricted sites.

Less well known to the general public is the 'Coast Redwood', since it is best suited to sheltered sites and prefers to be in pure stands. Today, small groves of them thrive at Leighton, Nesscliffe and Hawkestone within larger woodlands but are less suited to sites within Bicton.

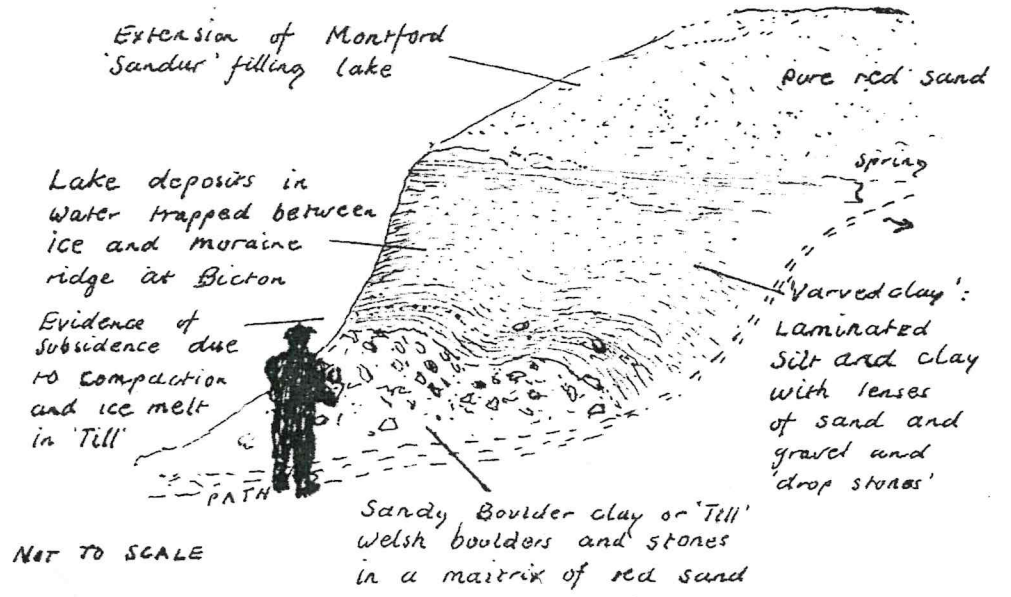
When the British Navy explored the NW coast of America they recognised the potential of the Douglas Fir for ships' masts. Now planted here, several British estates vie with each other to boast the tallest tree in the Kingdom, but the navy no longer needs them!

Nearer home, as Victoria and Albert discovered the delights of the Scottish Highlands, English gentry discovered the usefulness of Scots Pine, especially in exposed sites. Today, Udlington Manor by the Four Crosses is surrounded

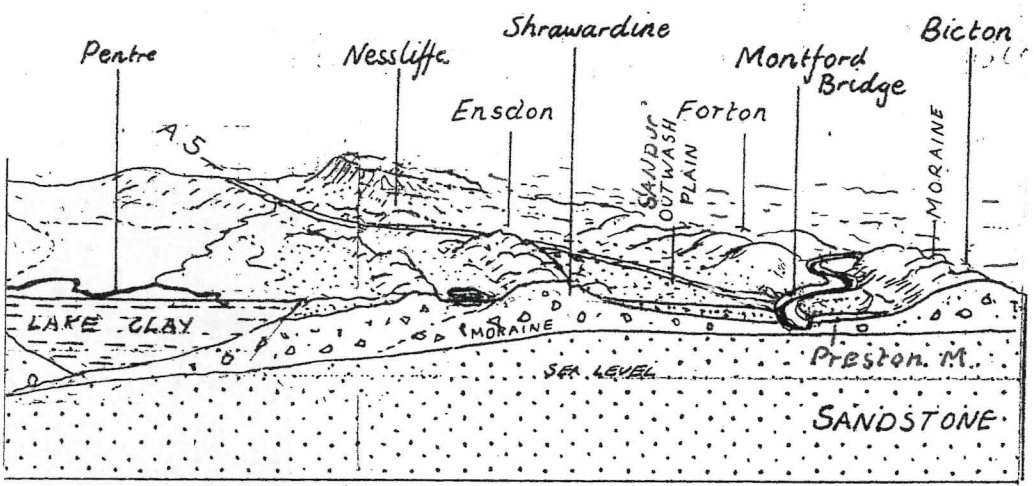
more public attention. Nevertheless, our Bicton area offers a convenient geographically compact area which can make the subject easier to comprehend.

Most of the local glacial action took place here about 20,000 years ago. If we project those Milankovitch cycles forward, they suggest the next cold period will start in 5,000 years time. If it starts cold and dry it may be a lot longer still before ice returns to Bicton once again.

Sketch of sediments below Preston Moatford



NOT TO SCALE



Bicton Village News

Offprint from

Apr 2016

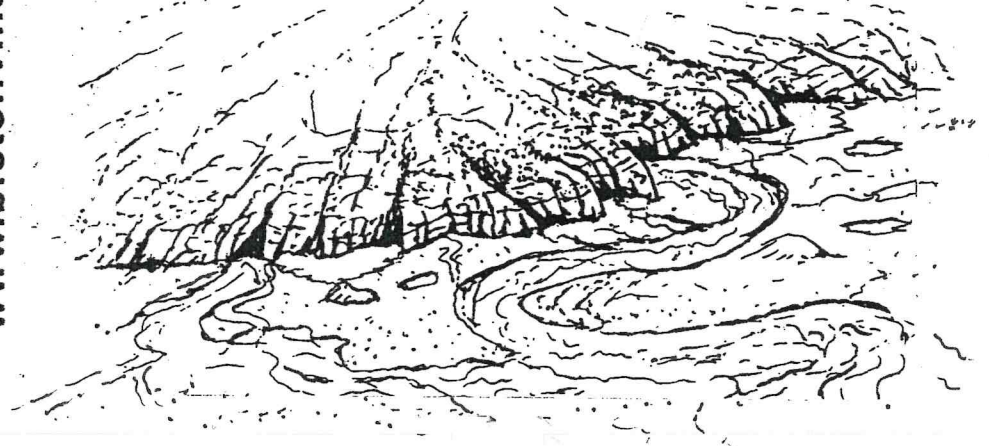
No 597

HISTORY of BICTON
by David Pannett

Part 106

www.bictonvillage.co.uk

Discovering the Ice Age



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 106

Discovering the Ice Age

Several times in these pages we have discussed how the Bicton landscape owes so much to the last Ice Age – moraines, kettle holes, sand and clay soils etc., - and their significance to human history. Bit by bit over the years our interpretation of such features has been improving, thus continuing a process which started almost two hundred years ago.

When Charles Darwin was growing up in Shrewsbury, he was shown the 'Bellstone' (now by the Morris Hall), a boulder of crystalline rock quite alien to Shropshire, which the 'wise men' of the town thought could never be explained. Within his lifetime, however, the mystery was solved when the role of ice transport was recognised. It was a typical glacial 'erratic' brought from Scotland, providing a valuable clue to the direction of ice flows.

Likewise, similar 'erratics' of dull volcanic rock decorate walls in our old village and demonstrate a different ice stream from Wales.

Related to this particular mystery were the widespread sheets of clay and sand covering so much of the 'solid' rock of the Shropshire Plain and the Midlands in general. Road works along the improved Holyhead Road east of Atcham exposed some in 1835, which those same 'wise men' could only explain as deposits from an invading sea. 'Modern' sea shells were important evidence.

Just at this time, however, Louis Agassiz was demonstrating that Swiss alpine glaciers once extended far beyond their present limits. British academics then suddenly realised that the work of former glaciers could also be recognised in British mountains. Darwin was embarrassed to admit how he had quite failed to appreciate such obvious features on his first visit to Snowdonia before the Beagle.

However, the wider spread of ice sheets over the lowlands was still not believed at first, so that drifting icebergs dropping stones in that 'sea' were blamed for those 'erratics'.

The reasons for climate change was another problem, but Dr James Croll discovered a mechanism. Regular variations in the Earth's orbit, together with a progressive wobble in the axis of rotation, could vary the impact of solar radiation. It was not until the following century that the Yugoslav astronomer Milankovitch applied mathematical analysis to this mechanism and discovered the actual 'cyclic rhythm' of changes which it would produce. (The pioneering work of Croll has therefore been largely forgotten, rather

like those who discussed evolution before Darwin).

By the early 20th century, evidence for an early glaciation reaching East Anglia and the most recent reaching just to Bridgnorth was well recognised. Professor Wills of Birmingham studied the features around Bridgnorth and took a special interest in the diversion of the Severn through the Ironbridge Gorge. Dixon of the Geological Survey was discovering evidence for temporary lakes trapped between ice and high ground near Wellington and Newport and suggested an overflowing ice-dammed lake could have cut the Gorge. Together they called this 'Lake Lapworth' after an earlier Birmingham professor.

From now on the Geological Survey allowed their imagination to run riot, proposing a vast lake covering most of the Shropshire Plain, which now entered the literature, including school textbooks. All this only hindered rather than helped our interpretation of our landscape, which had plenty of small local lakes but no big one. Water flowing under the ice sheet was the real factor in cutting the Gorge.

Some of this newer research in the sixties was actually based at Preston Montford Field Centre, which now realised it was right in the middle of a 'textbook' glacial landscape ideal for teaching about the subject. Staff recognised the typical arc-shaped moraine half surrounding it between Forton and Ford Heath, while the sediments exposed on the steep river bank recorded changes in the local environments. In particular, they included 'varved' silts and clays consisting of fine layers, each produced by the annual cycle of winter freeze and spring thaw and the change in sediment type which resulted i.e. coarse in spring, fine in winter. As with tree rings, one could, in theory, count up the years during which the lake lasted, before being drained and replaced by sheets of sand spreading out as an outwash plain or 'sandur' from a new ice front at Ensdon.

