

Meanwhile, the new A5 has been built through the parish, prompting the planting of boundary woodland, shielding it from sight, but not stopping all its noise. At Preston Montford a whole lot more trees have been planted to improve this screening.

This is but the briefest of summaries, pointing out the various reasons for planting trees, from practical to ornamental, but now the government sees them as weapons fighting climate change (like diesel cars and wood-burning, Drax power station!) because they store carbon.

In this connection, one group of enthusiasts has worked out that the best trees for this job are giant sequoias from California and therefore plan to plant more in this country. Victorians were very fond of them, so that we already have some fine specimens in the County, including in our own churchyard. So here is a homework exercise: treat them as a cone, 30 metres high, with circumference of base 5.5 metres - work out the volume. Pay a visit!

Each year we hear the slogan "a dog is for life, not just for Christmas". The same could apply to Christmas trees, so why not invest in a pot-grown Nordmann Fir, which could be used indoors for a couple of years before becoming a monumental feature in your garden (or elsewhere, when the parish council can find a space)?



Giant Sequoia in Bicton churchyard

Think of the future



C.F. Tunnickliffe

Offprint from

**HISTORY
of BICTON**

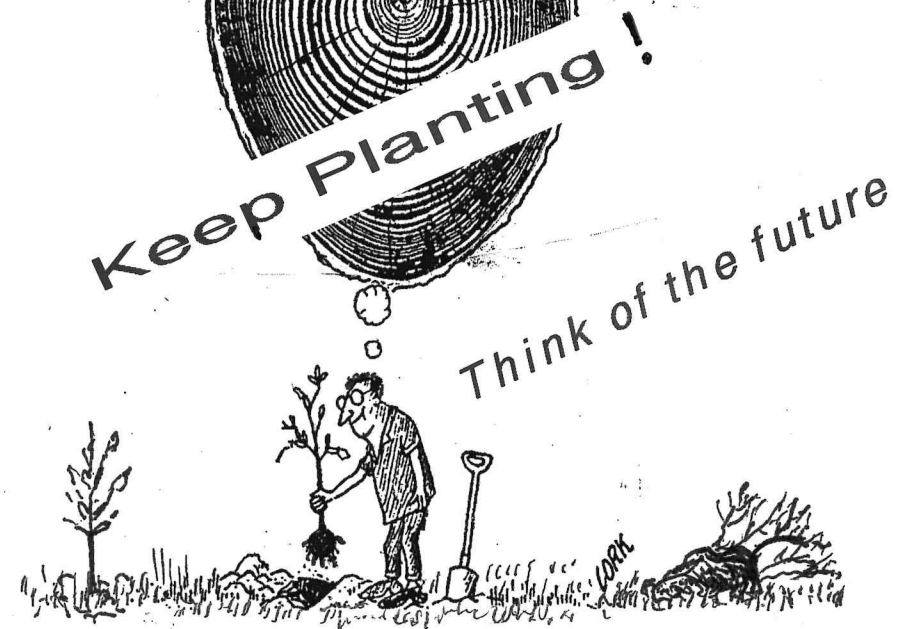
January 2021

No 654

by David Pannett

Bicton Village News

Part 162



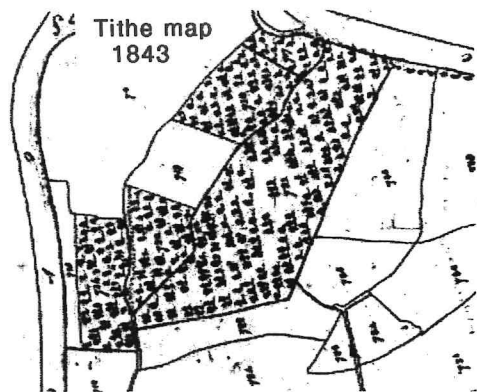
David Pannett's History of Bickton Part 162

Keep Planting!

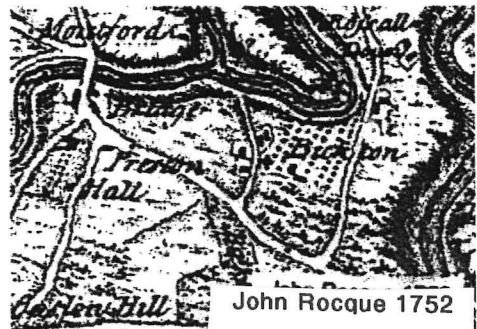
Amongst the many national policies which also touch upon life and landscape in Bickton is the government's current enthusiasm for planting trees. As part of this, Shropshire Council is offering communities young trees for planting in their areas.

A good idea, but suitable sites are needed to make the scheme a success. Here, some parish councillors have already started around the village, but have been frustrated by subsequent damage in vulnerable sites, hence their appeal for help.

