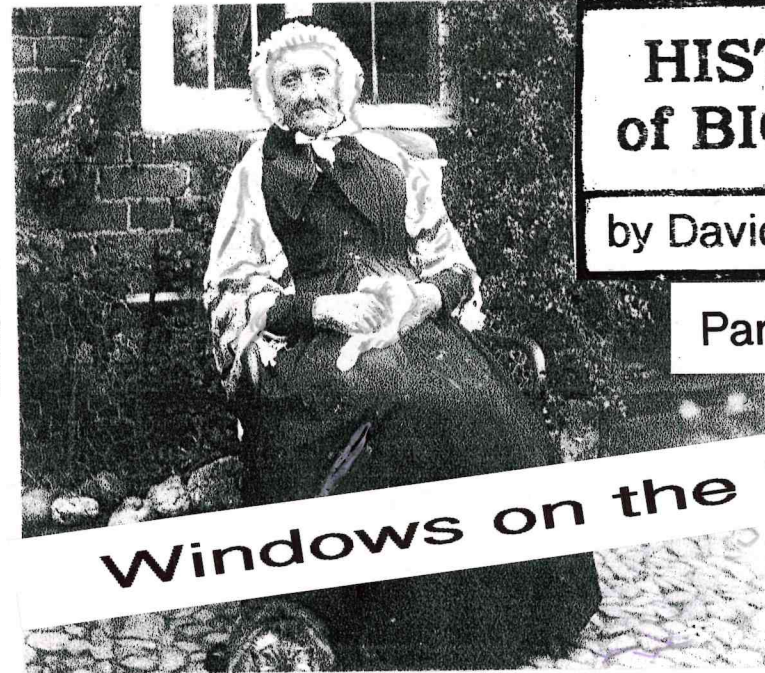


Offprint from

Jan 2017

No 606

Bicton



**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

Part 115

Windows on the Past

Village News

Photographs by Ernest Lewis



Lee family, The Villa



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 115

Windows on the past

Some time ago in this series (Dec 2013) we discussed the life of Ernest Lewis of Bicton, born at Old School House in 1878. As he grew up, the bicycle was taking on its modern form and thus increasing local mobility, while photography was developing, catering both for amateurs at home and professionals in their studios. Putting these inventions together, Ernest would cycle around the Shrewsbury area taking photographs of people near their own homes, rather than in a conventional studio in town. His main business was actually as a watchmaker, who also needed to cycle around winding important clocks (including Bicton Church after 1922) and he may have met photographic 'subjects' this way.

As a result, many local family archives may have examples of his work, but back at his own home at Milnsbridge, only a few of his glass negatives survived family 'de-cluttering' after his death in 1957. Now, thanks to modern computer technology, it is possible to reproduce them, as shown by four examples here. They date from years around 1910, but it is not always obvious where in the neighbourhood they were taken. Clues in the background may help and any suggestions from readers would be welcome. Photographs at this time were generally 'staged', avoiding natural movement because of the long exposure necessary. They were also generally associated with special events such as weddings, when all would be in their 'Sunday best' rather than working clothes. Indeed, just to be photographed was a special event in itself.

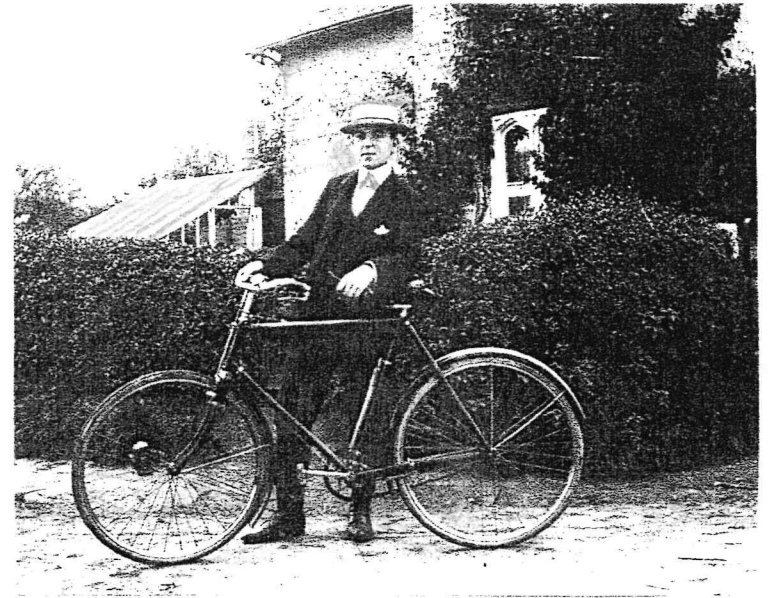
The examples illustrate aspects of typical pre-1914 fashions: long skirts for grown up women, waists pinched in by hidden corsets, billowing blouses hiding busts pushed up by those corsets, high neckline at one end and 'button-up' boots peeping out at the other. The formal dress for men looked equally uncomfortable with high starched collars (later celluloid). Waistcoats held the slimmer figures tight, and also housed the pocket watch. The 'walrus' or 'soup strainer' moustaches were common, perhaps avoiding navigating a 'cut throat' razor around the nose and lips, before Mr Gillette had improved the design.

Versions of 'sailor suits' with wide collars were popular for both boys and girls.

It would be an interesting exercise to 're-stage' these group scenes in

modern dress. Now we tend to be more 'casual' with a wider range of styles and fabrics available, including 'high viz' jackets for cyclists. The female figure can also be better appreciated. The resulting photograph would then be fed straight into the computer!

(Special thanks to staff at Shropshire Archives for help with this project).



Niece Nora

although rather verbose, show what ideas could be illustrated by looking at our familiar countryside rather than some exotic location:

'It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing in the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws being Growth and Reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the indirect and direct action of the conditions of life..... a Ratio of increase so high as to lead to a struggle for life, and as a consequence to 'Natural Selection', entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less-improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature the production of the higher animals directly follows.'

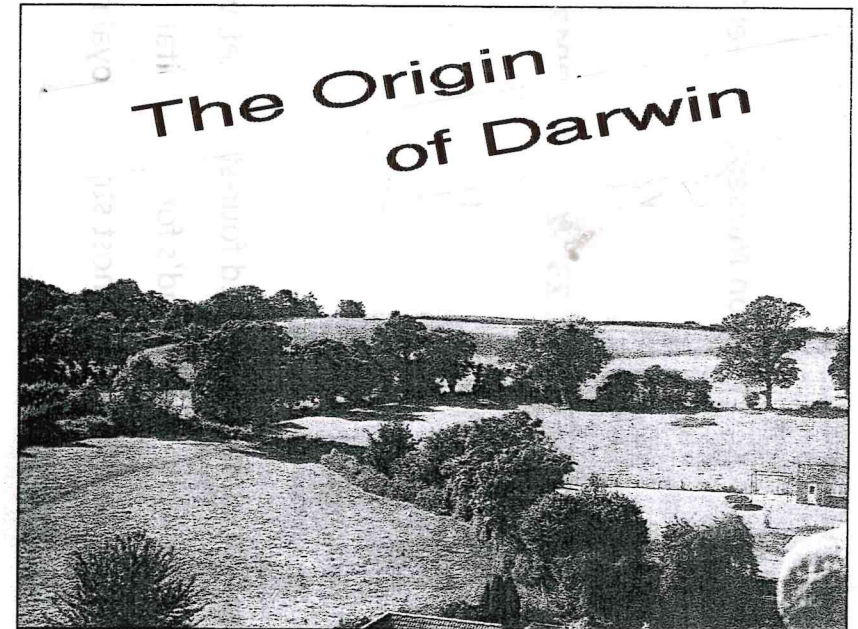


Bicton

Offprint from

Feb 2017

No 607



Village

News

Part 116

by David Pannett

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 116

The Origin of Darwin

Each February Shrewsbury marks the birthday of Charles Darwin with lectures and meetings celebrating aspects of his life and work. Bicton cannot claim any special link to him except by being part of the countryside near the family home on The Mount, over which he would have wandered in his youth, both collecting and shooting. He certainly passed by on the way to his girlfriend at Woodhouse near Rednal. Also, his father Robert, a doctor, is likely to have visited his patients amongst the gentry around here and in the end was himself buried in Montford churchyard.

Charles did not enjoy his education at Shrewsbury School, but nevertheless, a seated statue of him in later life was erected outside the old building (now the library). Since Shrewsbury can only claim association with his earliest years, a recent youthful statue of him erected at the School's Kingsland site is far more relevant. Bicton residents who belong to the Mytton Oak Medical Practice may be familiar with a small version of this statue in its waiting room.

Elsewhere in the Town, a strange structure now stands at the head of Mardol, which authorities claim to be another Darwin monument, but any connection is far from obvious. More logically, it can represent the collaboration between Thomas Telford, who reintroduced Nesscliffe stone into his work (e.g. Montford Bridge), and ironmaster William Hazeldine of Coleham, who produced the metalwork for his bridges. Judge for yourself when out shopping.

Father Robert wanted Charles to be a doctor in his footsteps and therefore sent him to Edinburgh, one of the best medical schools in the kingdom (famous for the Burke and Hare body scandals). Unfortunately, Charles had no stomach for it and instead he chose to go to Cambridge to study theology. This may seem a strange choice for a budding scientist, but Charles thought that a life as a country parson could give him spare time to pursue his interests in natural history. We have already remarked how our very small modern clergy team must serve six churches 'around the loop' where at least five Victorian clergy once operated.

At this time, the ancient universities were still dominated by the established

church, so that it could also be politic to be ordained as part of a career teaching other subjects. Charles as a student used his spare time to get involved with the geological and biological interests of such academics, which were to be of greater use to him when invited to join the voyage of the Beagle. As they say, the rest is history.

One problem with the fame which his later work brought him is that one tends to forget how many others contributed ideas and knowledge at various stages in his life. In his youth, for instance, there were already several enthusiastic naturalists in the town with whom he could associate. In a way, they were all heirs to the eighteenth century 'enlightenment', which sought to view the world in a fresh, logical way, without the burden of superstition. His grandfather Erasmus of Lichfield, for instance, was a member of the Lunar Society, a Midlands-based group of intellectuals and pioneer industrialists including Josiah Wedgwood, pushing forward the frontiers of technology, which drove the Industrial Revolution. Then, in Edinburgh, Charles would have found himself in one to the 'hot spots' of the whole European enlightenment buzzing with new radical ideas.