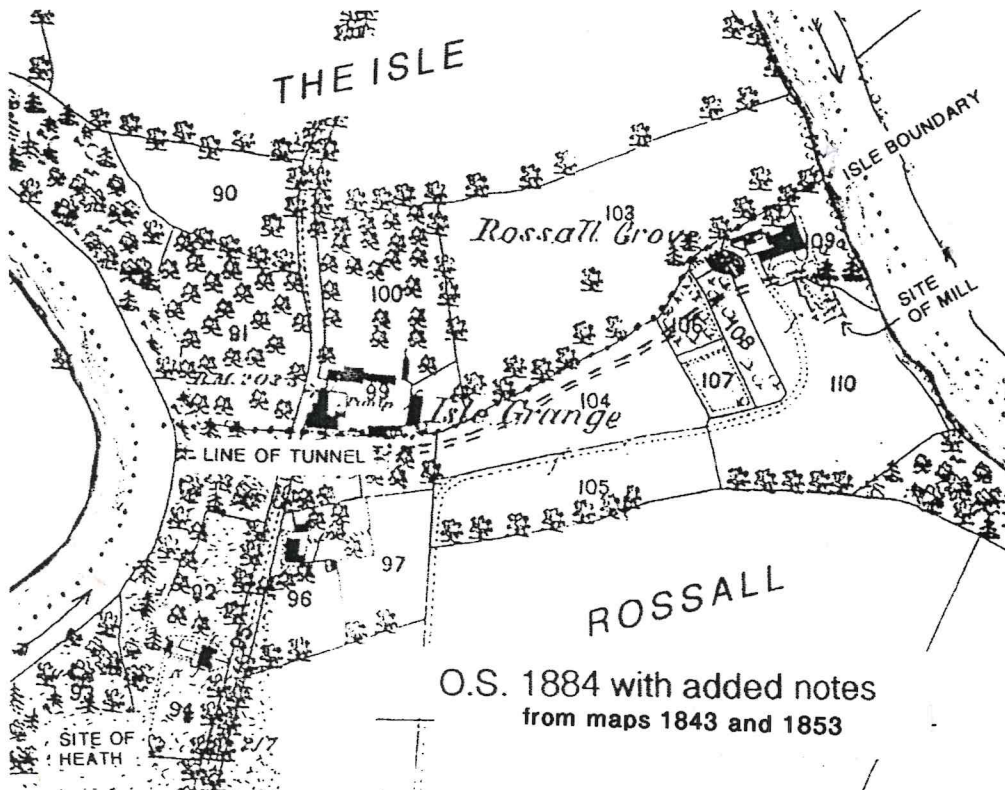
The A5 roadworks exposed these same layers on the Montford side of Montford Bridge, where the 'spring line' at the junction of the impervious clay and free draining sand caused problems in the cutting. The solution was a step with an extra drain along the junction, thus showing its position for all to see in spite of the vegetation. Meanwhile the field centre staff have kept their exposure clean and weeded.

The value of such landscape for teaching has however been dependant upon the demands of the curriculum which have not always been helpful. Also the bigger and more famous features of the Ellesmere area have received

In 1841, the census recorded John Davies 'malster' and family here. Then the Rossall Tithe Map of 1843 clearly shows the mill as part of the farm owned by Richard Jenkins and let to Richard Kilton, but there is no mention of an additional tenant actually working the mill.

Around 1850, a whole sequence of changes in land ownership took place leading to the disappearance of the mill altogether: 'Bagshaw's directory of 1851 provides the last reference to a mill and miller, Robert Williams, by which time Humphrey Sandford of the Isle had already taken over his part of the tunnel. At some stage, Richard Jenkins, now in London, sold his Rossall estate to Henry Wentworth Fielding, who already owned the rest of Rossall, and who could then sell the whole lot to John Harley of Shrewsbury (SA 3651/Temp bndl 5). A map prepared at this sale actually shows the line of the tunnel and the mill, but by 1884 the Ordnance Survey shows only the dwelling house remaining.

Meanwhile a row of six cottages down Isle Lane which had been originally built for the factory workers had been redeveloped into the Isle Cottages.

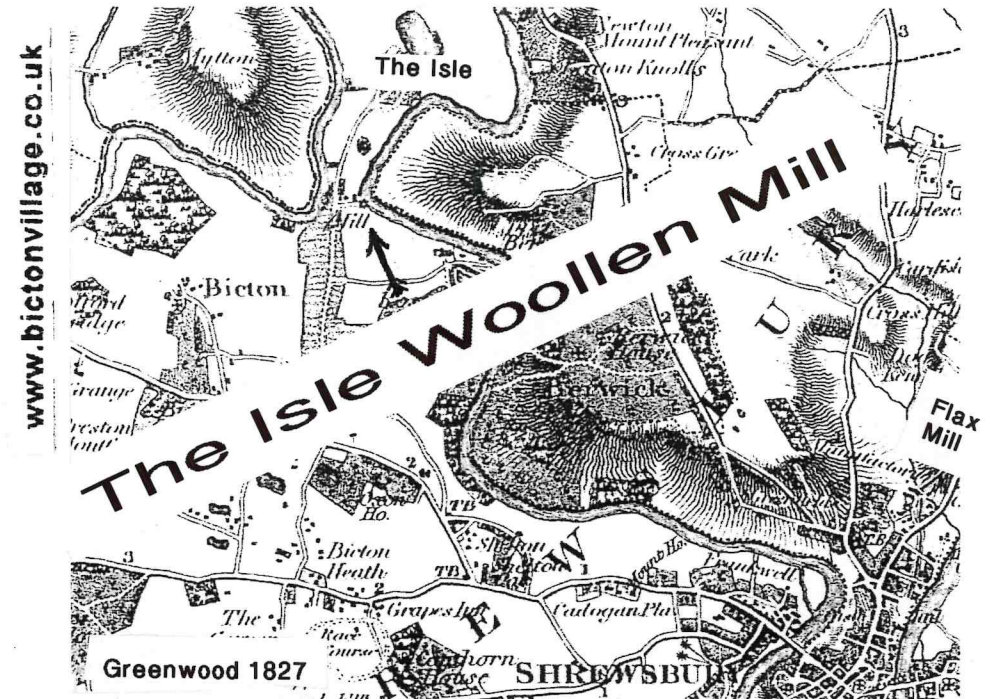


Offprint from

May 2016

No 598

Bicton



Village

News

HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Part 107

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 107

The Isle Woollen Mill

As reported several times in the local press, the former flax mill at Ditherington is undergoing restoration, mainly because of its significance in the history of such buildings. Already, a volunteer-run visitor centre has opened, explaining all this and the local history of textile manufacture, and is well worth a visit.

During the late eighteenth century considerable progress was being made in the mechanisation of textile production, leading to the development of the 'factory system' as a replacement for 'domestic' production. The necessary power was initially supplied by water, hence the term 'mill', which was even applied to factories driven by steam engines, which could be sited almost anywhere with good transport links supplying coal.

Shrewsbury already had a long tradition of textile trading, particularly woollen 'flannel' from Wales, so that local merchants were eager to seize the new opportunities which the factory system provided. The flax spinning mill was thereby built in partnership with a Leeds company on the new canal, just north of the town.

While all this was going on, in 1797, Arthur Aitkin, reporting on his tour of North Wales, remarked that "the greatest undertaking he considered to be the mill erected by Cook and Mason at the Isle...where a tunnel conveyed water to a wheel which provided power for spinning and fulling."*

Clearly there is a local 'Bicton' story here which has tended to be overlooked, perhaps because so little is surviving at the site today.

The mill was obviously exploiting the difference in water levels across this narrow neck of land left by the two mile loop of the river around the Isle, (as already discussed in these pages Jan 2008). Historically the estates of Up Rossall (The Isle), Down Rossall and Rossall Heath all met here, as also already discussed (Oct 2008, Jun 2011).

The actual plot upon which the mill was to be erected first appears c.1777 as a single detached field of the Bicton Grove estate, then owned by Thomas

* Trinder, *Industrial Archaeology of Shropshire*, 1996. p138

Wright and called 'the Grove at Rossall Lane End', a term later continued by the Ordnance Survey (SA D3651/B/17/2/38).

At some stage, perhaps soon after this date, Richard Jenkins (Sen.) of Bicton Hall acquired this 6 acre field, which he called the 'Isle Yard', along with the neighbouring farm in Rossall. In 1792, he leased it to Shrewsbury Draper Samuel Cook, who at the same time reached agreement with the other landowners sharing the adjacent heath allowing a tunnel under that land to serve a mill to be built here (SA 2495/box 24). It surely cannot be a coincidence that one of them, Folliot Sandford, then employed miners to dig another tunnel in order to drain his pool at the Isle (SA 465/399-400). It was to remain dry for many years until his successor allowed it to partly fill up again (Feb 2011).

From now on the progress of the enterprise was recorded by various agreements involving new partners providing either technical or financial support, hence the appearance of Mason in Aitkin's report. Thomas Holt, a Liverpool merchant, also acquired an interest, which at his death in 1802 passed to his brother John, a glass manufacturer from Wordsley near Kingswinford, and his sons Edward and Thomas. Then in 1821, when both John Holt and Edward had died, the administration of the business passed to Thomas, who decided to close it down. Perhaps the economic climate after those boom years of the Napoleonic Wars was now less favourable.

Jonathan Perry, auctioneer of Shrewsbury was thus engaged to dispose of it, first by selling its machinery and then seeking a buyer for the remainder of the lease of the premises including the remaining corn mill. The auction was duly carried out in 1824 with details listed in Eddow's Salopian Journal.