Looking back, almost all the existing trees in the parish are the result of earlier planting policies, especially by landowners during the last two hundred and fifty years. Before this, the medieval landscape was rather bare with fewer hedges and woodland limited to protected areas such as Bickley Coppice. Here the 'coppice' management produced a regular supply of pole wood for tools, fencing, fuel, light construction in a sustainable manner.



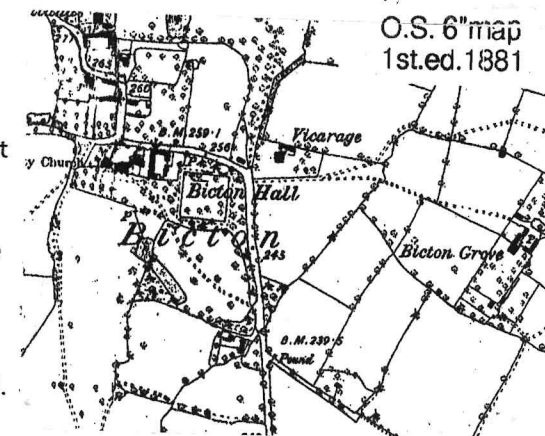
Once managed in common, it was clearly divided among the four owners of village farms, probably as a result of agreements 'inclosing' the old open fields around 1700. For a medieval feature, its south east boundaries seem rather straight and one wonders whether its area was reduced about the same time.



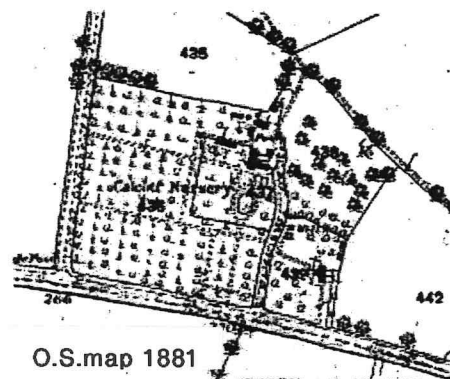
By the seventeenth century, governments were getting worried about supplies of timber for the navy, just when industries were also increasing their demands on woodland. However, by the next century the switch from charcoal to mined coal eased the situation, while landowners great and small were discovering the

delight of 'landscape garden s' and parkland. Locally, Thomas Wright actually established his nursery at the Grove supplying the necessary trees, including the first avenue of limes in Shrewsbury Quarry. The nursery even shows up on Rocque's map of 1752.

In this way, parkland with shelter belts and scattered trees was being developed around the 'big houses' at Onslow, Bickton House, Bickton Hall, Rossall and Oxon. Meanwhile, no doubt, the 'standard' oak trees were added to new hedges, as seen along Shepherds Lane. Later, Onslow included extra woodland for game cover, as we have recently discussed.



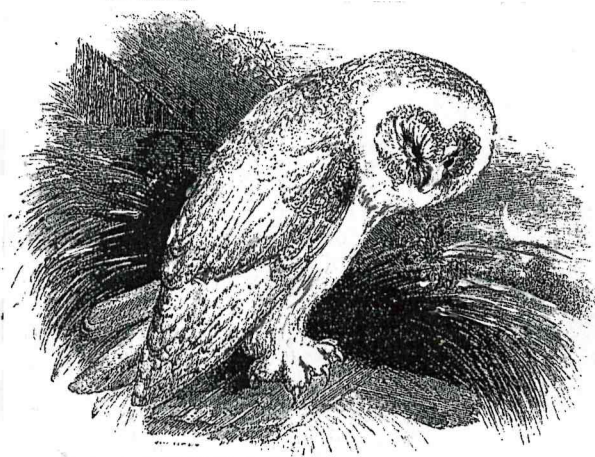
The result of all this can be seen on the first large scale Ordnance Survey maps, where surveyors took the trouble to mark isolated trees along hedgerows and in this parkland. By this time the newly introduced American trees were being added to the mixture of native species in these parks and early Victorian country villas were now also in the market for them. Again, a local nursery at Calcott on the Welshpool Road could cater for them.



The two wars of the twentieth century saw the loss of many mature trees, including from Bickley, so that subsequent growth is more 'modern' than 'medieval'. Modern times have also seen the growth of 'suburban' housing in the parish offering more opportunities for decorative exotic species suitable for small gardens. Again, a local nursery was at hand to help with supplies, Merton Nurseries, near the Four Crosses.

Proprietor, Herbert Lewis, planted many specimens in his own garden, in order to show off ideas and now these continue to thrive long after the nursery closed in 2001. The next generation have been adding more specimens of interest, so that it has been worth opening under the National Garden Scheme. Meanwhile, other trees on the actual nursery site still enhance the landscape around the Brethren's meeting hall.