The Industrial Revolution was now exploiting ever more of the Country's mineral wealth, while also digging for canals and roads with the result that knowledge of geology advanced enormously. This included the recognition of the vast scale of geological time, dispelling those calculations based on ancient Israelite myths. Moreover, the fossil record showed how life had been changing over that long period and extinctions had nothing to do with Noah's flood or the curse of Adam's sins.

However, the philosophical aspects of the enlightenment in Europe also helped promote the French Revolution, the American independence and later 1848 uprisings so that conservative elements in most countries became suspicious of new ideas which 'might rock the boat'. For instance, a meeting of that Lunar Society was actually attacked by a Birmingham mob (is fear of GM crops and Fracking any different today?).

In this climate it was no wonder that Charles hesitated to publish his conclusions until prompted by Alfred Wallace. At least by this time, thanks to all that financial support from wife Emma Wedgwood, he had amassed loads of evidence to support his ideas, and had already published some as part of special studies, including that of the humble earthworm.

To sum up those conclusions it is perhaps best to use his own words which,

vault at Church Eaton near their Staffordshire home. His widow stayed on at Oxon for some years, but it was left unoccupied during most of WW1 until eldest son Charles Edward took over. Since, by then, he had married a Miss Eyton, he took the name Morris Eyton in recognition of this.

He did not spend much time here, however, and as a result of changing economic and family fortunes the Oxon estate was put up for sale in 1930. By then it consisted of 364 acres, made up of the hall and its grounds, four farms (including Udlington), two smallholdings, 16 cottages (mainly along Welshpool road and Shepherd's Lane) and the Welsh Harp at Bicton Heath.

Most cottages were bought by their tenants, as was Udlington Farm, but the bulk of the other farmland went to the County Council who added it to their County smallholding estate. The Hall itself was taken over by Shelton Hospital to serve as an annexe.

Fast forward to modern times and the Council has since sold on all this land to other users, while the Hall became redundant and available for redevelopment and the pressures for urban expansion continue to dominate the future.



Oxon Hall

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Mar 2017

No 608

Bicton



**HISTORY
of BICTON**

by David Pannett

part 117

Village News

David Pannett's History of Bickton Part 117

The Oxon Story

The area of Bickton civil parish known as Oxon was historically always linked to Shelton and still is as part of the same ecclesiastical district established in 1854. Its general area was bounded by the two main roads to Oswestry and Welshpool radiating from Shrewsbury and the former open land of Bickton Heath. It shares the same undulating glacial landscape of the heath which therefore made it more suitable for pasture rather than arable and no doubt this inspired the name.

Today it is the scene of various developments, the latest of which will be a new sheltered housing complex for Wrekin Housing Trust near the Holyhead Road. Its assisted living regime will complement the existing range of services already available along this part of Oxon: apartments at Oxon Hall, The Uplands Nursing Home and the Shropshire and Mid Wales Hospice. Together these can cater for different aspects of later life from 'downsizing' to terminal care in a way which is the subject of much political discussion at the moment.

Meanwhile, on the western side, fields are given over to a touring caravan park. In between, the proposed Bickton Heath relief road (a section of proposed NW relief road) and associated commercial development will just about use up the remaining farmland.

In ten years of these history essays, Oxon has been rarely mentioned for the very practical reason that relevant documentary evidence is in short supply and the shape of the field pattern offers few obvious clues. For instance, being only a small unit of land it did not earn a separate mention in Domesday Book, 1086 when data for Shelton was recorded (Calcott in Bickton and Uddington in Rossall were in a similar situation) such areas did not appear in records until much later.

One of the earliest references may be a deed of the mid 15th century in which John Colle granted to Richard Waring of Shelton, for 40 years "all his lands and tenements in the town and fields of Shelton, except Oxden, Uddington and Blakemermedoes". The last name is a mystery, but Blakemeer Plantation in nearby Onslow may be a clue to its location. The

Colles also held land at the Isle which was then associated with Uddington.

In 1672 the Heath Tax recorded households in the township of 'Oxon and Shelton' without specifying which part they were in. Other taxation lists are likewise unclear. The first firm evidence for a large house in Oxon came in 1785 when 'William Spearman of Oxon gent.' became involved in the Shelton Tithes. A year later his daughter Margaret married Thomas Morris, a lawyer from Newport. The marriage record also referred to William as being of 'Donnington' so at the time the families were much closer. However in 1789 the marriage of another daughter was recorded in the local St. Chads Register. Son John succeeded William at Oxon where he was joined by brother Richard, a clergyman. They both lie together under an ornate tomb in Bickton's old churchyard, dated 1824 and 1826. Their other monument may actually be Oxon Hall which has a fine 'Regency' appearance. Nearby, the survivors of their parkland trees can still be recognised.

Meanwhile, Thomas and Margaret Morris (nee Spearman) produced four sons, Charles, Thomas, John and Edward. Thomas died young in 1813, but the others grew up and started buying land. First Charles and John bought Bickton House from Henry Hanmer in 1830, but this soon after passed to Dr Crawford who had married a Morris. Also in 1830 the parish survey recorded John renting Rossall Hall. Then, in 1832, Edward bought Oxon from his mother's Spearman family and later nearby Uddington from Viscount Boyne. Nearer Newport, in 1845, Charles and John bought the Wood Eaton Manor estate, which was to become an important alternative home for the whole family.

Charles and Edward never married, so that, after 1878, all the various properties passed to nephew Charles John Morris, born 1831, who could split his time between Oxon and Wood Eaton.

He was reputed to be one of the wealthiest men in the County. He was educated at Eton and Oxford and married Constance, daughter of Rev. Herbert Oakeby from near Bishops Castle. He acted as JP in both Staffordshire and Shropshire and was High Sheriff of this County in 1864. Otherwise he was of a retiring disposition and concentrated his efforts on improving his estates rather than contributing generally to local affairs. Vaughan Cottages in Bickton Heath were probably one of his improvements.

He died in 1899 and like other members of the family was buried in the family

and operating at plant fairs and shows could not survive the revolution in shopping habits. Even the larger nurseries such as Bayley's and Percy Thrower's succumbed to purchase by Dobbies and Wyevale respectively, both national chains.

Plants formerly grown by nurseries are often now supplied by large concerns from Holland and by wholesale growers.

The nursery closed in 2001. After protracted arguments with planners, the land was purchased by The Brethren for their meeting room, being non-residential. Herbert died when he was 96. His garden and home are still maintained by daughter Jessica and husband David Pannett.

Over the years the nursery catered for a wide area of Shrewsbury and over the border into Welshpool and beyond. Herbert Lewis was a mine of information and many gardeners sought his advice, whether on growing vegetables, flowers, trees, shrubs etc.

He is fondly remembered by many older persons and the family are proud that his memory lives on with the naming of Lewis Way in Shepherds lane, adjacent to the 'nursery'.



Offprint from

Apr 2017

No 609

Bicton



HISTORY
of BICTON

Part 118

Village

News

by David Pannett

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 118

The story of Merton Nurseries

April heralds the beginning of Spring, and thoughts turn to garden coming year. It also brings back memories of Merton Nurseries. This lay opposite the Four Crosses garage on land now occupied by The Brethren Meeting Room and, since it closed 16 years ago, new residents in the community may not be aware of its existence. It was first and foremost not a 'garden centre' but a 'nursery', the likes of which are rare today.

The business began in the 1960s when Herbert Lewis and family moved back to Bicton, after he managed to transfer his work from COD Donnington to the Army Careers Office in Mardol. He spent all his early life in Bicton as a schoolboy before becoming an apprentice grocer with Morris & Co in Frankwell, progressing to the flagship store on Pride Hill (now occupied by WH Smith). He subsequently moved to Newport and served during wartime in the Royal Armoured Corps at Sandhurst, before working at the COD Donnington. The bungalow, known as Merton, was built by brother Alan Lewis on land owned by brother Walter Lewis, both of whom lived in the family home at Milnsbridge.

Herbert always had a lifelong interest in gardening as did his father Ernest before him. Together with brother Alan he developed the then nursery in the field around the bungalow, where they first grew cut flowers such as Dahlias and Chrysanthemums for sale at the roadside and erected their first wooden greenhouse which enabled them to begin growing summer bedding plants. Herbert, meanwhile, as well as working, started to develop his own garden, mowing the grass of the field with a scythe. The current lawn in front of the bungalow is still turf from the original meadow, which has been mown and treated over the years and still shows signs of original ploughing from earlier times. He also began planting many varieties of cultivated varieties of conifers which have their origins around the globe and they became the backbone of the garden.

In 1970 he took early retirement from the civil service at 60 and then began expanding the nursery in earnest. Local employees from the village came to work growing bedding plants and Mary Fowles, for instance, continued to work there for the next 30 years. June Hughes, the gardening correspondent of Bicton Village News was also an employee.

The nursery reached its peak in 1991, just as the new Shrewsbury By-Pass was opening. Passing trade at that time had brought personalities such as

Virginia Mckenna, Lady Isobel Barnett and Richard Baker (newsreader) as customers, but now the new road was undermining it. Later, Chris Beardshaw came with BBC Gardeners World to film both the garden and the hosta collection amassed by daughter Jessica. Herbert, over the years, had further developed his own private garden and it was designated as a fundraiser for the Severn Hospice and the National Garden Scheme. Mayors of Shrewsbury together with the Multiple Sclerosis local group held garden parties here on the lawn.

In the early days, trays for bedding plants made of wood were assembled on site and plants grown on outside in cold frames. A further three wooden greenhouses, erected and made by Alan, who was a former carpenter, were heated by coal fired stoves heating water in cast iron pipes. One greenhouse had to be demolished when an elderly lady driving an automatic car drove straight into it causing much broken glass. She remarkably emerged unscathed but was forbidden by her son to drive again! Two more aluminium frame greenhouses were subsequently erected in place of the timber greenhouses.

Materials such as potting compost and lawn sand were hand mixed and bagged on the premises. Every 4 weeks, spent mushroom compost came in bulk from a local mushroom farm and also had to be bagged for sale. Such was the demand customers would bag their own and a load could disappear in a matter of a few hours.

Potatoes grown in the field were lifted by hand to supply 'new potatoes' in the summertime after which wallflowers were hand planted to be lifted in the Autumn and taken away in large plastic sacks, recycled and sold to us by local farmers.

The nursery gained a reputation for selling things loose and weighed on site, not in pre-packs as today. The customer could select their own seed potatoes by hand from some 50 varieties. Customers came from far and wide and it was after the nursery closed that the 'Potato Days' started at Montford Village hall.