However, Jonathan failed to find anyone to take on the corn mill lease so he was obliged to take it himself, while continuing the search. Fortunately for him, Richard Jenkins returned from India in 1827 and now involved himself with the management of his estates, including taking back his father's lease and compensating Jonathan for any extra expenses. At the same time agreements were drawn up between the local landowners for the inclosure of Rossall Heath, in which Richard Jenkins was granted access to that part of the tunnel running under land allotted to the Sandford estate. Then, after the inclosure in 1830, further agreements rationalised the once irregular eastern side of the heath, giving the pattern of straight hedges and access road we see today. (SA 465/392-415)

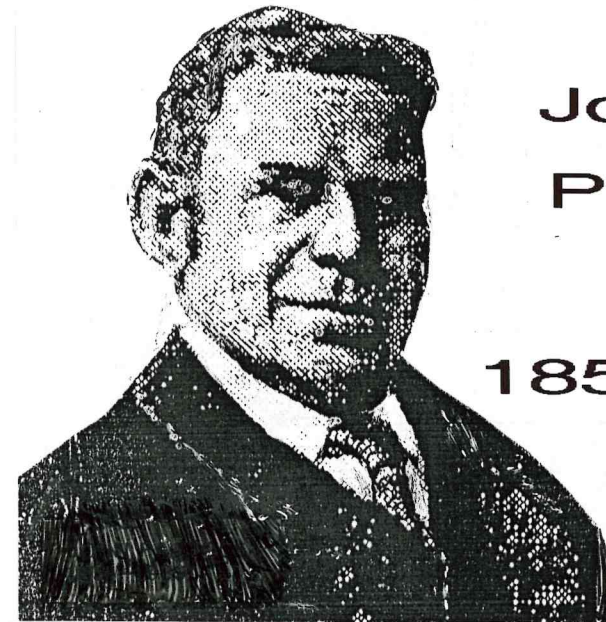
cottages on the Holyhead Road where he once lived. There may be other items of carpentry in local properties. In this way, we can be reminded of his contribution to the life and landscape of the village as we pass by.

Offprint from

Jun 2016
No 599

Bicton

John
Paddock



1851-1939

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

Part 108

Village

News

funeral bill
from John

The Representatives of the
Late Mr John Roberts

1928		£	s	d
To John Paddock				
Feb 21	To. A English oak coffin	"	"	"
To 24	polished Brass Furniture	"	"	"
"	and engraved plate	"	"	"
"	Elm shell padded & lined	"	"	"
"	and shroud &c Complete	13	0	0
22	Horse and pair from Quarry	"	"	"
"	place to Bicton	1	4	6
"	Horse and pair to Bicton	"	"	"
"	for the funeral	1	12	6
"	Drivers Fees	"	5	0
"	Funeral Fees at Bicton church	"	15	0
		£	14	0

Received of the Shanks
1928
J. Paddock

A.O.F. Juvenile Society. 1929

extract from Forester
subscription book

No.	NAMES	Quarterly Subscriptions.	Arrears.	Week ending Sat. July	Week ending Sat. Aug	Week ending Sat. Sep	Week ending Sat.
	H. W. Clarke	1	0	"	"	1/0	
	Tho W. Allen	1	0	"	"	2/0	
	Edith Wallon	1	0	"	"	2/0	
	Peter Butler	1	0	"	"	1/0	
	Kenneth Butler	1	0	"	"	1/0	
	Endow Alfred Deweyla	3	0	"	"	3/0	
	Endow Rich Daries	3	0	"	"	3/0	
	Endow Hill Daries	3	0	"	"	3/0	
	Norman Noon	"	6	"	"	"	
	Lester Gwill	1	0	4	4	4	
	Endow Harsley Gwill	3	0	1/0	1/0	1/0	
	Endow Edw J. Whittrigham	0		"	"	6/0	
	Francis Lee	1	0	"	"	1/0	
				1/4	1/4	24/4	

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 108

John Paddock 1851-1939

Apart from Europe and the weather, topics frequently discussed in political circles include welfare benefits, voluntary work, housing, education, apprenticeships and social mobility. Looking back we can find the very same issues arising in the life and times of John Paddock of Bicton, 1851-1939.

He was born in the village, the second son of Thomas Paddock, farm labourer and wife Jane (nee Mathews). They had a typical 'Victorian' family of nine children, the eldest of which had to leave home early in order to make room for younger siblings. Supporting such a large family was an obvious financial burden, without the resources enjoyed by Victoria and Albert, so mother Jane was also a laundress. The elder boys were also apprenticed to trades which might allow them to escape from low paid agricultural work. Elder brother Edward became a carriage builder, while younger brother Alfred became a carpenter.

John himself was apprenticed to John Edwards, carpenter and wheelwright, at Forton Bank, just across the river, where he also lodged. By this time the elderly widowed tradesman was being helped at home and in the workshop by his widowed daughter and her own family. The 1871 census revealed another crowded household of seven including another lad of John's age. By 1881 John had married Sarah Ann and set up home and business back here in Bicton. From now on his life followed an unusual path, in that they had no children, at a time when those large families were the norm. One wonders if his experience with the strains which they could bring may have been a factor. Thus free of such extra responsibility he now devoted his life to various aspects of service to the wider community, while at the same time following his trade.

In a way he had already become involved in such voluntary work while still a school boy. Thanks to his education he had been able to help his father become a very successful secretary to the local branch of the 'Ancient Order of Foresters' Friendly Society. It was no surprise that John actually then took on the role himself.

Before 'National Insurance' and related state benefits, which we now take for granted, such 'mutual' societies provided a valuable safety net for the working man struck down by illness. Their subscriptions were usually invested in order to yield an income from which benefits could be paid out as

and when needed. Government enquiries in 1873 and subsequent regulations revealed that our local branches or 'courts' were, in fact, managed very well and could be a model for others.

Such 'courts' could also be the focus of social contact, which included an annual service at Bicton, followed by a meal at their 'home base', the Wingfield Arms. At such events best suits, bowler hats and colourful sashes were proudly worn, not unlike those Orange Men in Northern Ireland. Other 'Friendly Societies' such as the 'Oddfellows' and the 'Ancient Order of Buffaloes' operated in a similar fashion elsewhere.

Thanks to such an early start, John eventually served a total of sixty one years with the organisation. As a by-product of this, he also became involved as a trustee to both St Chad's and Shrewsbury Municipal Charities, which also embraced Bicton.

This same early start with his administrative experience enabled John to also take on the role of Parish Clerk by 1880, in fact not long after such modern civil parishes had been created. He was to hold this post for over thirty years and only handed over to John Barlow when he became chairman of the parish council instead. In recognition of such work he was also appointed a JP at a time when this role was more often associated with landed gentry or professions rather than the 'working man'.

As in most rural villages local carpenters would usually produce coffins and when needed and generally act as undertakers. As sexton to Bicton Church John also undertook such duties with help from fellow carpenter brother Alfred, now doing small scale farming at the Pound.

Meanwhile, John's other relatives and their families were also striving to improve themselves, mainly by finding work beyond the village. Those who stayed here were working their way up the farming ladder to eventually take on the tenancies of larger village farms.. As John's energy waned in the thirties, nephew James was able to take over his role in the Foresters.

Wife Sarah died in 1933, after which John moved in with one of his employees, John Whittingham, at Mayfield House which they had built themselves. By strange coincidence, or just by sharing an infection, both died in July 1939, aged 57 and 87 respectively. With no immediate family to organise such things, John lacks a clear memorial in the churchyard.

However, all around the village are 'monuments' to his work as a builder: Mayfield, Roselea in Church Lane, New Cottages on Shepherds Lane and

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 108

John Paddock 1851-1939

Apart from Europe and the weather, topics frequently discussed in political circles include welfare benefits, voluntary work, housing, education, apprenticeships and social mobility. Looking back we can find the very same issues arising in the life and times of John Paddock of Bicton, 1851-1939.

He was born in the village, the second son of Thomas Paddock, farm labourer and wife Jane (nee Mathews). They had a typical 'Victorian' family of nine children, the eldest of which had to leave home early in order to make room for younger siblings. Supporting such a large family was an obvious financial burden, without the resources enjoyed by Victoria and Albert, so mother Jane was also a laundress. The elder boys were also apprenticed to trades which might allow them to escape from low paid agricultural work. Elder brother Edward became a carriage builder, while younger brother Alfred became a carpenter.

John himself was apprenticed to John Edwards, carpenter and wheelwright, at Forton Bank, just across the river, where he also lodged. By this time the elderly widowed tradesman was being helped at home and in the workshop by his widowed daughter and her own family. The 1871 census revealed another crowded household of seven including another lad of John's age. By 1881 John had married Sarah Ann and set up home and business back here in Bicton. From now on his life followed an unusual path, in that they had no children, at a time when those large families were the norm. One wonders if his experience with the strains which they could bring may have been a factor. Thus free of such extra responsibility he now devoted his life to various aspects of service to the wider community, while at the same time following his trade.

In a way he had already become involved in such voluntary work while still a school boy. Thanks to his education he had been able to help his father become a very successful secretary to the local branch of the 'Ancient Order of Foresters' Friendly Society. It was no surprise that John actually then took on the role himself.

Before 'National Insurance' and related state benefits, which we now take for granted, such 'mutual' societies provided a valuable safety net for the working man struck down by illness. Their subscriptions were usually invested in order to yield an income from which benefits could be paid out as

and when needed. Government enquiries in 1873 and subsequent regulations revealed that our local branches or 'courts' were, in fact, managed very well and could be a model for others.

Such 'courts' could also be the focus of social contact, which included an annual service at Bicton, followed by a meal at their 'home base', the Wingfield Arms. At such events best suits, bowler hats and colourful sashes were proudly worn, not unlike those Orange Men in Northern Ireland. Other 'Friendly Societies' such as the 'Oddfellows' and the 'Ancient Order of Buffaloes' operated in a similar fashion elsewhere.