Although obviously inspired by Gilbert, Charles Darwin makes little acknowledgement of this in his subsequent work, which of course was now more 'scientific', seeking explanations and mechanisms beyond 'creation'. It was only in his last book on earthworms that he mentioned him, but did not quote too much as it could have undermined Charles' own claim to be original! In 1777 Gilbert had actually written:



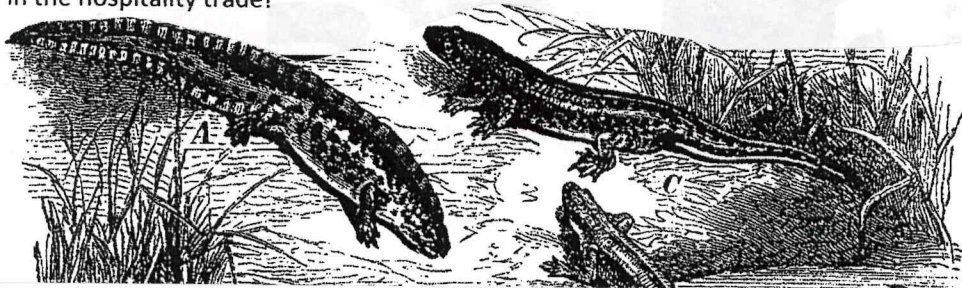
BARN OWL

"Earthworms, though in appearance a small and despicable link in the chain of nature, yet, if lost, would make a lamentable chasm. For, to say nothing of half the birds and some quadrupeds, which are almost entirely supported by them, worms seem to be great promoters of vegetation, which would proceed but lamely without them by boring, perforating and loosening the soil..." (and a lot more)

In the end the invitation to join the Beagle changed everything, so that another book, 'The Journals of Alexander von Humboldt' became more relevant. This famous German explorer is perhaps not as well known in Britain as he ought to be, being somewhat eclipsed by Darwin and then the darker aspects of German history.

Initially trained as a mining surveyor he turned to exploring South America in 1799-1804, following a legacy from his late mother. His professional recording skills and willingness to face danger would inspire Charles to follow suit - the rest is history.

In modern times the lessons from Selborne helped in the establishment of residential field study centres such as our local Preston Montford. Now the whole organisation is facing the double blow of disrupted school programmes and closure in the hospitality trade!



HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

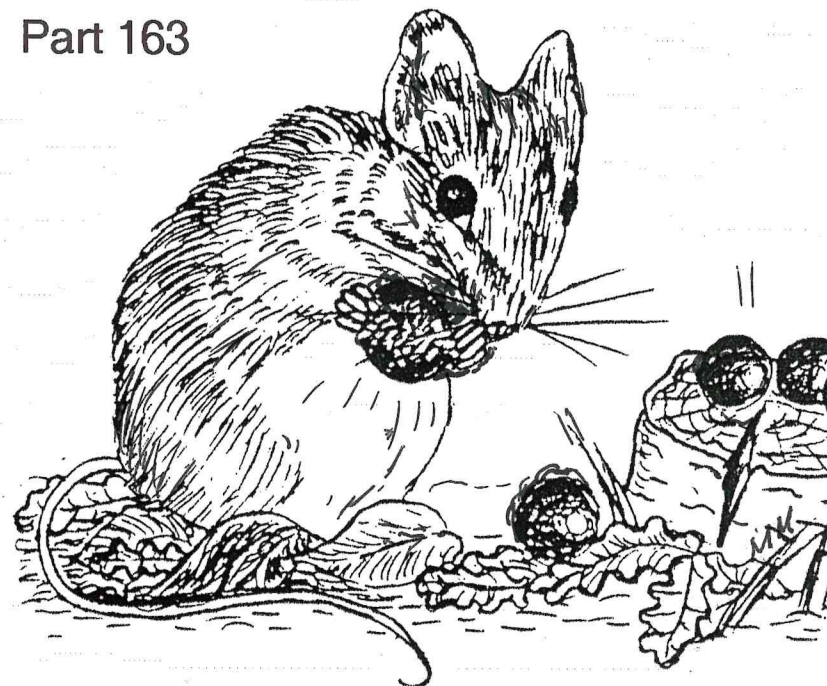
Offprint from

February 2021

No 655

Bicton Village News

Part 163



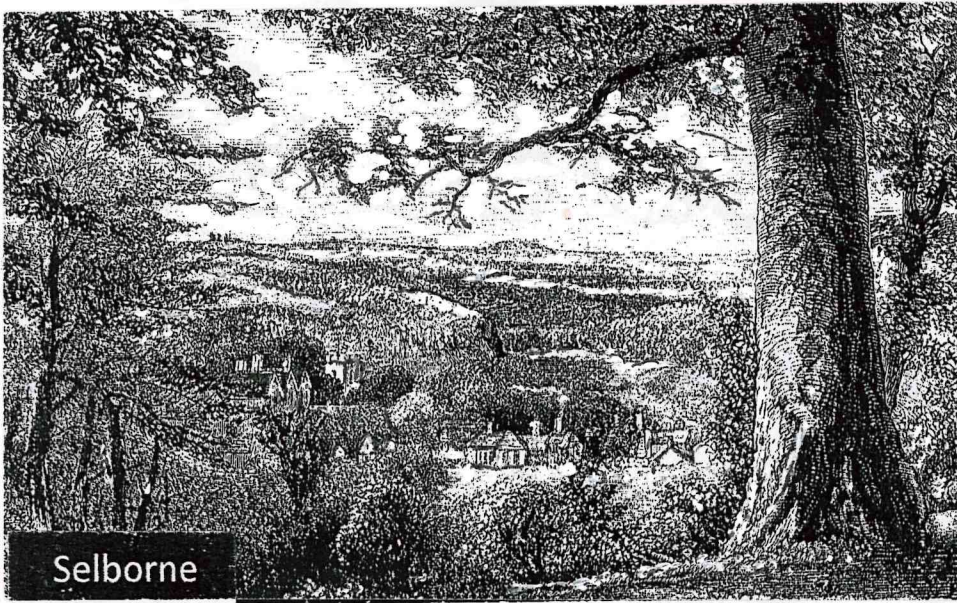
Village Natural History

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 163

Village Natural History

Each February Shrewsbury usually marks the birthday of Charles Darwin with lectures and meetings celebrating aspects of his work. This year there are obvious problems! At least we can make a contribution in these pages.

The main link which Bicton may have with the Darwin story is that the parish formed part of the countryside next to Shrewsbury over which he would have wandered as a youngster. He was then not really enjoying his time at Shrewsbury School, since it offered little stimulus to his interests in the natural world, so he had to educate himself in these aspects in books and by personal observation.



Selborne

One book which did help was Gilbert White's 'The Natural History of Selborne', first published in 1789 and then running to many new editions during the following decades after his death in 1793.

Robert Darwin, being a successful Shrewsbury doctor (buried at Montford) first sent Charles to the famous medical school at Edinburgh (well known for its dissection). However, Charles could not stomach the course and opted instead to go to Cambridge for a clerical degree. He thought that life as a country parson would give him opportunity to continue his passion for natural history, with that Rev'd Gilbert White, long time curate at Selborne being the obvious model.

This village and parish lies on the edge of Hampshire, where Sussex and Surrey also meet and where the rolling chalk hills give way to the varied geology of the Weald. The habitats were therefore varied, but not exceptional for that region.

John, a lawyer, with wife Anne settled here and produced eleven children of which Gilbert was the first in 1720. After schools nearby and in Basingstoke, Gilbert obtained a scholarship to study divinity at Oriel College, Oxford, before returning to his home and local curate's posts, where he remained for the rest of his life. He turned down offers of advanced posts elsewhere, including a college fellowship, since he was so reluctant to leave his beloved village and its natural history, the study of which filled his time.

He published his observations as a collection of letters to other naturalists and thus mixed up the topics rather than following a 'textbook' sequence (not unlike this history series!). The subjects covered included farming soils, weather patterns, plantlife and animals, great and small, and their behaviour.

He has since been dismissed as offering little scientific discovery, but he was a pioneer in simply 'observing', leaving others to follow up with a more 'scientific' approach. As a religious man, he was content to just see the wonders of 'God's creation'. Perhaps his many readers appreciated this approach and could be inspired without being 'blinded' with science. Indeed, given suitable personal situations, almost anyone could do it. The current 'lockdown' and confinement to home areas may give some such opportunity. Have we any volunteers to do the Natural History of Bicton with 'letters' to the Village News? Photographs?

In this connection, Gilbert's favourite subject was the bird life, its seasonal patterns, nesting styles, food and social interaction etc. Today, large gardens and food handouts are important for the welfare of some species and it is possible for us to see them more easily, even in camera range.

The long period of his observations was, of course, made possible by his ecclesiastical life and financial support and we are reminded of the way in which so many nineteenth century clergy also made valuable contributions to local history in this county. Their knowledge of classical languages may have had little use in the pulpit but was valuable in transcribing, translating and publishing ancient records for the rest of us to read.

Our present small clergy team are now responsible for seven churches around the loop which once employed five clergy and three curates in 1870, so have their hands full.