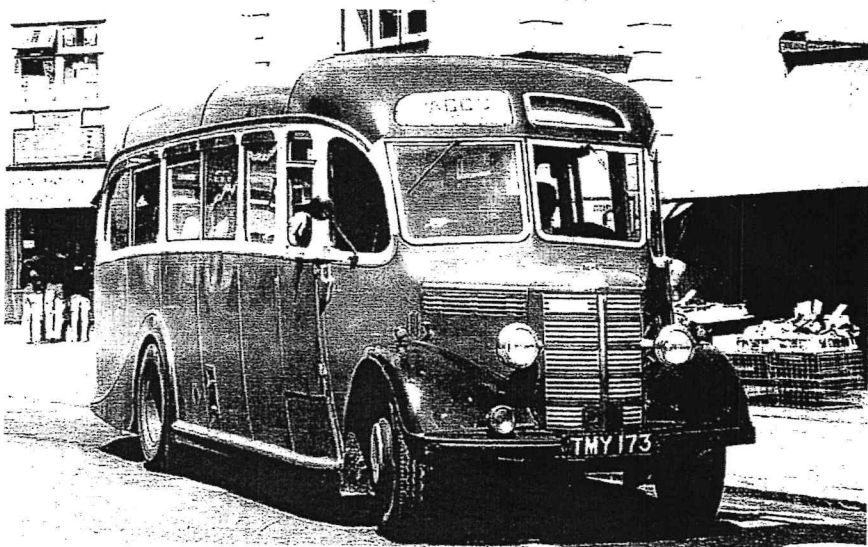
The nursery shop grew steadily and was managed by the late Margaret Owen. Jim Francis, local carpenter, extended it over a number of years. Garden centres were beginning to emerge offering year-round shopping with catering and franchises selling a much wider range of goods not garden-related whilst supermarkets too entered the competition. Traditional nurseries, unless they developed a specialism in growing one type of plant

With an aging family and the changing fortunes of rural bus trade as a result of ever increasing car ownership, it was decided to sell the company to neighbour T E Jones of Nesscliffe. His main interest was in plant hire and transport, however, rather than buses.....

Special thanks to Janet McKenzie and Jean Williams for providing information.



Part of Vaggs fleet 1969



Bicton

Offprint from

May 2017

No 610



Bus Ride to Town

The story of Vaggs

Village

News

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

Part 119

by David Pannett

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 119

Bus Ride to Town

Today in Bicton we can make use of a regular bus service on the Oswestry – Shrewsbury route, which now has 'high tech' vehicles with low floors, space for prams and wheelchairs as well as electronic ticket machines. Those of us with bus passes may also be old enough to remember earlier times, when a different sort of company ran this service, one owned and managed by local people rather than a multinational corporation (Arriva is actually a subsidiary of Deutsche Bahn – i.e. German Railways).

Motor buses, as we know them, were first developed in the big cities during the early years of the last century, as necessary technology became available, but only really expanded after the WW1. One example of this was the Birmingham and Midland Motor Omnibus Company, which by the early '20s was running services around Shrewsbury, including one to Montford Bridge. Better known as 'Midland Red' from the colour of its buses, it established a depot at Ditherington (recently demolished) while commencing services from the Square.

Until this time, most people in the local countryside had to rely on walking, cycling or the regular carriers' carts in order to reach town for shopping or selling produce in the market. In 1917, directories record several carriers operating in the area, five of which would have passed through Bicton each Wednesday and Saturday en route from Shrawardine, Forton and Nesscliffe. Significantly, during the following decade this trade declined as the new buses and delivery vans took over.

One such carrier illustrating this development was Charles John Vagg. The son of a Dorset butcher, born in 1879, he moved around several places in the country before finally settling with his wife and growing family on the Bradford estate in Knockin where a smallholding was an ideal base for his carriers business. Eldest son Stephen (b. 1907) found work with a local bus company, Howarths, in Knockin, but decided to leave and help father and brother, John, create a company of their own. Not only did they now take business away from Howarths with some sharp timetabling, but they also eventually took the whole company over as well. In this way the 'Vaggs' company was born in 1924-5.

Their first bus had been a converted van, which was then followed by a charabanc, ideal for group outings. At that time, a school or chapel day trip to Carding Mill Valley would have been a great adventure and also established the company as an asset to the community.

The first depot was in Knockin village, but as the fleet expanded, relocation to near the site of the estate sawmill on Knockin Heath took place, where it was to remain for the next 50 years. Another garage was also later built on the main road near Nesscliffe, where other aspects of the business, including a milk collection lorry, could be dealt with. Smaller garages, serving the general motor trade, followed at Kinnerley.

The growing business not only employed the Vagg family, but also many more in the community as mechanics, drivers and conductors. Most of the latter were, in fact, ladies, while others were employed in the office. In some ways, the local community must have felt like being part of a wider Vaggs 'family' of friends and neighbours.

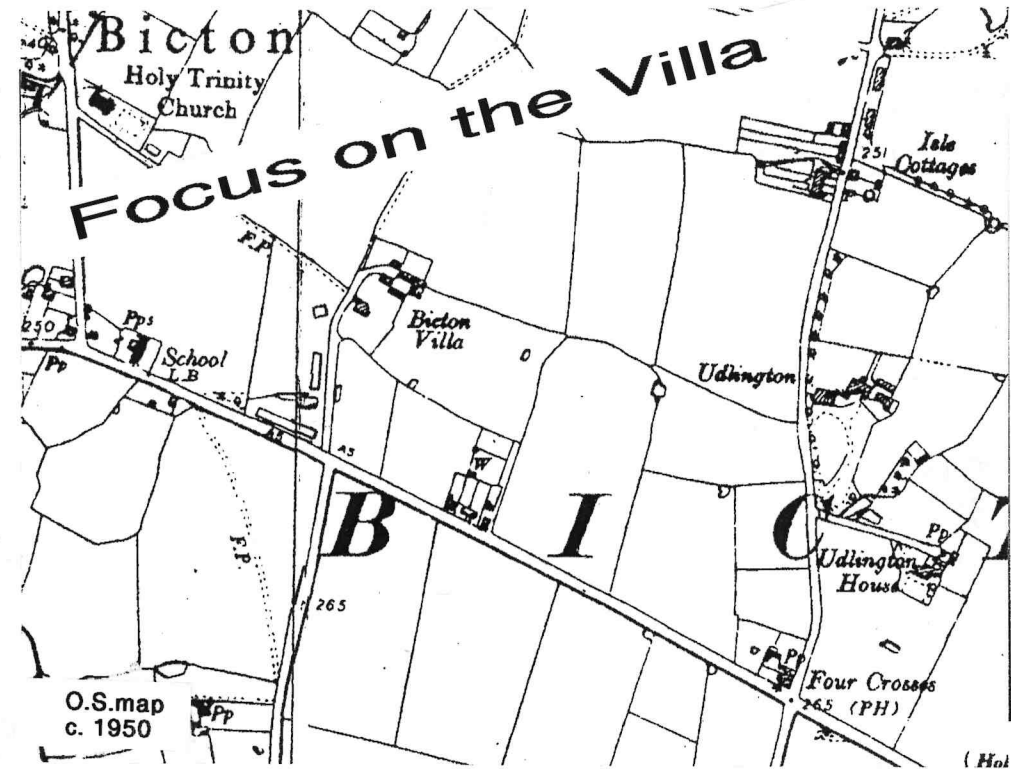
In 1936, the routes through Bicton and Montford Bridge served Valeswood, Kinnerley, Llanymynech, as well as the main road to Nesscliffe and Oswestry. As a result, the timetable was complicated, but concentrated on the morning and evening 'rush hours' in order to help workers in town. Indeed, such services probably encouraged the first 'suburban' type housing in the village. The terminus was then by the cattle market along Smithfield Road.

During the war, the Nesscliffe training camp provided special business ferrying troops to and from Shrewsbury station. Some aging vehicles needed an extra push up Grange Bank at times when overloaded, so a new fleet was urgently required when peace returned.

The new stock now included types which can still be seen at vintage rallies, such as that at Onslow. One with special memories for many of us was the 29 seater, 'bull-nosed' petrol-driven Bedford, so well suited to penetrating narrow rural lanes. They were particularly useful to Preston Montford Field Centre for taking student groups to various teaching sites, even up the Tanat Valley to Pistyll Rhaeadr. Towards the end of their working life they also sometimes needed an extra push by students in order to reach the top.

Other groups likewise booked coaches for their outings and over many years Margaret Price would have been a familiar voice at the end of the office telephone arranging them.

Bicton



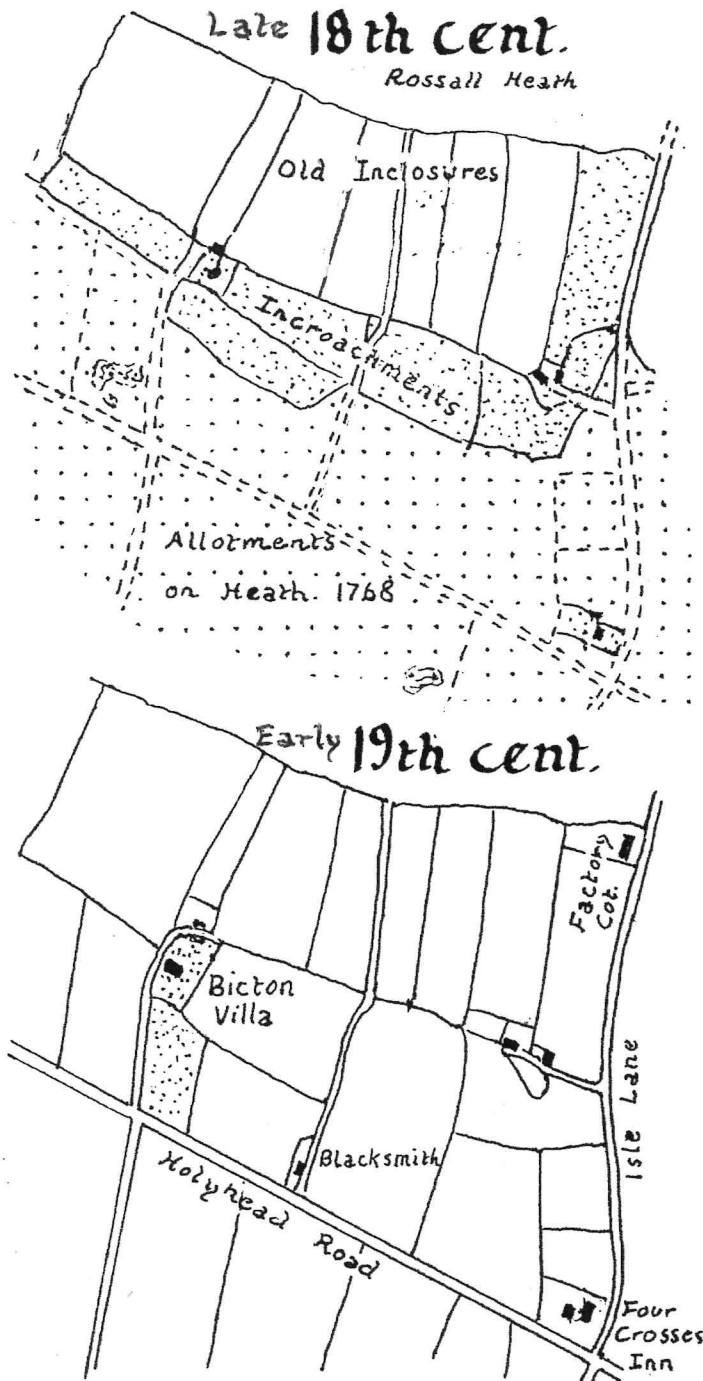
Village

News

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

Part 120

by David Pannett



Henry Lee and his family came from Montford about 1890. They were to remain here for the next 30 years at least. In 1926, when Thomas Edwards had taken the farm, George Dudley had already started his milk retailing business at nearby Laburnam Cottage. He subsequently took over the Villa and was to become a familiar figure delivering milk around the neighbourhood for many decades. In this way this story comes into living memory to at least the oldest members of the community.