Thanks to such an early start, John eventually served a total of sixty one years with the organisation. As a by-product of this, he also became involved as a trustee to both St Chad's and Shrewsbury Municipal Charities, which also embraced Bicton.

This same early start with his administrative experience enabled John to also take on the role of Parish Clerk by 1880, in fact not long after such modern civil parishes had been created. He was to hold this post for over thirty years and only handed over to John Barlow when he became chairman of the parish council instead. In recognition of such work he was also appointed a JP at a time when this role was more often associated with landed gentry or professions rather than the 'working man'.

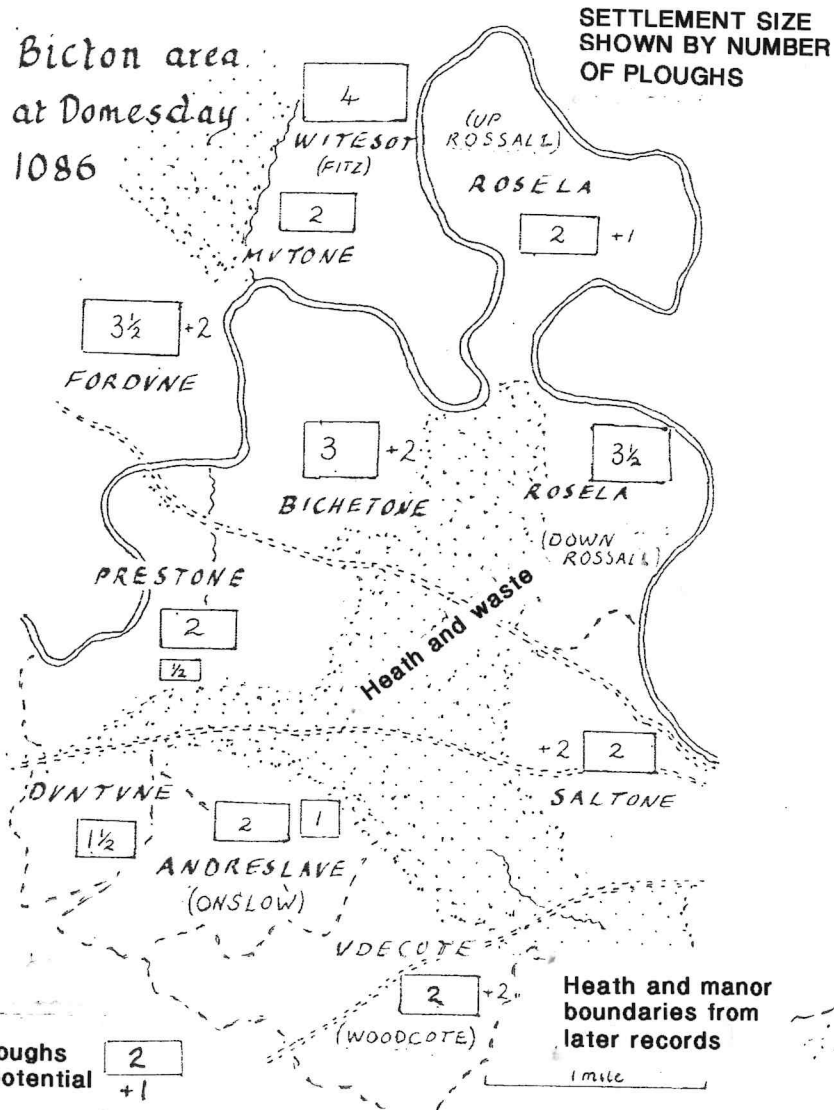
As in most rural villages local carpenters would usually produce coffins as and when needed and generally act as undertakers. As sexton to Bicton Church John also undertook such duties with help from fellow carpenter brother Alfred, now doing small scale farming at the Pound.

Meanwhile, John's other relatives and their families were also striving to improve themselves, mainly by finding work beyond the village. Those who stayed here were working their way up the farming ladder to eventually take on the tenancies of larger village farms.. As John's energy waned in the thirties, nephew James was able to take over his role in the Foresters.

Wife Sarah died in 1933, after which John moved in with one of his employees, John Whittingham, at Mayfield House which they had built themselves. By strange coincidence, or just by sharing an infection, both died in July 1939, aged 57 and 87 respectively. With no immediate family to organise such things, John lacks a clear memorial in the churchyard.

However, all around the village are 'monuments' to his work as a builder: Mayfield, Roselea in Church Lane, New Cottages on Shepherds Lane and

of our local settlements and demonstrates that the basic pattern of farming communities was already in existence, although later much altered. The very small 'townships' of Calcott, Udlington and Oxon were however not mentioned at this time and their origins must remain a mystery. Both Preston Montford and Onslow appeared to have two different estates within them, but only in the case of Onslow did this feature persist as a parish boundary running through the settlement.



Bicton Village News

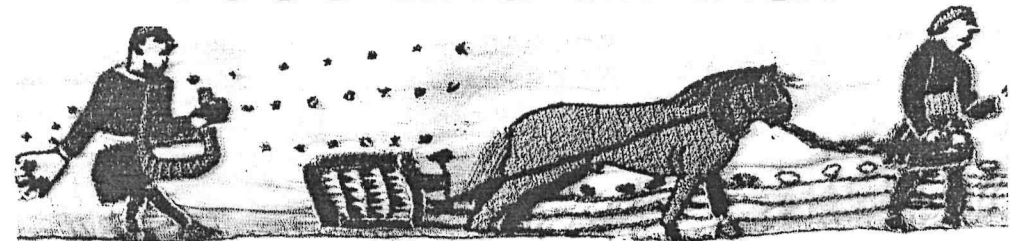
Offprint from
Jul 2016
No 600

HISTORY
of BICTON
by David Pannett

Part 109



1066 and all that



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 109

1066 and all that

Amongst the many dates to be celebrated this year will be the 950th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings, which brought us the Norman Conquest. The impact of this was soon to be seen in new Norman castles and churches as symbols of the new regime, while Norman nobility and churchmen replaced those of Saxon England. At the grass roots level, however, the population had to carry on as before.

King William, as an outsider, was naturally curious about the details of his new territory, so that, after a few years he commissioned a survey. Completed in 1086, this was later known as the Domesday Book since it resembled the 'Last judgement'. Although the King commissioned it, the efficiency of its production was to be a lasting tribute to the Saxon administrative framework and its associated settlement and agricultural systems which he had inherited. These had been developed during the previous two centuries, as Saxon Kings such as Alfred and Athelstone reorganised the Kingdom as a response to the Danish Wars. Our national pattern of Shires and Shire towns is but one of their legacies which we still live with. Ecclesiastical divisions could be even older, although Hundreds as subdivisions of shires have however lapsed.

The three main concerns of any medieval government based on a feudal hierarchy were: Who owned what and by whom?; How much tax could it yield? and What was that land's potential for food production? Domesday Book attempted to answer these questions as can be seen from Bicton's own entry (translated from the original latin and abbreviations):

Holdings of St Chads Church:

Baschurch Hundred

The church itself holds Bicton, Wiger holds from it, 2 hides which pay tax. In lordship 1 plough 4 villagers and one free man with 2 ploughs, 2 others would be possible

The value was (1066) 10s now 15s

Clearly some of this needs further explanation:

Churches at this time were important landowners and locally St Chads also held Rossall, half of Onslow and Shelton, St Alkmonds held Preston Montford and Dinthill while St Marys held Mytton. While founding these churches, the Saxon Kings, nobility and Bishops had thus provided them with rents and Tithes for their support. Wiger, as tenant of the church, would have been the nearest thing which Bicton had as a resident 'Lord of the Manor'.

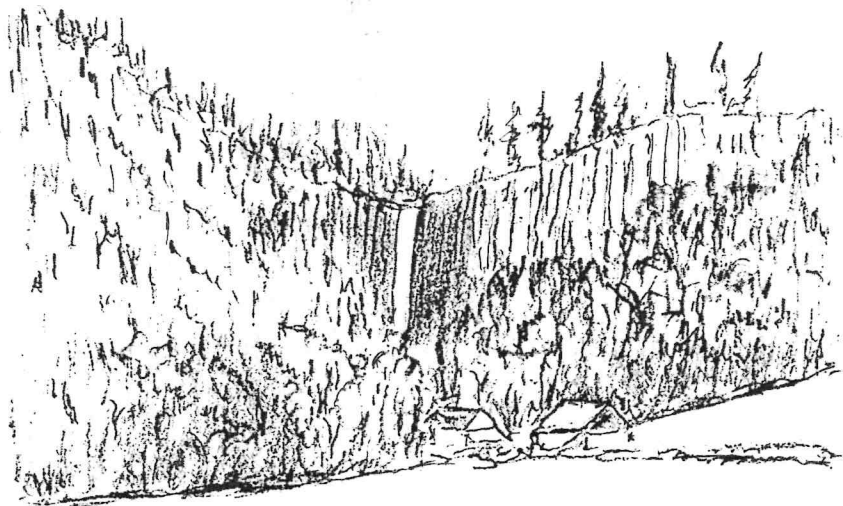
Other villages in this area were held by various subtenants under Roger de Lacey, Lord of Oswestry, and his relations such as the Corbets. As at Bicton there were also some 'free men', but they soon disappeared as everyone had to submit to one feudal lord or another.

When it comes to taxation, we are all familiar with the different 'bands' for the calculation of Council Tax and in some respects the 'Hidage' system of the Saxons was similar. Each village was assessed with a number of Hides which approximated to about 120 acres of arable land, while a quarter of each, termed a 'virgate' of about 30 acres, was deemed enough to support a village family. 'Smallholds' would have had a lesser share. Bicton was similar to its neighbours in being in the 1-2 Hide 'band'.