WOOD PIGEON

name	age	sex	rel	17
John Lloyd	75	Male	Head	75
Ellen Toison	79	Female	Wife	79
Mary Evans	27	Female	Servant	27
Ann Evans	28	Female	do	28
Harriet Thomas	26	Female	do	26
Elyabeth Davies	4	Female	Wife	4
John Evans	72	Male	Head	72
Richard Russ	47	Male	Servant	47

Next up the lane stood the twin buildings of 'Bicton Cottage' (Whitehouse), home to Christianna Jellico, 81 and her three young staff and also a small boarding school run by her daughter Lucy, 60. The family may also have originated in Shifnal where late husband Thomas Jellico had other relatives and may also, like them, have been a Land Surveyor. Before long all this would be closed down as the ladies died and joined Thomas and other members of the family in the Chapel graveyard.

The rest of the village consisted of the three large farms, each with a different family structure. John and Mary Davies, 55 and 47 at Bicton Farm only had their two young sons at home whom they 'employed' as workers, while Richard and Susanna Russ, 47 and 48 at Red House had the more typical farmhouse mixture of five family, farm and domestic staff. John Lloyd, 75 at the Woodlands was a 'gentleman farmer', originally from Alberbury, relied on four domestic staff and a widowed labourer who thereby had a home too. We already met his other workers at those cottages nearby. Of all these farmers, only John Davies continued to live in the village until he joined his Jellico neighbours in the graveyard.

In summary, this part of Bicton which we have explored contained 18 households, 12 of which were related to agriculture in 3 large farmhouses and 9 cottages. Of the 89 individuals only 2 adults had been born locally. Some of the older children may have already moved on seeking domestic work away from their crowded homes, while 19 others, mainly girls, had come here for similar work. About 20 of school age remained.

Altogether, there appears to have been a steady turnover of population involving several Shropshire parishes - is it any different today? There is still only one Bicton born adult along the route!

Offprint from

Bicton

March 2021

No 656

Village News

David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 164

Census Time Again

March, this year, is census time again! The system has been going on for over two hundred years and is therefore valuable for the study of our local history. The most recent, however, are kept out of public view for one hundred years, so that 2021 may see the release of the 1921 data for study.

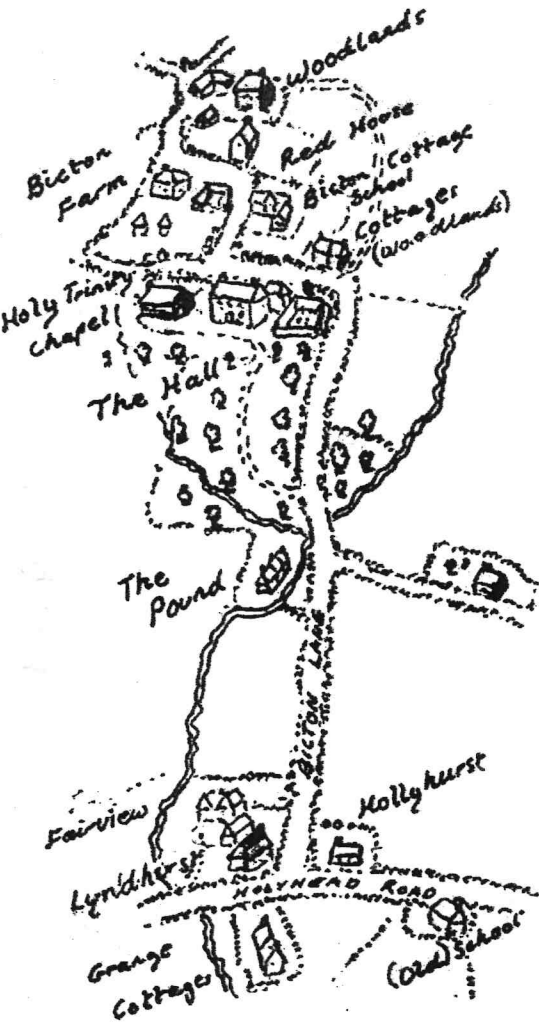
The original intention of the government of the day was to make the first census in 1800, but the pressures of the Napoleonic Wars and general inexperience caused this plan to be delayed a year, hence 01, 11, 21 etc.

As experience with the system improved, more questions were asked leading to a standard format first used in 1851 and continued for the rest of the century. Thus, for the first time historians can learn of relationships and places of birth in each household as well as names and ages.

Many years ago in this series, we analysed the age structure for the village in 1851 (Nov. '07) and more recently explored family structure in 1911 (Oct. '18), the latest census available for study. Perhaps we could do the same with the 1851 census which was the first really useful one and, with it, explore the village from the Holyhead Road, up Bicton Lane to the Woodlands.

Before the building of the new school (the Victorian one on the Holyhead Road), our route would start at the cottage (Old School House), housing the local 'charity' school run by Frances Bowlker, 54. Such a post thus provided both employment and accommodation for herself and her son during her widowhood. Before enlargement, it must have been a tight squeeze for the pupils!