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 120

Focus on the Villa

Recent discussions about proposed development around Bicton has focused on the issue of protecting open ground between the old 'farming' village and the newer 'suburban' village as well as the wider area between the whole village and the Calcott-Four Crosses clusters. The planning inspector upheld objections to the former and it is hoped that he would likewise support objections to development in the latter.

Such an area of flat land bordering the main road is very tempting to developers in the current 'planning climate'. However good their detailed plans may be, the location of such development would undermine the separate identity of the village, making it just another part of the suburban sprawl spreading from Bicton Heath (similar arguments relate to the gap between Bayston Hill and Meole Brace).

In this context, it is about time these history essays paid more attention to this area, especially Bicton Villa, which is so visible to all from the main road. By coincidence, the old photograph by Ernest Lewis, recently published here



(Jan '17) has been identified as showing the Lee family at Bicton Villa – Henry and Isabella with sons Herbert and Richard and daughters Isabella, Helen, Gertrude and Rhoda. Other distinguished looking gentlemen were probably relatives or in-laws of one married daughter. The special occasion was most likely to have been the eightieth birthday of Henry in 1912. Their very formal appearance gives an

impression of being a far grander household than one farming only 50 acres, but this was both the fashion at those times as well as the special aspirations of this family, for which they were known in the village.

So what was the story of this 50 acre holding and very special house...?

Records in fact show it to be quite complex with a field pattern of different ages and many changes in ownership.

The northern boundary is an old hedge and ditch marking the boundary of Bicton against Rossall Heath, while the adjacent fields once had a series of

narrow shapes suggesting enclosure from an extension of Bicton's medieval fields (Oct '10). Hedge lines were once slightly curved and about a furlong in length. To the South the rest of the land was once open heath stretching as far as the Welshpool Road. The map prepared at its 'inclosure' in 1768 also showed how cottages and encroachments had taken place all around it, including here (Dec '07) on the sites of Villa Farm, the Four Crosses and another site now lost. Since most were held by Mrs Jane Griffith, she was allotted extra land in the award, extending to the main road while the 'Four Crosses' cottage went to John Mytton.

Subsequent agreements over road maintenance (April '11) show that, by 1800 the Griffiths property had passed to William Smith, who may have been responsible for building the 'Villa' with its characteristic 'Regency' features. The parish survey of 1812 confirms that it was just a 'residence' rather than a 'farmhouse', as the name would suggest and was occupied by Thomas Purcell. It had been built adjacent to the existing cottages and shared their drive to the Holyhead Road. Around it farmland was mainly occupied by Thomas Clayton based on his farmstead off Isle Lane. The blacksmith shop of Philip Rowlands and also the cottages built for the Isle Woollen Mill had also appeared by this time (June '12).

By the next parish survey in 1830, William Smith had just died, John William Watson was a new tenant of the Villa, Thomas Clayton now farmed 45 acres, while the Four Crosses and blacksmith shop had been added to the estate after the sale of Mytton property in 1824.

The Smith estate passed to John, William's heir, who thus appears as owner on the 1843 tithe map. Otherwise very little had changed, apart from Mrs Allan, a widow, becoming tenant of the Villa with an extra five acres, no doubt for the pony so useful to country residents who could afford one. John Smith, however, died soon after this and the estate was auctioned off, leading to many more changes under new owners. The Isle Estate took over the factory cottages, making them their 'Isle Cottages' along Isle Lane (June '12), Thomas Clayton's farmstead disappeared altogether leaving little trace amongst the hedgerows, so that 'farmstead' functions were transferred to the Villa and its adjacent cottages. At some stage the Four Crosses was also rebuilt. At the end of the century new cottages were built by the blacksmith shop.

From now on, directories and census records show successive occupants of this farm – Martha Hilton, George Pritchard and William Felton, before

Rossall Hall 1962

SHROPSHIRE
ARCHIVES



In the 1850s it was all change again as John Harley took over the whole estate including the Jenkins' farm. Now the Hall became a real family home rather than just a property investment and in the following years two sons and three daughters were raised here. Unfortunately a further generation of possible heirs failed to appear in due course.

John died in 1883 aged 91 and was buried in Bicton's new churchyard, where, one by one, he was joined by his wife Ann and his unmarried daughters (graves against east wall), the last of whom had 'downsized' to Rossall Grove by 1922.

All this was the beginning of the end for the Hall. It was sold on to the Stott family in 1943 who improved some aspects of the estate, but found the Hall had problems which were difficult to deal with in the prevailing economic climate. They therefore felt obliged to demolish it in the 60s and finally sold the remainder of the estate in 1970. Had it survived a little longer, modern attitudes and investment might have saved it.

Public footpaths now cross over the old park – why not take a stroll through its special landscape?

Bicton Village News

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Jul 2017

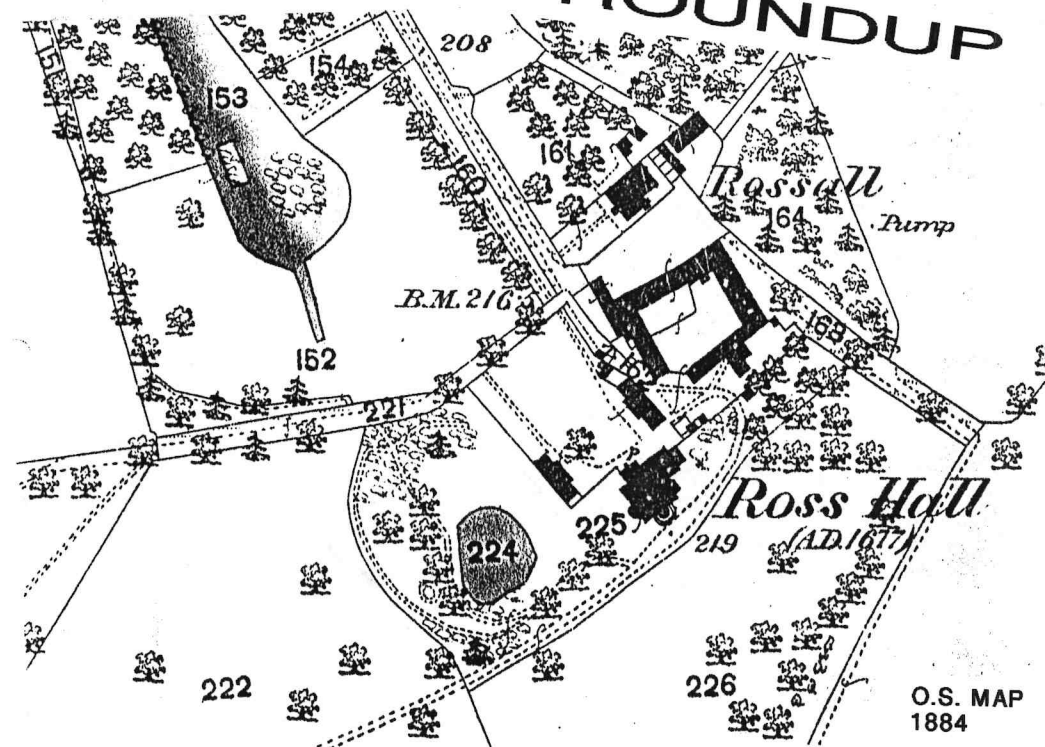
No 612

HISTORY
of BICTON

by David Pannett

Part 121

ROSSALL ROUNDUP



O.S. MAP
1884

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 121

Rossall Roundup

Several earlier essays have already touched upon the township of Rossall on the eastern side of Bicton civil parish, but so far the story of the 'Hall' has not been dealt with properly.

That part of the township west of Isle Lane was once heathland, while the original farmland was confined to the eastern side, where it was bordered by glacially deformed ground against Udlington and Shelton as well as the steep bluffs and wide meadowland bordering the river. Indeed the name may have been derived from Rhos, the Welsh term for such meadows (similar to Rous Hill in Shrewsbury). It was also called 'Down' Rossall to distinguish it from 'Up' Rossall, better known as the Isle.

At Domesday 1086, this land was farmed by five smallholders as tenants of St Chads Church, in the similar way to those at Bicton. One presumes they shared a typical communal 'Open Field' system but clear evidence has not survived.

The Black Death in the fourteenth century probably undermined the medieval system here, as elsewhere, leading to the concentration of holdings into fewer hands and the loss of any original 'village' layout. Out of these changes the Stury family emerged as the principle occupiers for the next few generations.

Thomas Stury, in particular, entered the records in the 16th century, when he had a fight with neighbour, John Cole, down in Shrewsbury. The issue was probably a long running dispute over the use of the Heath, which was also being claimed by both Cole and the successive Sandfords of the Isle (Oct 08). Thomas finally drowned when he fell in the river while crossing from Berwick in 1596.

By the late 17th century, we can gain a better idea of the township, other than from those constant arguments over the Heath. The Hearth Tax of 1672 recorded one 'eight hearth' big house and five single hearth dwellings, which must have been little more than cottages. Neighbouring townships usually had some two-hearth 'farmhouses', but here a 'big house' was clearly dominant.

By now, the Stury's had run out of male heirs, so that the ownership of the estate had to change while different tenants were now already occupying that house. Wealthy men became involved, including Edward Gosnell, a London merchant, who had suffered in the Great Fire of 1666. As his family already had connections with Shropshire it was an obvious choice for an escape from the problems of London.