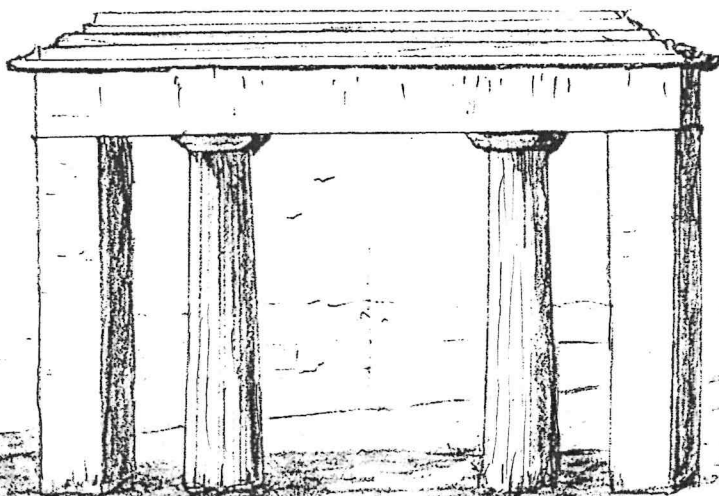
Reliable food production was the foundation of any well run feudal state in which the various lay and religious elites 'consumed' the output of all these producers at village level, rather like the pyramid of numbers in a natural ecosystem (e.g. one pike feeds on many minnows, which in turn feed on countless flies and weeds without which the whole system would collapse). In an age of poor communications, Kings and nobles tended to move around their territories in order to consume those supplies from their scattered properties.

One measure of actual production, as opposed to 'estimated tax bands', was the actual number of plough teams in use. Each village had been organised as a communal or collective farm (like the latter Soviet model) by the Saxon Kings creating what we term the 'Open Field System'. Villages thus each contributed to the ploughs and the draught oxen and acted as a team during the work, hence the need to mix their individual plots together. They were also obliged to work their landlord's part which was normally mixed in too, rather than being a separate estate.

A plot of plough teams can therefore give a better idea of the relative sizes



Pistyll Rhaeadr, Berwyn Mountains



'The end of the road' - monumental arch at Holyhead Harbour

Offprint from

Aug 2016

No 601

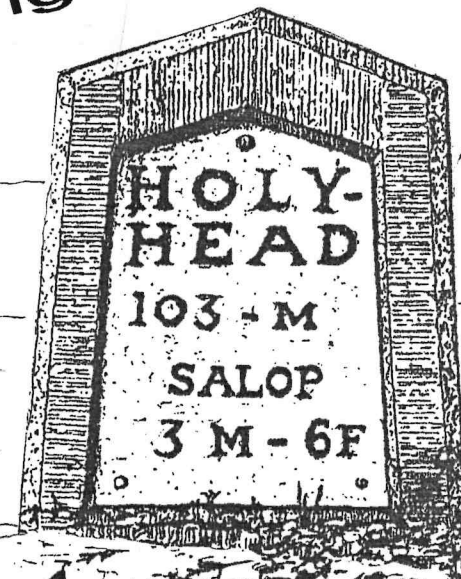
Bicton

Exploring

History

further

west



Village

News

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

Part 110

by David Pannett

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 110

Exploring history further west

We have often discussed how Bicton sits on a mound of glacial debris – clay, stones of all sizes and patches of sand. They form a prominent ridge or 'moraine' across which the old Oswestry road needed improvements when it became part of Telford's 'Holyhead Road' in the early nineteenth century.

Since the summer months are a traditional time for getting out and about, why not explore westwards to find out where all that glacial material came from and where the road was leading to.

On a fine day, from the crest of the moraine on Grange Bank, we can easily see the Berwyn Mountain forming the western skyline, so head in that direction. On the way one could call for refreshment at the Royal Hill at Edgerley, one of the few traditional country pubs which have escaped a modern makeover. This would give time to reflect on the river winding over a level plain of clay and silt filling a deep trench scoured in the local sandstone by the passing glacier, which then dumped much of it over Bicton. In this same area is the delightful little timber-frame church at Molverley, whose construction is a sensible response to the soft ground beneath.

Further up the Severn, steep hillsides and flat valley floors also betray the action of glaciers draining from the Welsh ice cap some 20,000 years ago. However, for the types of glacial scenery illustrated in textbooks, one must instead head for those mountains up the Tanat valley on the Bala road.

Beyond Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant the narrow road climbs up a tributary valley to reach Pistyll Rhaeadr, claimed to be the highest waterfall in Wales. It plunges over a cliff of hard basalt which shows a rough version of 'Giant's Causeway' vertical jointing and whose height, over one hundred feet, is a measure of the amount by which the ice has cut the valley deeper. This yielded the type of material which contributed to the Bicton moraine, including those boulders built into garden walls in the old village.

For the energetic, the rest of the valley leading towards Cadair Berwyn is certainly worth exploring, if only for the peace and quiet away from tourists. This is more than can be said of Snowdonia, where glaciers moving in the other direction carved passes through the upland, thus providing convenient routes for road builders and access for visitors.

During the late eighteenth century, several local 'Turnpike Trusts' were improving the roads through here, partially as an alternative route between Shrewsbury and Holyhead avoiding Chester. But after 1800, when the parliaments of Dublin and Westminster were united, the Irish MPs, nevertheless, still complained that their journey was slow and difficult. They lobbied the government to intervene, but response was slow thanks to the distractions of the Napoleonic Wars.

The government did, however, eventually become involved when it realised how important these roads were to the national postal services and appointed Thomas Telford to survey the route beyond Shrewsbury and organise improvements. Thus, from 1810 onwards, these were carried out, especially in reducing gradients and providing better bridges which included a suspension bridge over the Menai Strait. Toll houses and milestones of a standard design were spaced along the route, while in the mountain areas strong boundary walls both supported and confined the carriageway on difficult slopes.

In a drive to North Wales, notice the smooth gradients fit for stagecoaches and the engineering involved, especially on that slow descent into Bettws-y-Coed. On the way, look under the bridge at Chirk, where the modern wide deck actually sits on Telford's original arch! Finally, at Holyhead harbour, which has seen many modern developments, his custom house and a sort of triumphal arch still greet you at the quayside.

Should you continue your journey to Dublin, or at least look at a tourist brochure, you will see 'Halfpenny Bridge' across the Liffey – guess whose design was used!

With so much urgent work in the mountains it is no surprise that the minor problem at Bicton was not sorted out until 1835, actually after Telford's death, when assistant John Provis took over. Thus the whole project was now complete.

The road successfully reduced travel time between London and Holyhead to about 27 hours, but its glory was to be short-lived as the new railway system took over in 1848. However, Telford's work was 'built to last' so that much of it has been able to accommodate a return to more use in the motor car age (with the aid of 'tarmacadam'). It is also now appreciated as an historic monument. Do explore it along with the mountain scenery and thereby appreciate how our local features and history fit into the wider scheme of things.

Offprint from

Sep 2016

No 602

Bicton

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 111



Our Changing Farming Landscape

DAVID PANNETT

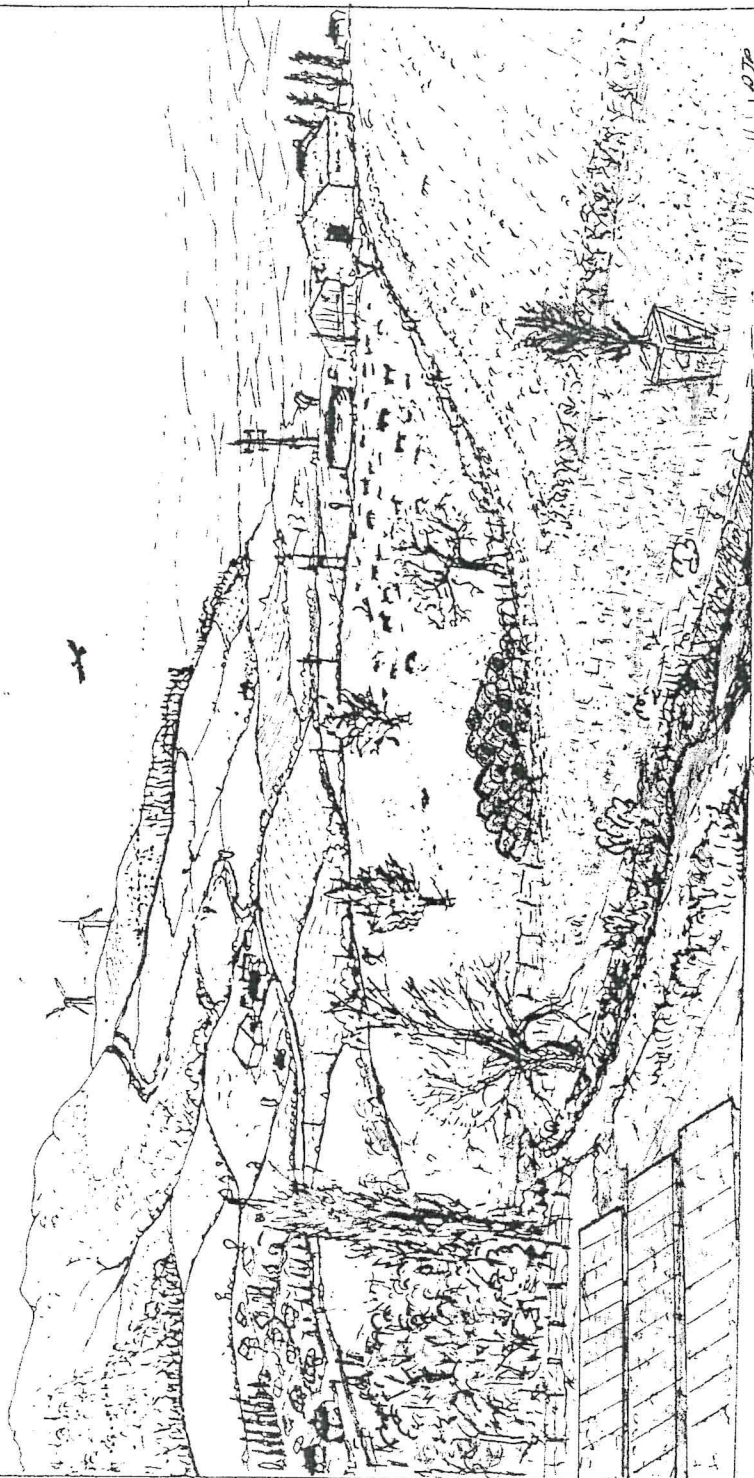
As a break from our usual history essay, here is a sort of 'Spot the Difference' exercise to test your powers of observation, using an imaginary view of somewhere in the Borderland. Spot the changes and look for examples of them in the real world as you travel around or search your memories. Some of them relate to Bicton.