Next along the Holyhead Road, Grange Cottage was then in two parts, each housing a family of an agricultural labourer: Samuel Preece, 32 and Richard Rogers, 49, originally from Cardiston and Pontesbury. Together with wives and children this small building housed eleven individuals. Across the road at the corner of Bicton Lane, 'Holyhurst' was the home of Thomas Parry, 56 and wife Priscilla. He had the distinction of being the only adult who was actually born in Bicton, occupying the same cottage since before the 1841



census. In a way, he was self employed on a small holding here, part of the Jenkins estate and may, therefore, have worked at Bicton Hall, hence not needing to move. Daughter Elizabeth had already left home but the Parrings now 'employed' a young local girl whom they appear to have raised from childhood. Example of local 'social service'?

By contrast, the original old cottage on the opposite corner was seeing many changes, now lying empty and being replaced by 'Lyndhurst' and 'Fairview' at opposite corners of its plot. The former was home to Road Surveyor Thomas Edwards, 55 and his wife Hannah, 59, helped by one servant girl. Thomas was born in Montgomeryshire, while Hannah came from near Wellington; perhaps road 'work' helped them to meet.

Fairview likewise held newcomers, Mary Pritchard, 49 from Wallop, who is described as a 'gentlewoman's assistant', although other records shed no

light on the possible identity of the 'gentlewoman' in question. Jane Minton, 37, was recorded as a visitor, who later appears to have moved in to share the house. There is a mystery here which we may explore some other time.

Further down the lane, we come to the 'Pound', since rebuilt, but then a row of three small dwellings, each occupied by another agricultural labourer and family, amongst whom only Benjamin Williams, 44 had been here in 1841. Altogether six adults and five children filled this very basic building.

Nearby, one other long standing family of Robert Thomas, 49 occupied the cottage along what would become Church Lane. As another tenant of the Jenkins estate, he may have worked at the Hall.

Up the lane nearer the old village were another pair of cottages linked to the Woodlands housing families of Richard Thomson, 57 and Thomas Preece, 47, totalling ten individuals including older children and a 'brother-in-law'. By comparison, the building has since been enlarged at each end, but only houses less than half that number – not an unusual situation.

Richard Thomson	Head	Man	57	11	Wife
Elizabeth	Wife	Man	50	11	Brother in law
William	Son	Man	18	11	Wheeler
Elizabeth	Son	Man	15	11	General
Richard	Son	Man	17	11	of Hall
Thomas	Son	Man	8	11	School
Mary	Son	Man	3	11	School
not recorded	Man	Man	67	11	Co

Bicton Hall had more space, but was also well filled; needing that top storey, which now no longer exists. By 1851, owner Richard Jenkins had moved to London to be nearer parliament, while letting the Hall to suitable tenants. It is no surprise that he was able to help fellow MP John Cotes of Woodcote near Shifnal by providing a home for his three unmarried sisters, Charlotte, 66, Sophia, 48 and Emily, 45. For support, they employed nine staff including Housekeeper and Butler, all of whom came from outside the parish and would all except two move on before the next census.

The field plotting was at the 6 inch to one mile scale followed by publication at the One Inch scale. The O.S. 1900 edition was used as a base, since it was still uncoloured and would not clash with the geological information. After initial publication in 1932, the local maps at least were reprinted in 1959 and 1972, by which time the 'national grid' could be added. Throughout, separate 'Solid' and 'Drift' versions were produced, the former owing much to the older surveys, even when reprinted at 1:50,000 scale, while the latter owed most to the 1920s work on superficial deposits. Commenting and explanation of the what had been mapped then was incorporated into the 'Shrewsbury District Memoir', finally published in 1938 after some delay.

The 'drift' version is, of course, most relevant in Bicton, since the parish is covered by a blanket of glacial 'boulder clay' up to one hundred feet thick in places. The pebbles and boulders within it were the clues that it had all come from Wales.

In association with this formation, several patches of water laid sand and gravel were identified, but from the map alone, their actual relationship is not obvious. In the case of The Isle it is 'peeping' out from the clay, while around Preston Montford and Calcott it lies on top (Apr 2016).

The latter deposit actually appears to have some historical significance by providing some of the best well-drained 'arable' soil in the township. It became the site of 'Grange Field' surrounding the old monastic 'Grange', suggesting the medieval monks (Jul 2012) were hogging the best soil, while the rest of the villagers had to make do with heavy clay which they had to raise in ridges to get good drainage (as shown by LIDAR)(Mar 2018).

Along the Severn Valley the gravel river terraces were now plotted in addition to fine alluvium of the floodplain. The significance of these features, together with others round here, have been discussed in several essays over the years, which are available as 'offprints' as well as online via the bictonvillage.co.uk web site.