In these circumstances he acquired Rossall and quickly replaced the old, timber house with a brick building of the very latest fashion now being built in post-fire London. In doing so, he was a pioneer in introducing this style to the country, stimulating other local landowners to follow suit during the following years. Samuel Adderton's Preston Montford Hall and Lord Newport's Guildhall in Shrewsbury being local examples. Edward was actually Mayor of Shrewsbury in 1679 and obviously moved in the same political and social circles.

One attractive feature of Rossall, apart from its proximity to Shrewsbury, had been its delightful site where the new hall could stand on a high point overlooking the river valley and the deformed glacial ground, which together provided a romantic parkland vista. To the north, another 'kettle hole' lent itself to holding an ornamental pond and sheltering a partially walled kitchen garden. Beyond, the normal, flatter farmland was worked by two tenanted farms.

Edward's family, however, were not so keen on all this and after his death in 1703, sold it on to other gentry who continued with further sales during the rest of the eighteenth century, perhaps as much for property investment as a place in which to live.

In this way, Grange Farm was added to the Jenkins' Bicton Hall estate in 1763 while the home farm and the Hall passed to Cecil Weld Forester, who changed its name to Ross Hall (there is a story that he once entertained the Prince Regent here). Then, in 1829, he sold it to Henry Wentworth Fielding of nearby Berwick (later known as Wentworth Powys), who let the hall to various tenants. For instance, in 1830 John Morris held it before the Morris brothers took over Oxon estate but by 1843 the tenant was Ann Fielding, probably Henry's mother.

By now the heath had been enclosed adding more normal farmland to the estate, leading eventually to the development of Rossall Heath Farm.

At the same time Ensdon was reorganised, creating Beam House and Ensdon House farms out in the former fields. The latter also served as an 'upmarket' inn by the turnpike road, suitable for the landlord on his visits. Forton Heath was also 'inclosed' soon after, giving some extra land to both smallholdings and newly reorganised farms.

At first, the new farms inherited the old field pattern around Montford, but the way was now open for further improvements. The marshland of Lodge Farm presented the most urgent problem so a new system of drains and straight hedges soon appeared here, together with a plantation on the dampest ground.

By the middle of the nineteenth century both Lodge and Barley Farms were held by members of the Matthews family and later the united farm passed to Henry Minton, member of a family already tenants at Forton. They became famous stock breeders, gaining many prizes at agricultural shows and, with the cooperation of the landlord, they continued to improve both buildings and field pattern thus leaving fine monuments to this period of Victorian 'High Farming'. In the same way, the larger graves dominating the churchyard record other leading farming families, especially Gittins and Bowen-Jones.

This church, vicarage and glebe lands (church lands) also became caught up in this mainly agricultural story. The original vicarage was deemed unsuitable for the new generation of clergy, related to the squires, and was rebuilt more than once before being replaced altogether on a new site. In modern times this was found to be too big and was again replaced by a smaller version by the church. After all that, the church no longer needs it now that our shared clergy team are based in Bicton and Bomere Heath.

That Victorian prosperity was, however, overtaken by a period of acute agricultural depression throughout the early years of the following century. Also many landowning families suffered personal losses in the war and therefore it was no surprise when many estates were sold off, including this one in 1918. Although many tenants took the opportunity to buy their farms, the economic climate was against them, so that a new commercial landlord stepped in to take over large parts of the old estates and bring much needed new investment in buildings and workers' housing.

Farming continues to change with increased mechanisation, while the old 'service centre' at Montford Bridge is becoming ever more a 'residential' community. Thus 'history' marches on, reflecting not just the soil, but the 'owner of the soil'.

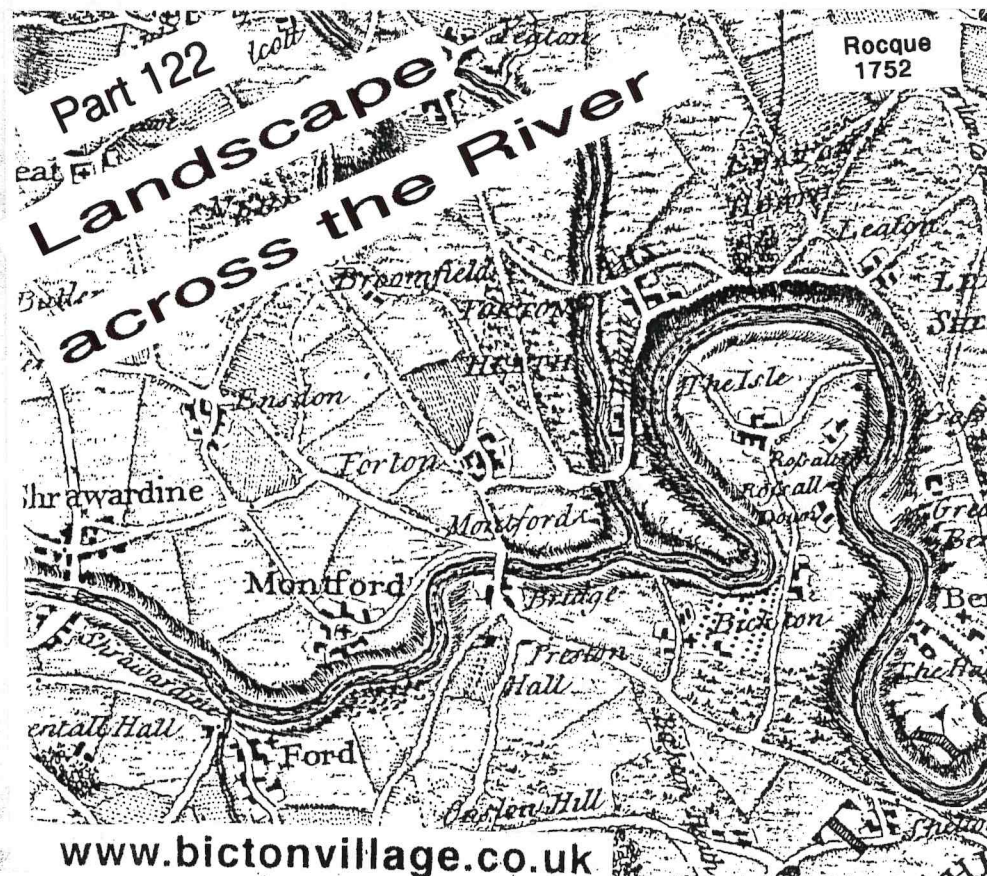
HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

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Bicton Village News



www.bictonvillage.co.uk

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 122

Landscape across the River

As usual in summer we encourage readers to get out and about and perhaps appreciate our local landscape in a wider context. For example, Montford parish just across the river is worth exploring as it once had many similarities with Bicton, but also major differences caused by land ownership.

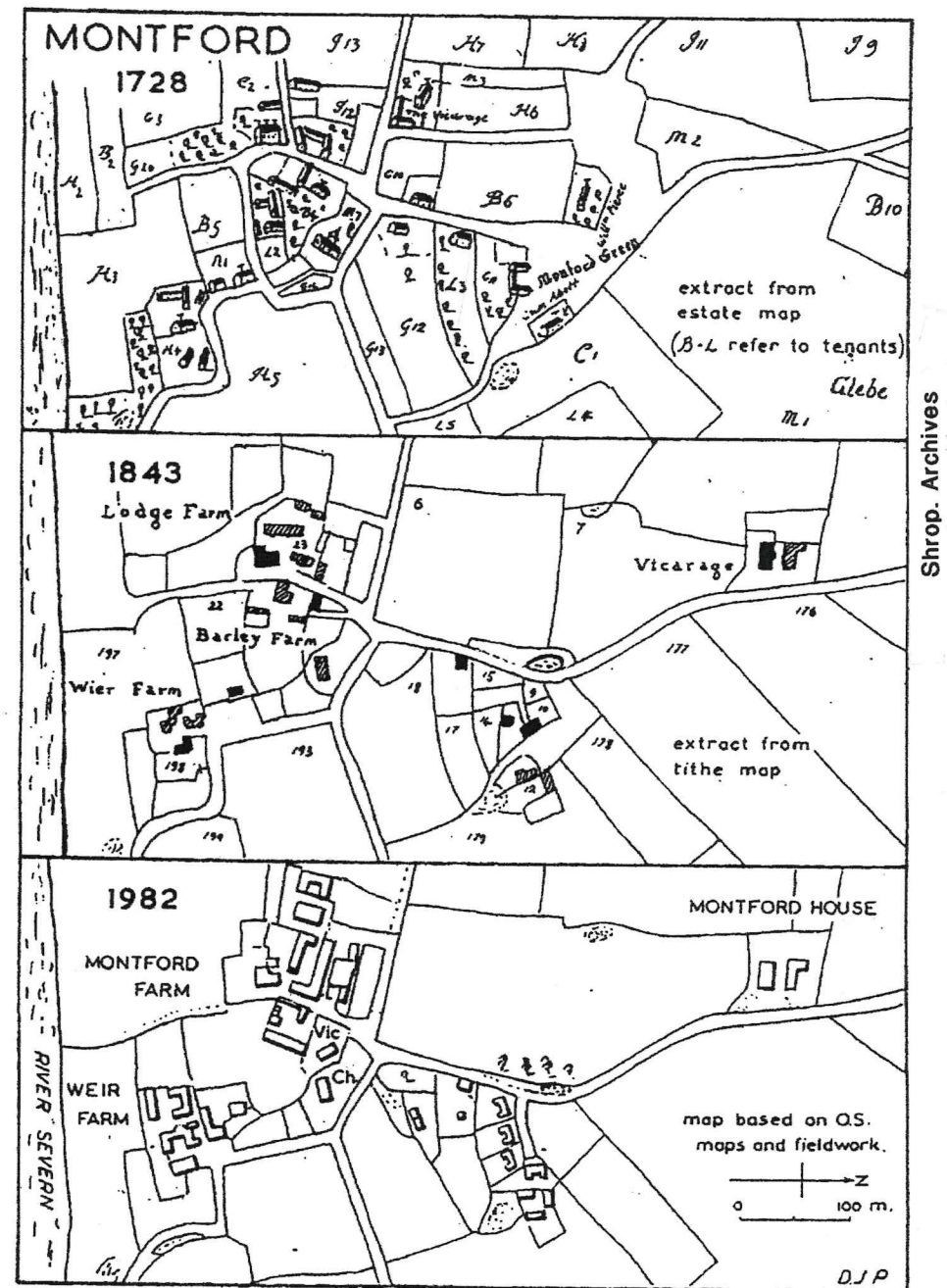
In the mid eighteenth century, when a spirit of improvement was developing in the country, the Montford estate was acquired by the famous Robert Clive, who was seeking ways of investing some of the profits of his Indian adventures. The estate, formerly owned by the Bromley family of Shrawardine Castle, included the townships of Montford, Forton and Ensdon, as well as Shrawardine. Estate maps show that each of these ancient villages and hamlets then consisted of several farmsteads whose land lay scattered and intermixed in small fields all around following piecemeal 'inclosure' of the medieval 'open fields', in a way similar to Bicton. The 'inclosure' process was probably going on at the same time c.1700 in both places.