Village

News

www.bictonvillage.co.uk

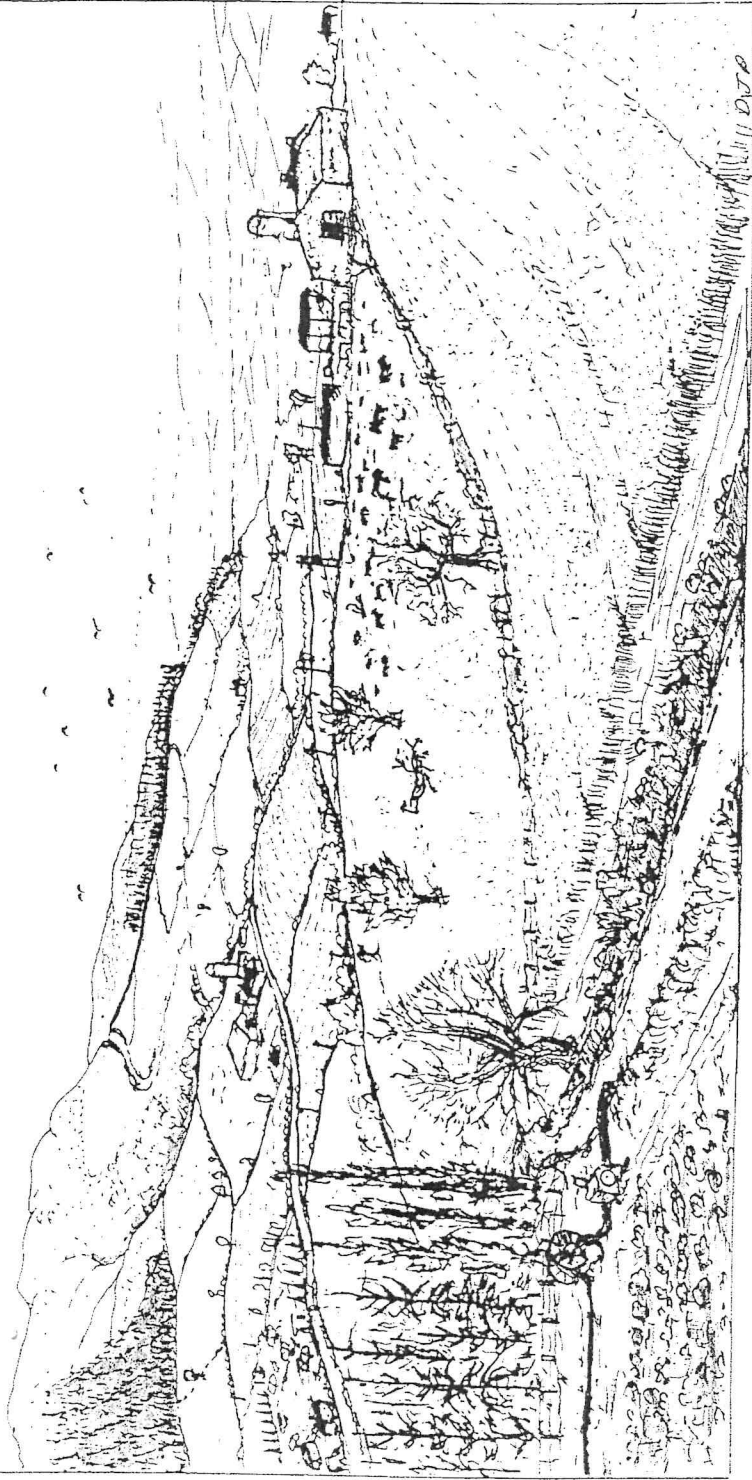
Yet more changes today



The traditional scene c 1950



The modernised scene c. 1980



Offprint from

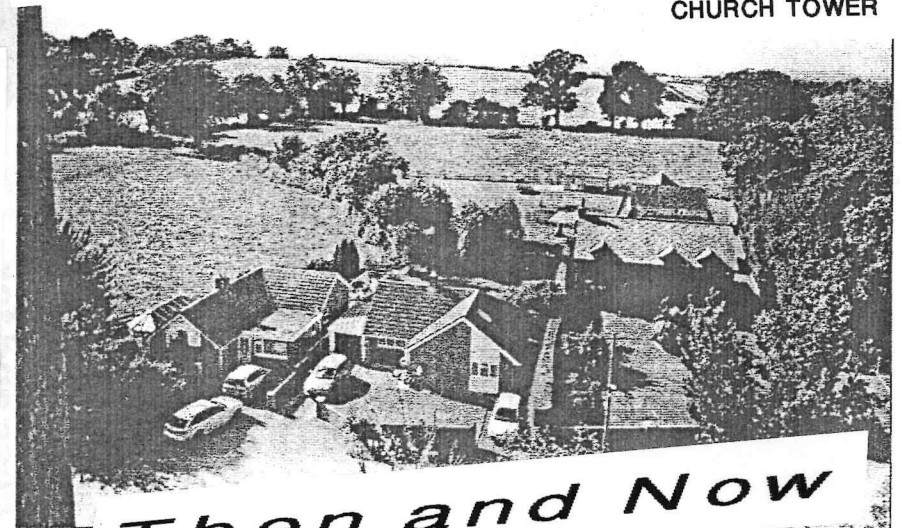
Oct 2016

No 603

Bicton

Our Landscape

VIEW WEST FROM
CHURCH TOWER



Then and Now

www.bictonvillage.co.uk

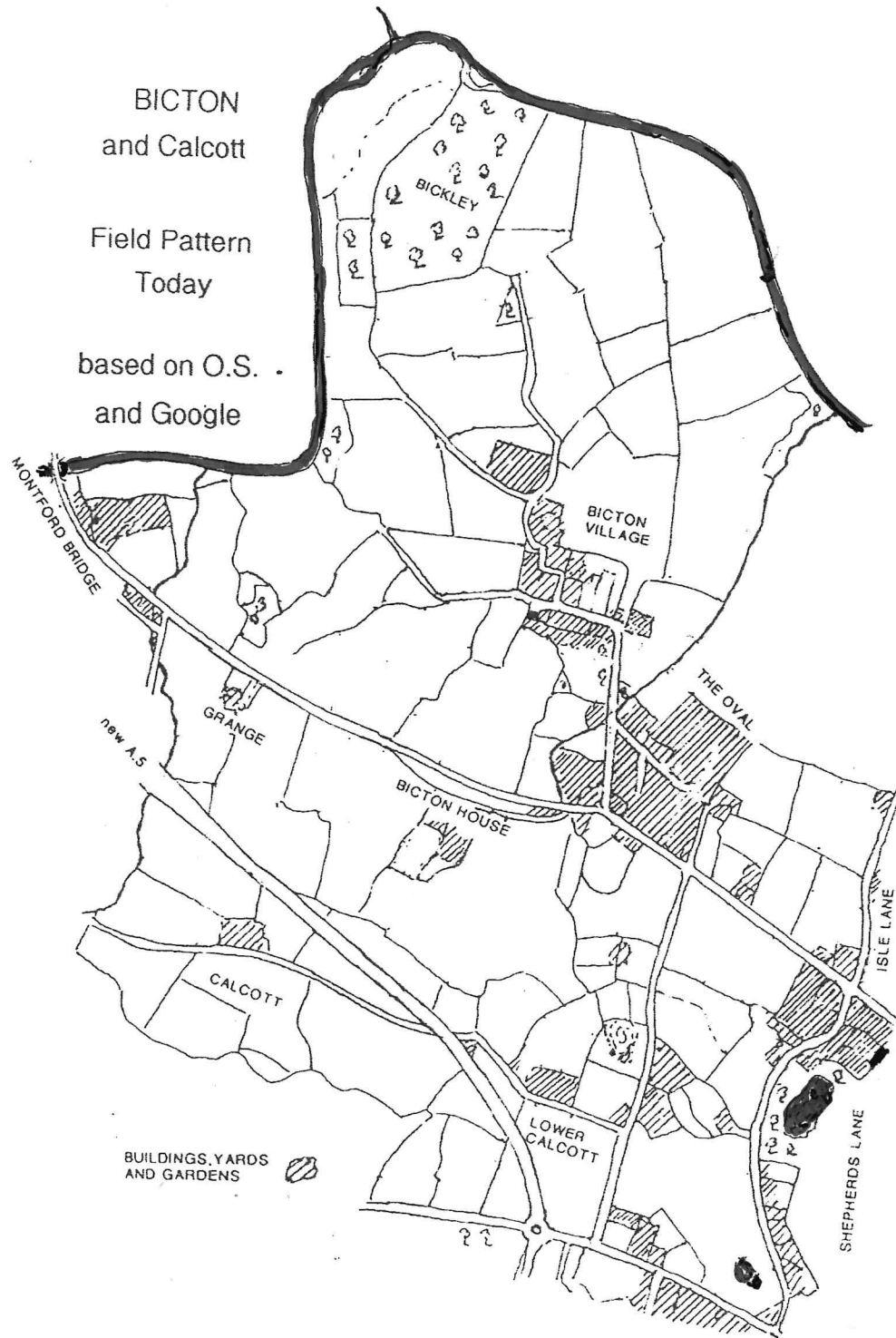
Village

News

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

Part 112

by David Pannett



BICTON
and Calcott

Field Pattern
Today

based on O.S.
and Google

BUILDINGS, YARDS
AND GARDENS

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 112

Our Landscape then and now

The pattern of fields in the ancient 'township' of Bicton and Calcott developed during the course of several centuries, but has experienced rapid change in recent decades. This is not a unique situation, but one which is common to many parts of Britain as illustrated in last month's 'I Spy' exercise.