In the meantime, keep your eyes on the soil.

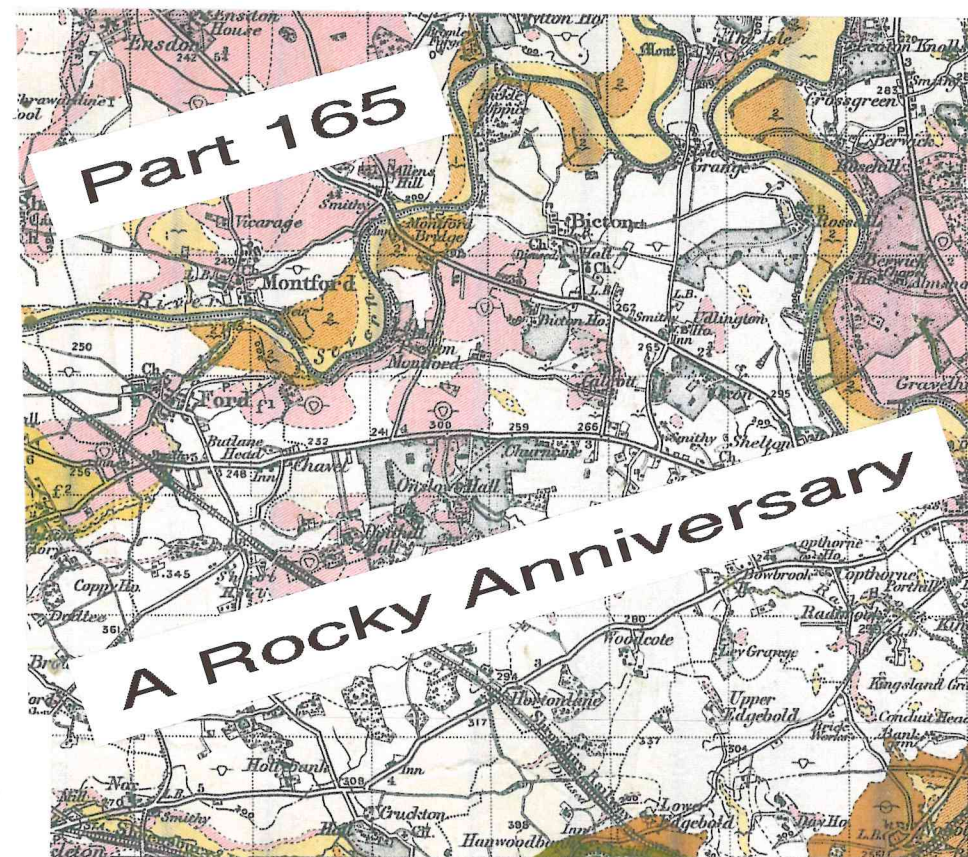
Offprint from

April 2021

No 657

Bicton Village News

David Pannett's History of Bicton



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 165

A Rocky Anniversary

This year marks the bicentenary of the death of Napoleon during his exile on St. Helena. Was it stomach cancer or arsenic from his green wallpaper? One lasting impact of his famous life was the way in which it prompted our government to found the Ordnance Survey and its programme of national mapping. Surveyors passed through Bicton in 1816 (Jul 2008) for publication in 1836.

We have also recently pointed out (Nov 2020) how this year marks the centenary of the first 'council houses' in the parish: 'Rural Cottages' by Atcham Rural District Council. There is certainly an excuse for a 'birthday party' in The Crescent, Montford Bridge when virus restrictions will allow!

Another local anniversary which might go unnoticed by residents is the work of the British Geological Survey mapping this area at the very same time, one hundred years ago. The resulting published maps are still in use today.

Some years ago, when commentators were discussing the relative merits of a geology graduate doing voluntary work in a museum instead of shelf stacking in Poundland for her Jobseekers allowance, one dismissed geology as an 'obscure subject.'