Shrawardine also contained the site of the medieval deer park occupying some glacially deformed ground and by now converted to farming. To the north of Forton lay a heath whose 400 acres spread into adjacent Fitz and around which many cottage smallholdings had developed, including a seventeenth century ironworks at Bromley's Forge.

Around Montford Bridge similar holdings included the Pheasant Inn and a blacksmith's shop, each exploiting some roadside waste. In general, therefore, the estate, like Bicton parish, contained a mixture of types of settlement very typical of lowland Shropshire, the whole pattern being held together by a system of 'customary' or manorial tenures.

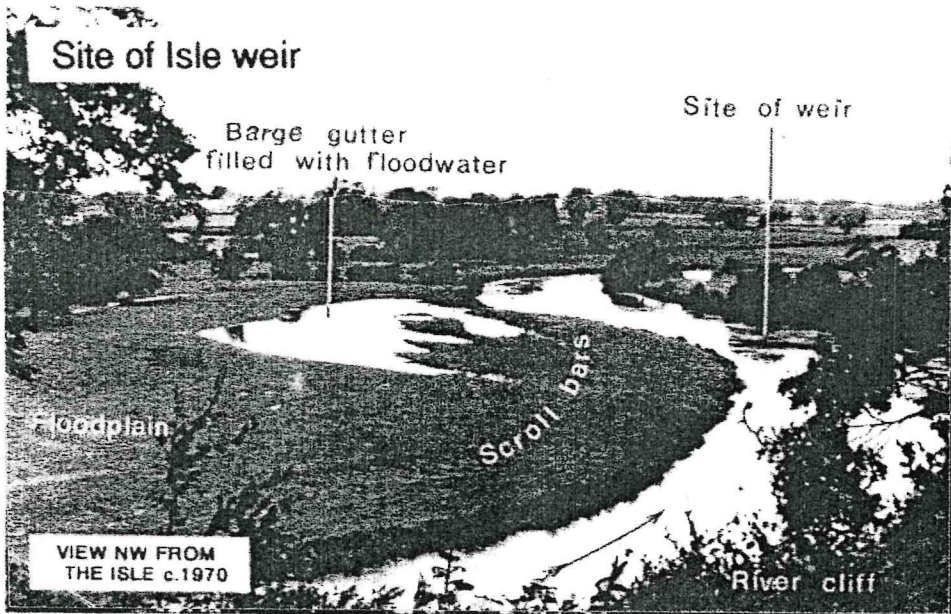
Around Montford village itself, the fields of its six tenant farmers were still spread over the main landforms left by the Ice Age, each of which had been used in different ways during the middle ages. The best arable fields had occupied the level sandy outwash plain towards Montford Bridge, while grazing land filled the damp, marshy hollows towards Shrawardine Park. The river valley provided extensive meadow land to the south, where there was also a fish weir and ozier beds. In 1771, after gradually extinguishing the old manorial tenures, the new landlord was able to re-let the whole area as three compact farms on 21 year leases and new management clauses. Thus Lodge Farm (294 acres), Barley Farm (224 acres) and

Wier (sic.) Farm (268 acres) were laid out in the 'marsh', arable field and riverside areas respectively, with the two public lanes radiating from the village acting as boundaries. Within the village old farmsteads were amalgamated or reduced to cottages.



This would explain how a weir belonging to the Isle closed down while others nearby remained in use, even into the nineteenth century. The only clues to its former existence are the adjacent field names and traces of an old barge gutter running across the opposite floodplain. The original parish and property boundaries had obviously returned to the river at a date before post-reformation bureaucracy might have fixed them. Its history is therefore guesswork, but nevertheless it reveals much about the nature of the floodplain. Most of its surface is historically very old with recent deposition confined to the bank area, where low banks of silt, 'scroll bars', have blocked the ends of the gutter, which still holds water in time of flood.

The main 'catch' for such weirs was normally eels during seasonal downstream migration, rather than fish in general. In the 1920s many more regulations were brought in to manage inland fisheries for both commercial and sport fishing, so that such traditional 'weir' fishing was banned. In any case, eel numbers were declining because of 'elver' fishing downstream and loss of habitat upstream. Once our landscape was rich in pools, wet ditches and meadows, but agricultural improvement has drained so much. Unlike normal fish, eels could wriggle through such ditches to reach pools, such as those around Bicton, where Oxon Pool was noted for them in the sixteenth century, while later, John Mytton created another off Calcott Lane, which has since been drained.



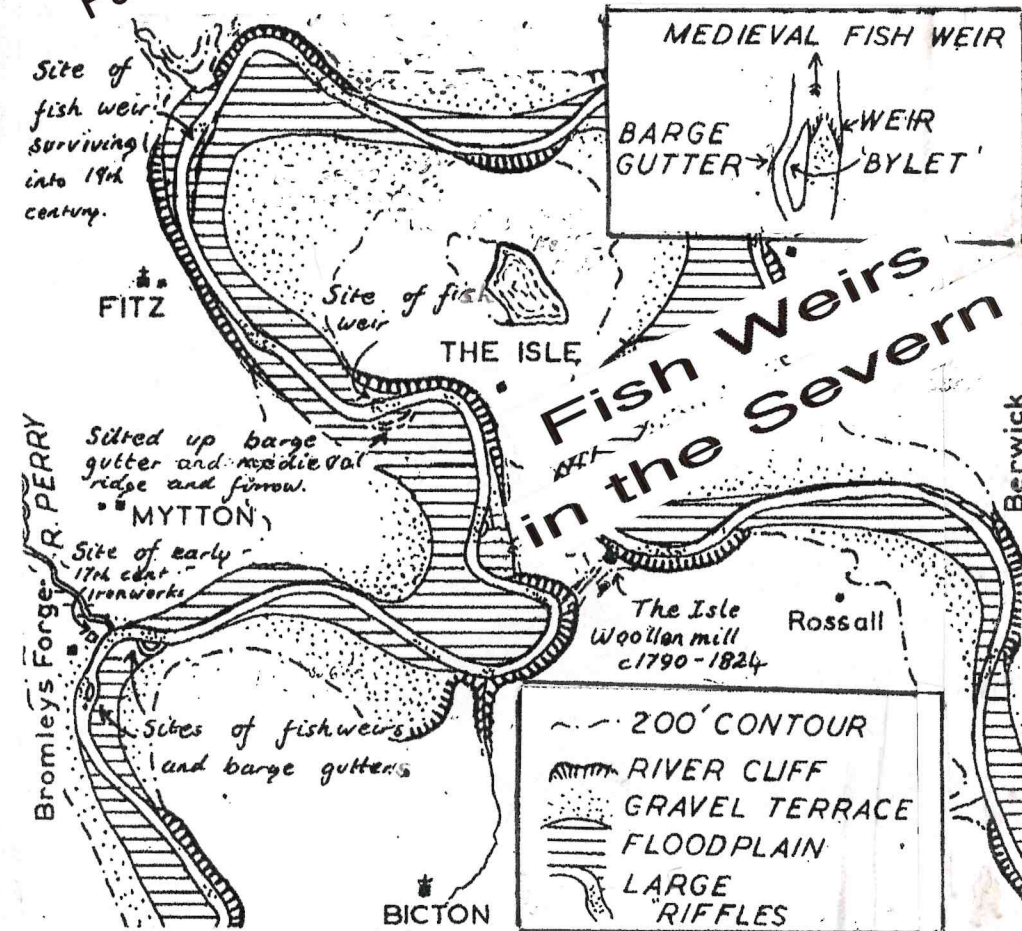
**HISTORY
of BICTON**
by David Pannett

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Part 123



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 123

Fish Weirs in the Severn

It is now over nine years since an essay in this history discussed the River Severn around Bicton and thereby mentioned 'fish weirs'. Perhaps it is now time to say more about them for the sake of newcomers as well as for those who have lost original copies.

Anciently, fishing especially for migrating eels, was not by rod and line, but by baskets or nets held over openings in fences built across the width of the river channel. On the Severn, such 'weirs' would thereby block navigation, but conflict was avoided by digging 'barge gutters' around them. This produced the characteristic islands or 'bylets' at each site, many of which can still be seen on O.S. Maps. The 1880's editions of the 6 inch and 25 inch maps actually show the 'funnel' shapes of some weir fences still surviving at Little Shrawardine, Montford, Fitz and Preston Boats, while contemporary watercolours and photographs confirm the details of their construction.

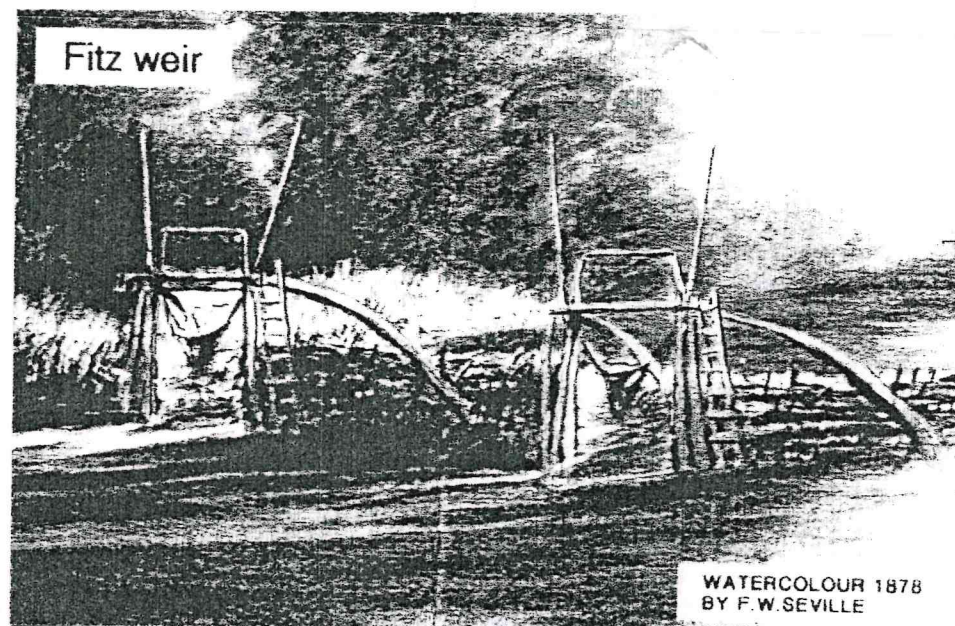
Earlier estate maps confirm these shapes and also identify the associated cottages and smallholdings of the weir keepers, whose other occupation would probably be basket weaving using the riverside willows. Field names and other records are also clues to the former existence of weirs. Meanwhile there were also many references to 'fisheries' on the tributary streams, but these were normally associated with mills, which often paid their rent in eels.