The original pattern, as shown by 19th century maps, consisted of mainly medium sized fields of about 10-15 acres. Those around the village were created on the site of the three medieval 'Open Fields', probably in the late 17th century. However, many lines of hedges still reflect the earlier layout of 'furlongs', the groups of ridges and strips in those old fields. Also, in spite of these changes, the farmsteads remained in the old village, although enlarged and improved, so that a radiating network of lanes was necessary to connect them with their outlying land.

The south-eastern third of the township appears to be quite different, as it was once mainly open heathland until 1768 and had become a scatter of cottage smallholdings between which the new roads and straight hedges were then fitted.

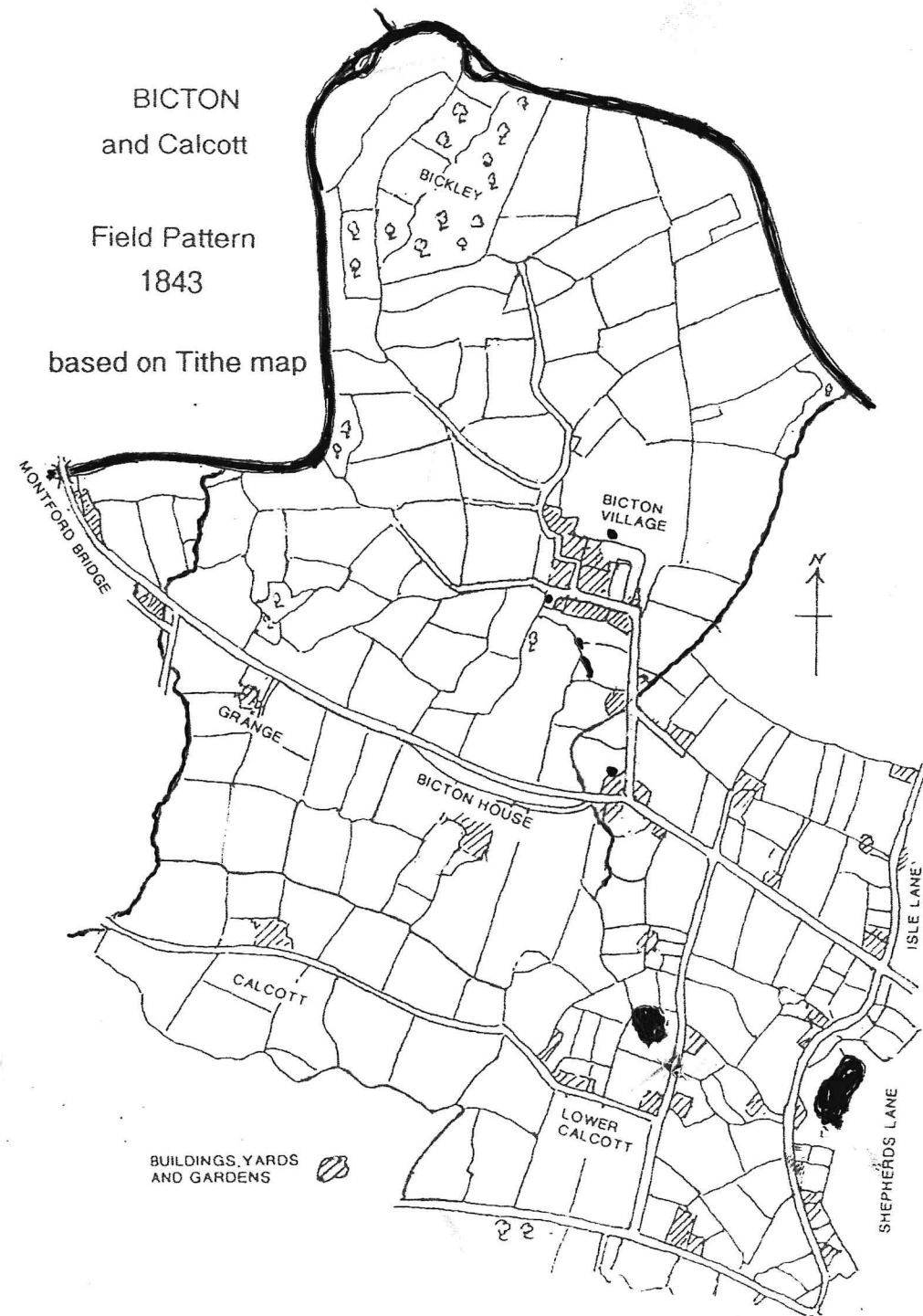
The south-west corner is in many ways rather a mystery. It includes land of a former 'grange' belonging to Buildwas Abbey, as well as a separate estate at Calcott belonging to St John's Hospital, Frankwell. How much of an old pattern did the new, post-reformation owners inherit and how much did they establish a new one is just guesswork.

The whole pattern survived more or less intact into the 20th century, partly thanks to periods of economic depression and the local emphasis on dairy farming. In the post-war years, however, the combined effects of bigger machinery and support policies encouraging greater production required the enlargement of fields. Also some of the old permanent pastures came under the plough. Here and there a lone oak tree can still record the loss of an old hedge.

Farm amalgamations also took place as tenancies expired or owner-occupiers retired. Some specialised production units require bigger buildings. Some farmland was now being taken over by 'suburban' type housing, while the spaces between small-holder cottages are being filled in. Further development is threatened in the south-east corner.

The new A5 has cut right across the field pattern and the NW Relief Road is still on plans for the future.

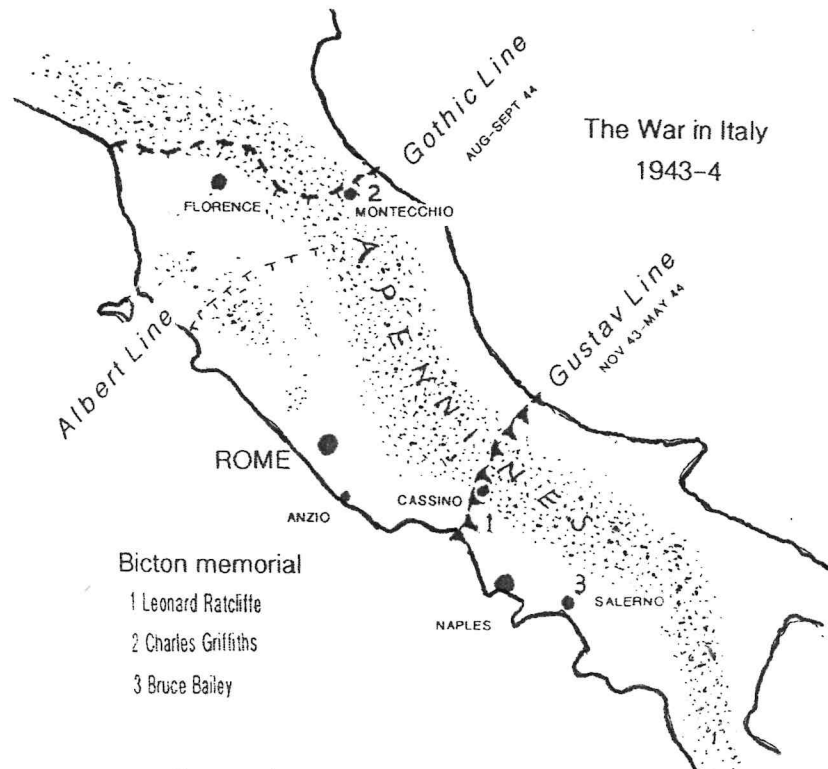
Watch this space!



target. Eventually, however, the Normandy invasion did take place as another joint enterprise with the Americans. We landed in the east, where it was important to secure the left flank along the Caen canal, hence the famous airborne commando drop on to 'Pegasus' Bridge (subsequently named after them). Then, as the invasion progressed in the next days and weeks, conventional infantry took over to resist the German counterattacks. The resulting casualties included John Evans, serving with the Suffolk Regiment, who now lies in the War Cemetery at Ranville.

He had been a police constable in Stoke, but married Enid Lancett, school teacher from Calcott Lane, with whom he had a daughter, Hillary. Since the war his memory has been kept alive by them, including frequent visits to France.

We hope this essay will also help in this, thanks to information supplied by friends and families which has made it possible. There are more stories to tell some other time when similar information has been gathered together for them... any help most welcome.



offprint

Bicton

Nov 2016
No 604



Village

News

HISTORY
of BICTON

by David Pannett

Part 113

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 113

Remembering WWII

Once again in November we remember those who died in past wars and this year it is the turn of those Bicton people who fell in the Second World War. Their memorial inside the Church offers just a list of names, leaving plenty of scope for further details where these are known. With passing years and the typical mobile population of the parish there are, however, few around to remember them and supply this information. There are also fewer people who visit the Church and who are even aware of their names.