Most of the known sites were included in the 28 listed by the 'Commissioners of Sewers' in 1575, seeking to regulate obstructions to navigation in the County. By the nineteenth century, most of these had gone out of use for various reasons, including flood damage, such as the great flood of 1628, which is said to have '*brought down all the wares on the Severn*' (may have damaged Montford Bridge too).

Medieval deeds and charters suggest that the peak of weir building was in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, expanding upon eight fisheries already recorded in Domesday Book 1086. The charters of Shrewsbury Abbey, for instance, included exchanges of land with neighbouring estates which would have allowed the digging of the necessary barge gutters still to be seen at Wroxeter and Underdale, Shrewsbury. In this way, the midriver property and parish boundaries could be diverted through them.

Taking all these various records and field observations together, it is possible to identify at least forty sites in Shropshire, including those around Bicton at Bromley's Forge, Mytton, the Isle and Fitz. They all occupy suitable gravel banks, which thereby illustrate the general stability of the channel, relevant also to the story of fords and bridges.

While some bylets remain, others have been reunited with the adjacent floodplain, across which the outline of a silted-up barge gutter can still be recognised. In these cases, the parish and property boundaries might still follow this line, so that, for example, a small patch by Bickley Coppice actually still belongs to Mytton across the site of the weir. This same odd situation at the Fitz weir has only recently been resolved by a deal between the landowners concerned.



A few of these sites, with obvious features, but poor documentation, had obviously gone out of use before 1575, perhaps during one of those 14th century purges against obstruction to navigation. Why these were closed down while others survived is not recorded, but their relationship to a customary towpath could provide one explanation. If this had been along one bank only along whole lengths of the river, any barge gutter on that side would allow the weir to continue, but, the other way round, the weir would be condemned as an obstruction.

Both could be true as there are chemical hints that the impact might have been the very force that broke that Canadian ice sheet.

Eventually, however, warming returned and the succession to woodland via 'pioneer' trees carried on where it had left off giving the character to the next two 'Zones'. As mixed high forest covered the surface more shrubby species were shaded out. Such forest would have been the home to Mesolithic 'hunter gatherers' who had little impact upon it, but by 5,000 years ago things began to change with the 'Neolithic' revolution.

From now on in 'Zone 7b', the woodland was under attack from 'slash and burn' shifting cultivation and grazing by domestic animals. Elm and lime almost disappeared, perhaps from a combination of disease or selective exploitation. By contrast, there was a revival of hazel, perhaps because it could withstand the 'coppicing'. Most marked, however, was the return of open grassland and weed species, so that the whole landscape was becoming a type of 'temperate savanna'.

Neolithic and Bronze Age farmers were partially nomadic, so that they may have had a widespread impact out of proportion to their actual numbers. Late Bronze Age and Iron Age communities, however, became more settled and cultivation was more permanent to cater for a large population, so that typical weeds of cultivation appeared. Also, some light soils, which were initially so easy to work, now showed signs of exhaustion and were only fit for heather. All this disturbance was also allowing local soil erosion to contribute sediment to some shallow pools, sealing off original peat layers, until rediscovered by any unsuspecting developer in modern times in our area.

From the Iron Age to modern times, **Zone 8** cultivation has generally expanded at the expense of woodland, but details do show some variations as population fluctuated with wars and famines. We might discuss these some other time, but for now it is worth pointing out that in the last centuries of the diagram, tree pollen appears to have increased in spite of ever more intense farming thanks to the deliberate planting of woodland and hedgerows. This is a habit we might usefully continue, as we reflect upon all those changes in the past.

HISTORY of BICTON

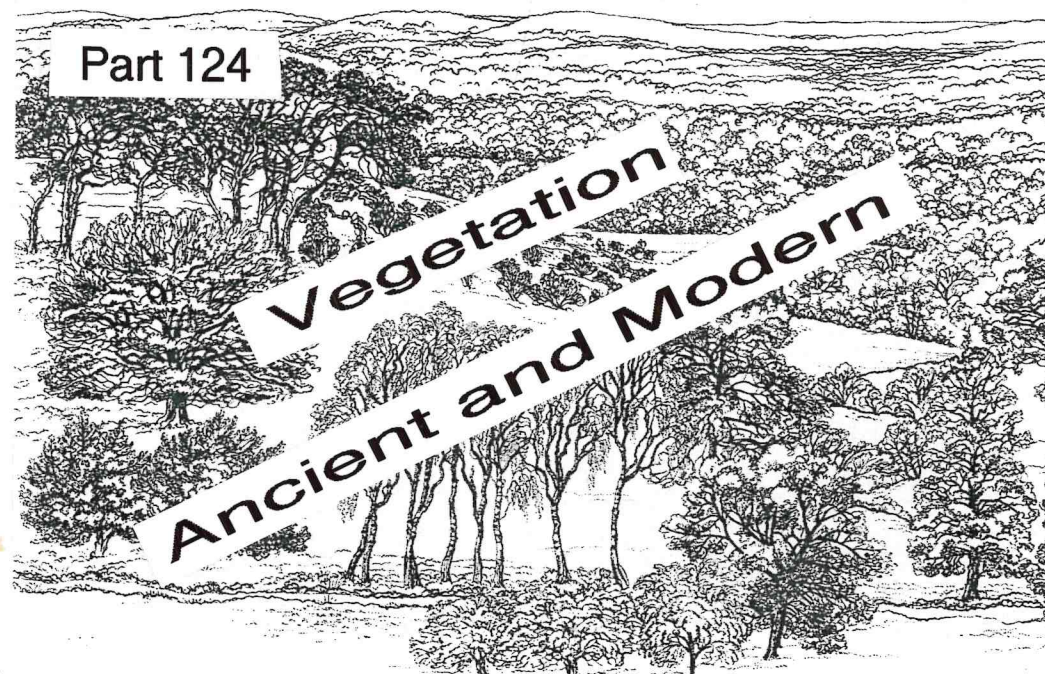
by David Pannett

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Bicton

Part 124



Village News

website www.bictonvillage.co.uk

Vegetation Ancient and Modern

Those who suffer from hay fever are only too well aware of how our air can be filled with pollen at certain seasons. Also, we are constantly being reminded of climate change. The two subjects do, in fact, have some connection in that climate influences our flora and both have changed in the past, especially with the coming and going of Ice Ages. Since then, human activity has also played a part by developing farming.

Pollen grains have tough coats in order to survive their aerial journeys and also distinctive shapes in order to 'key' into matching female flowers. As a result, they can still be recognised after many years where they have fallen into wet sediments or peat. In this way, the successive layers in the many 'meres and mosses' of the Shropshire Cheshire plain, including those in Bicton, can hold a record of vegetation changes since the last Ice Age.

By noting the percentage of different types of pollen in samples taken from successive levels, researchers can construct a 'pollen diagram' illustrating how the vegetation has changed over time. Absolute dating by 'Carbon 14' analysis can also help where suitable material is available. Information from many sites can then be pooled to provide an overall picture of the region as illustrated here.

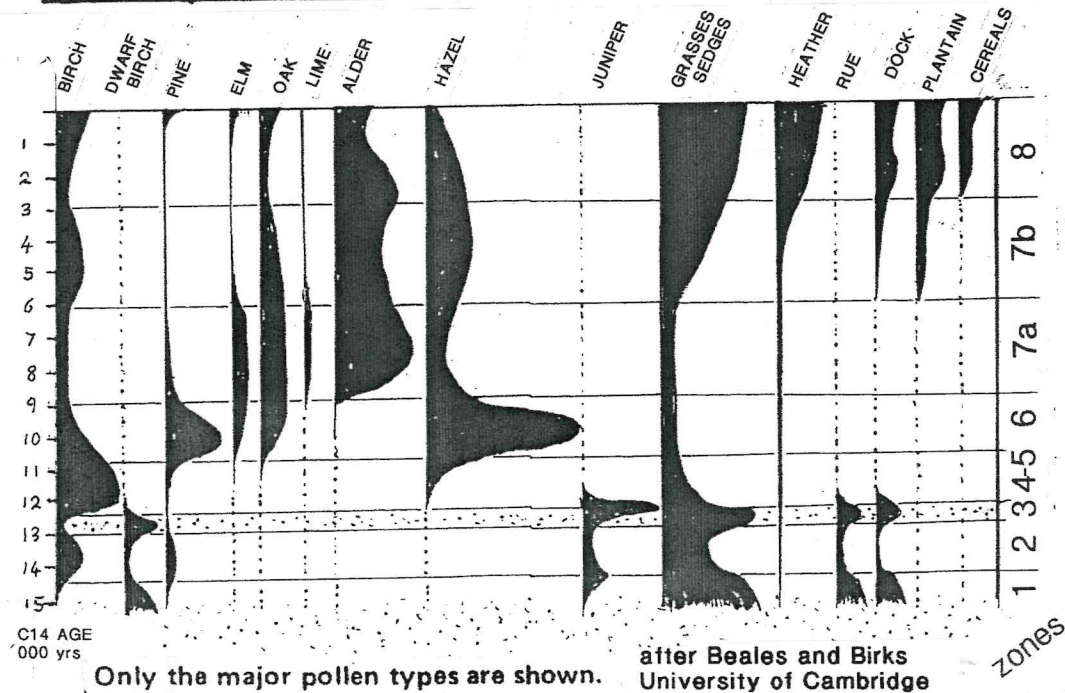
One must use caution in the interpretation, since local situations may have influenced results, while some species preserve better than others. Also, waterside plants like alder may be over-represented, while others, which do not rely on wind dispersal, may be under-represented in the record. Nevertheless, certain selected species can be good indicators of the type of vegetation present at each period and enable researchers to recognise distinct 'zones' during the last 13,000 years.

In 'Zone 1' an icy landscape was giving way to open grassland, which included many 'weed' species, which, as every gardener knows, quickly fill up

any bare ground. As permafrost and even larger masses of buried ice slowly melted, the characteristics such as those at Oxon and Calcott appeared, trapping the pollen in their muds (and passing mammoths).

Temperatures were actually rising quite quickly to almost modern levels, judging by insect remains, but tree cover was slow to develop as seed sources were still remote. Only the usual pioneers, birch and pine, took over defining 'Zone 2'. Before more mixed woodland could develop, however, a sudden reversal of the climate occurred, bringing small glaciers back to our local Welsh summits visible from Bicton for the next few centuries.

Generalised pollen diagram for the Cheshire - Shropshire area.



One explanation for all this could have been the way the progressive shrinking of the Canadian ice sheet first created a vast lake over the northern prairies and then suddenly released it all down the St. Lawrence, when it shrank further. Such was the volume of fresh water, that it altered the behaviour of the Gulf Stream Drift, thus plunging Europe back into cold conditions. Another idea is that an asteroid exploded in the atmosphere, making it so dirty that the whole earth was plunged back into an Ice Age.

Roman Wroxeter. Courses on 'Industrial Archaeology' also featured and claimed to have invented that very term.

During the winter months without students, the staff always had plenty to do by way of maintenance of equipment and buildings, especially those old huts, and in which everyone 'mucked in' without those petty demarcation issues more common in normal schools (or shipyards) at the time.

As the years rolled by, the estate continued to develop: improved access to river and ponds, better weather stations and yet more trees. In 1973 Charles Sinker became the overall director of the FSC and



1960s biology students

thus the underused stable block was gradually turned into 'Head Office'.

At the house, a new dining room was slotted into some existing walls and a start made on new accommodation to replace those old huts. Eventually the new A5 made this possible as it completely changed the landscape in that corner of the estate. Now there are yet more trees and a new teaching pond, replacing the original lost under the embankment, where its soft sediment and old hydrology gave the engineers quite an expensive headache.

Over the years successive generations of staff have made their own contributions to 'bringing environmental understanding to all'. In line with changing times, they now use more IT and have greater concern for details of 'health and safety' in a way not known in the pioneer days. Also, the very success of the FSC in promoting field studies has created competition in the industry, so that old style accommodation is unpopular with customers. Thus recent work has brought even Samuel Adderton's old house up to 'Premier Inn' standards.

Indeed, there is plenty to celebrate this year, including an 'open day' on November 18th, when the wealth of current activities will be on display.

Environmental
Understanding

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November 2017
No 616

Bicton

for All

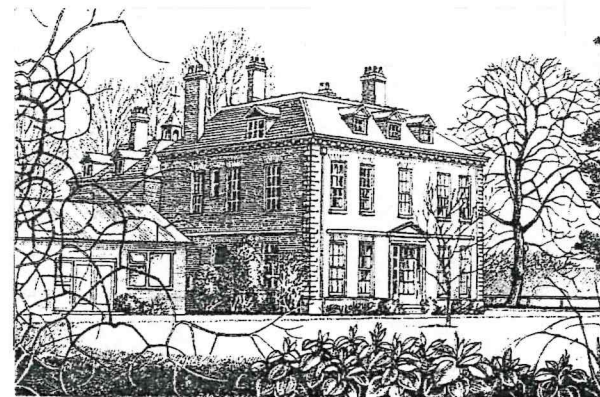
Village

HISTORY
of BICTON

by David Pannett

Part 125

News



Preston Montford Hall c.1705,
also rebuilt kitchen wing 1890
and classroom 1957

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David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 125

Environmental Understanding for All

Normally in November we reflect upon some aspect of the Wars, particularly some special anniversary, but the deaths of local lads Denis Blackmore and John Brown at the 'Ypres Salient' in 1917 have already been dealt with in these pages (Nov '10). However, there are plenty of other anniversaries this year, apart from the winter of 1947 and the great storm of 1987. One closely related to Bicton, worthy of happier celebration, is the 60th anniversary of the opening of a 'Field Centre' at Preston Montford in 1957.

That story still has a wartime connection in that the parent organisation, the 'Field Studies Council', arose out of wartime meetings between enthusiasts and academics in 1943, and so we duly celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2013 (Jun '13). From the start, the National Trust also became involved and, after the War could offer some of its properties as bases for residential environmental education, which was to become the core of the 'new organisation's' work. Thus 'Field Centres' were opened at Flatford Mill, Suffolk; Malham, Yorkshire; Juniper Hall by Dorking and Dale Fort, Pembrokeshire.

Such was the success of these in catering for the growing demand from 6th Form biology and geography students that it was decided to establish more centres in other types of properties and locations. In 1957, Preston Montford therefore became the first of a new generation of such centres, based in its 'Queen Anne' mansion beside the River Severn. To many, the surrounding landscape was rather 'ordinary' but, from the start, the Warden, Charles Sinker and his staff set out to demonstrate that this could make it more relevant to their students.

The original house had been built by Samuel Adderton, a Shrewsbury draper, shortly before his death in 1707 (another anniversary!). In the following generations, marriage settlements passed the estate to the Hills of Hawkestone, who later sold it to John Wingfield of nearby Onslow. As each

estate just used it as a spare property to be mainly let out, the original structure was little altered.

Eventually, it passed into the hands of a police charity which opened a 'probation home' here in 1947 (another anniversary). However, changing Home Office policy meant that it closed down at the very time the FSC was looking for a base in the Welsh Borders.

In this way the Centre inherited existing accommodation, including some wartime huts, and only needed an extra classroom in order to function. The down side, however, was that this was all rather basic, with some changeover days involving shifting the beds around to fit the gender ratio of the next intake. Also, the main house could not offer female showers, but money was always short to improve the situation. Income was dependent upon student fees rather than Government subsidy, except indirectly through local authority support for their own students.

Apart from the small team of teachers and support staff, the Centre sometimes housed research students linked to universities, whose results added to the overall 'local knowledge' which was a feature of each centre (Bicton News readers have also been sharing some of this). The local teaching areas were not just the home estate with its grassland, river and

ponds, but also contrasting features on the Stiperstones, Long Mynd, the Ellesmere 'Meres and Mosses' and even the streets of Shrewsbury. The small coaches provided by 'Vaggs' of Knockin Heath proved most useful, being suited to narrow lanes and dirty boots.



1960s geography tutor

In school holidays traditional adult courses in a range of natural history and geological topics were often run by visiting specialists. In this context, there was the centre's special relationship with Birmingham University's 'Extra Mural' department, which ran summer schools excavating

The river bank was cut over during the war, so that the centre inherited young coppice regrowth. Such pole wood proved useful in constructing steps and paths to give access to the river and exposures of glacial sediment. Further tree growth is, however, a mixed blessing, since it can interfere with the fine view to the west over the river towards Montford.



Jessica Pannett
planting a giant sequoia

Several other small 'gardens' have also been fitted in around the estate to cater for special interests and provide opportunities for active conservation. Daily weather records are also taken, along with the nightly 'catch' of moths, which are passed on to the 'Met' office and Rothamstead research station. Meanwhile, almost out of sight, various 'green' systems are heating and lighting the buildings, partly as demonstrations of what can be done. Indeed, there is plenty to show off, hence the significance of an 'Open Day' on November 18th as part of the anniversary celebrations. Visitors included families and individuals from 'eight to eighty'.

The garden had recently lost its giant sequoia to fungus disease and as part of the celebrations a replacement was supplied and planted by Jessica Pannett of Bicton, the great, great granddaughter of Edward Lewis, who was gardener here in the early nineteenth century. In this ceremony, the past, present and future of Preston Montford thereby came together and we wish both tree and centre further success and growth.

Bicton

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Village

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

News

Part 126

by David Pannett

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 126

An Estate Designed for Learning

This year seems full of anniversaries, including one which we have not so far mentioned: the 50th of the outbreak of Foot & Mouth disease in the autumn of 1967. The dairy farms of North Shropshire and Cheshire were badly hit, but those south of the river, including Bicton, escaped. Nevertheless routine management was disrupted by restrictions of movement and the closure of markets. These restrictions could not be relaxed until the following summer when drier weather probably helped stop the spread.

Through this period Preston Montford Field Centre also had to adapt the content of its courses which normally would have included sites around different parts of the County amongst the farmland. The Urban environments of Shrewsbury and the Ironbridge remained very useful, as well as the Centre's own small estate of about 20 acres, which included the river bank, pastures and small ponds. The experience certainly prompted thoughts on how the estate could be improved for teaching purposes and fortunately some of those ideas were already in place when 'Foot and Mouth' struck the County almost forty years later.

By then, the new A5 had cut across the corner of the estate, reducing its size, but stimulating changes out of necessity and opportunity. For a start, new trees were planted to screen the road and a new pond dug to replace one buried by the embankment. Other developments followed enabling more 'non-residential' day courses to take place here covering a variety of topics. In 1957, 900 students passed through the doors, but in 2017 this had risen ten times to 9,000, with ages ranging from 8 to 80.

For years, most of the grounds had been used as pasture and this management still continues, but with more parts fenced off to allow different regimes of grazing, which can influence their plant communities. One ungrazed plot is now carefully managed as a traditional hay meadow, in which wild flowers are encouraged.

When run as a private house, the walled garden and orchard would have supplied fresh food and vegetables to the household in a traditional way. Now after many years of neglect, and indeed demolition of old greenhouses and walls, the orchards, at least, are being restored and expanded. Traditional varieties, spaced out to allow under-grazing by sheep, will form another type of farming habitat.

A remaining fragment of wall now supports and shelters a 'bee hotel' where a variety of drilled lugs, bamboo and drainpipes provides breeding nests and hibernation shelter for solitary bees and any other insect that needs dry accommodation. Those that prefer damp soil can be inspected under old



Head of Centre Adrian Pickles
at the bee hotel

carpet squares and boards scattered amongst the undergrowth. Here they can all find refuge from spraying farmers and tidy gardeners. Most of the kitchen garden area is now a new pond for freshwater studies, but vegetables once again grow in plots nearer the house. Apart from

being a source of food it is yet another 'ordinary' habitat attracting its own wildlife as any gardener knows. Indeed, this emphasis on 'ordinary' habitats has always been the aim of this centre, since they can be more relevant to the typical student than distant coasts or mountains. Moreover, some of the work done here could be easily copied 'back home' in school grounds or private homes.

The original ponds occupy glacial 'kettle holes' and at one time must have been filled with peat from decaying vegetation. Open water only reappeared once this had been dug out in the middle ages. Now reed and willow beds filter the centre's effluent as an example of environmentally friendly management.