The list, with some additional information is as follows:

Bruce Herbert Bailey	R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve	d	18.10.44	22
Marion T Bright (nee Price)			31.05.45	20
Dennis Brown				
Percy Crane	Durham Light Infantry		27.06.42	31
William H Edmonds				
John Reginald Evans	Suffolk reg		18.07.44	27
Jack Norton Green				
Charles Benjamin Griffiths	Royal Artillery		14.09.44	25
Dennis Griffiths				
Leonard Ratcliffe	Royal Artillery		26.11.43	40
John Phillip Williams	Royal Engineers		12.04.41	35

The deaths span several years of the war, starting with John Williams in 1941 and finishing with Marion Bright in 1945, both of whom actually lie in our churchyard, rather than in some foreign field.

John Williams, the son of Mr & Mrs E Williams, formerly of Calcott Moss, was then living in The Crescent, Montford Bridge with wife Gladys and son Norman. Before joining up he had been a driver for the County Council and this no doubt steered him into the road construction company of the Royal Engineers at a base in Northern Ireland. He died there suddenly, just after returning from leave so it was relatively easy for his remains to be brought home to Bicton. His standard 'War Cemetery' headstone also records that his wife then died five months later and joined him here, an unusual situation for an 'official' war grave.

Marion Bright, who had only recently married Dennis Bright of Bishops Castle, also originally came from The Crescent as part of the large family of Bob Price. She had become a nurse and unfortunately contracted tuberculosis while serving at a hospital in Reykjavik, Iceland, which forced her to return home. These were the days before the development of Streptomycin, so that TB was still a killer with little treatment available beyond fresh air and rest. She therefore lies amongst other Price family members in the churchyard, but lacks a separate headstone. There was even debate whether she should be included on the War Memorial, but it was rightly claimed that she had been 'doing her bit' in an important centre of activity during the war.

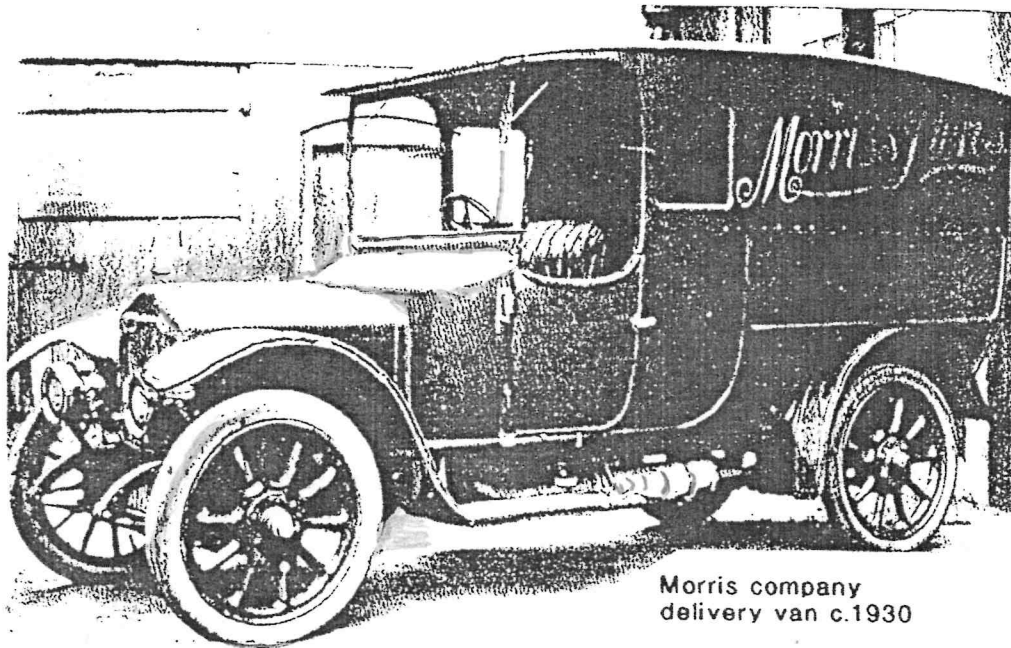
Between these two, other deaths mainly reflected successive stages of the war in Europe, including the role of the well known '8th Army'. This story really started with the success of Rommel's Afrika Korps in pushing back the allies in North Africa during 1942. They were, however, stopped at El Alamein, where Percy Crane, son of John and Annie Crane, became one of the casualties.

After a build up of men and materials and with Montgomery in charge, the 8th Army fought back and with the help of the Americans, eventually drove the Germans out of Africa, leading to the invasion of Sicily and Italy. Politicians may have described this area as the 'soft underbelly of Europe', but the geographical reality was quite different thanks to the mountainous terrain. For the retreating armies this gave ideal opportunities for defence, but only a 'hard slog' for those advancing. In particular, the German forces established a series of defensive lines which became the scene of the most intense fighting. In this way, Gunner Leonard Ratcliffe died near Cassino on the 'Gustav Line' along with many others. He was the son of John and Joanna Ratcliffe from Calcott Lane and left a wife, Violet, on Holyhead Road. His father was an attendant at the Shelton Mental Hospital. Later, at the 'Gothic Line', gunner Charles Griffiths, son of Charles and Martha of Isle Lane, also died. At the same time there was plenty of supporting action in the air, from bases behind the advancing front and some of this led to the death of Bruce Bailey, son of another 'Asylum' attendant, Herbert Bailey and wife Irene. Their large family grew up in a small cottage which no longer exists, near Grove Farm. This Italian campaign posed many problems which prompted much debate amongst the allies about its value, when France should have been an easier

Throughout this story, there has been an associated revolution in packaging. The 'old time' grocery stores sliced bacon, weighed out loose sugar, dried fruit, biscuits etc. which were then wrapped by the assistants in brown paper parcels or bags. No wonder the trade required a long apprenticeship.

Back home such ingredients demanded more work from the housewife, especially in the annual ritual of making a Christmas pudding. Now, even these can be bought ready-made, along with a range of partially prepared foods and ready meals encased in plastic designed for the microwave.

While this has been going on, however, a sort of revolt against it has developed in the form of 'Farm Shops', where fresh local produce replaces all those far travelled pre-packed goods. Here, a real butcher can cut meat in front of the customer and most goods are taken away in paper rather than plastic. Battlefield and Churncote are good examples of this. Each also offers dining space using those same local ingredients, where one can also relax away from the hectic Christmas shopping.



Morris company
delivery van c.1930

Offprint from

Dec 2016

No 605

Bicton



Shopping Days

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

Part 114

Village

News

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 114

Shopping Days

As we approach Christmas, the passage of time is often expressed as the number of shopping days remaining. Also, each year we may notice the latest techniques used by retailers to encourage us to buy, both for daily needs and for the special demands of the festive season. This can remind us how much this whole business has changed within our living memory.

One current trend is 'online' ordering and card payments, which means that some customers do not even need to leave the house. Leading supermarkets dispatch the orders with their fleet of vans, which manage to penetrate even the remotest narrow lanes of our countryside as 'Satnavs' pursue the relevant postcode. At the same time, numerous carriers and the postmen deliver parcels from the likes of Amazon and others. Some days the post seems dominated by yet more catalogues designed to keep this system going.

Aspects of this modern trend are but revised versions of systems which served rural areas in the past, especially after the development of motor transport in the 1920s. Then, principal grocers of a market town, such as Morris & Co in Shrewsbury, sent out 'travellers' gathering orders which would be delivered by company van a few days later. Morris & Co boasted a fleet of 40 vehicles, some of which were devoted to this trade. Herbert Lewis of Milnsbridge, off Shepherds Lane, served a seven year apprenticeship with this company and then, when married, worked as such a traveller for Midgleys of Newport. When he was called up in the war, the army made use of all his car experience by sending him to Sandhurst as a driving instructor..... but in tanks! (polite 'shop' manners probably helped too).

The mail order system for goods not normally held by 'small town' shops was probably first developed in the United States in response to their widely scattered farming population (who could also use the catalogues in the privy!). An amusing story told by Alistair Cooke concerned a group of Americans discussing relations with the Soviet Union during the 'Cold War': one said "We should just nuke the Ruskies"; but another said "No, just drop Sears-Roebuck (department store) catalogues on them so they can see what they have been missing under the commies."

Locally, the lanes were always busy with sales traffic, the milkman being

perhaps the most regular. Before Prices of the Woodlands, George Dudley and Family of Bicton Villa served the community over several decades. In the beginning the milk was dispensed from an open churn into the customers' own jugs; the familiar glass bottle came later.

When this rural area still lacked electricity, another important regular was Charles Birch from Shrewsbury bringing lamp oil. The Morris bakery also had a regular bread round, while other specialists brought different foods: Bill Price of Montford Bridge (fish), Hynes of Ford (meat) to name but a few who came and went over the years. Together they incidentally provided some welcome social contact to otherwise isolated cottage families.

In a pioneering way, the Co-op set up a more general mobile shop to tour the local villages. Paddy McLoughlin, after working in a normal shop, went on to establish his own small fleet of similar mobile shops based in Bicton Lane. After he closed down in the 1970s, his warehouse housed other businesses until eventually being taken over by Dairyscope. The adjacent shop reverted to a normal residence.

About this time, a retailing revolution was taking place in town – Safeway self-service supermarket arrived in Abbey Foregate. Others followed later on the edge of the town and we have witnessed their impact on traditional 'High Street' trade. The Morris Company, for instance, gave up their grocery stores and concentrated on other activities in property, leisure and care homes, which we see around us today.

Locally, small village stores continued, partially thanks to sub-post office functions, at Bicton Heath and Montford Bridge. However, these too have now gone.

Small filling stations also came under threat from the supermarkets and either closed or reinvented themselves as combined convenience stores and garages offering other services on the regular commuter routes in and out of town. It is now hard to recall that the Four Crosses filling station was once attached to the Inn, while that at Chavel (Ford) was little more than a shed. The Mount garage had a similar story.

The big 'out of town' supermarkets aimed to cater for the 'weekly one-stop shopping' but now realised that local convenience stores were successfully selling frequent basket loads rather than those big trolley loads. In response they have been joining in, both in the suburbs and town centre.