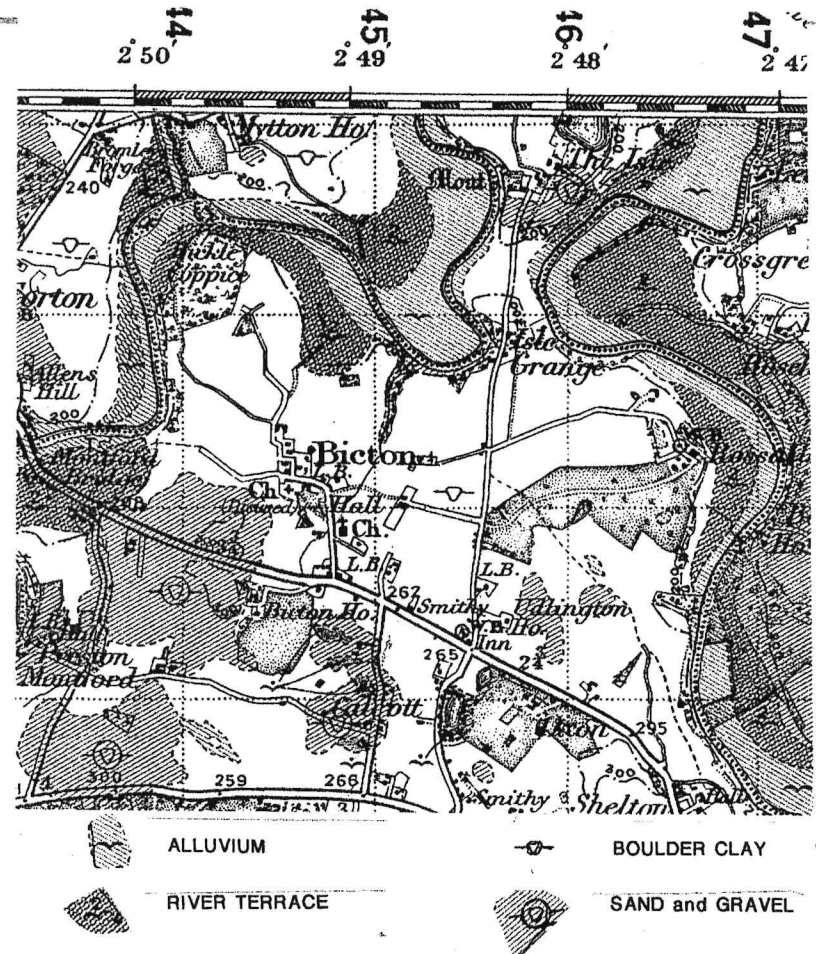
We must therefore point out how those new buildings illustrate so much geology: bricks, tiles, glass, cement and concrete made from clay, sand, limestone and gravel, all with the help of coal and oil for fuel. Also, iron filings, copper wire and lead flashing came from ores in the ground. The local contribution is then the best foundation for them to stand on.

In other words, modern life had become ever more dependent on geological resources and the search for them has always been a driving force behind the study of rocks. In the 'Industrial Revolution', mines, quarries and canal cuttings were revealing more about their distribution, leading to the compilation of the first geological maps in the early nineteenth century. William Smith, a mining and canal surveyor, produced his pioneering map of the country in 1815. Then government involvement led to the establishment of the British Geological Survey which went on to pursue its own programme of mapping, leading to eventual publication in the years 1844-55.

By then, the 'one inch to one mile' maps of the Ordnance Survey were available as a base to carry the geological information. Only the boundaries could be printed, so the colouring was applied by hand.

Emphasis had to be on the 'solid' rocks, since all those superficial, mainly glacial deposits, were still not fully understood. The one exception was the alluvium of river floodplains which was related to this obvious physical feature. Otherwise, the map covering the Bicton area could only show the largely hidden soft red sandstones of the Triassic Age.

These 'Old Series' maps therefore had limited practical use in such areas, so that the improved 'New Series' maps were launched after WWI. Thus the survey officers D A Wray and C D Wedd worked through the parish in the years 1920-21.



surveyors, who had once produced those earlier title and estate maps. Estate agents and auctioneers could now simply copy the O.S. maps rather than produce their own. Locally, Thomas Tisdale, who lies with his wife under that angel in our churchyard, was one such surveyor experiencing these changes (July 2014).

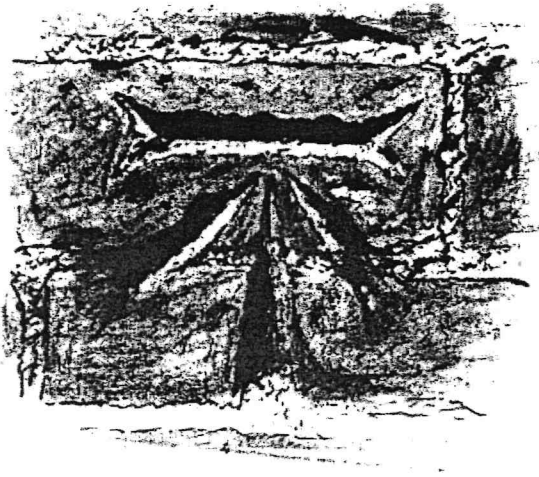
The new maps could now also carry the height information in the form of 'spot heights' on road surfaces along which levelling teams progressed. In addition, 'bench marks' were cut into adjacent walls, which were considered to be permanent. The stone parapet of Montford Bridge has, of course, been replaced, together with a similar wall where Bicton Lane crosses the brook by the pound, but some marked buildings still survive.

A mark at the Woodlands appears to be obscured by farming operations, but another can still be seen on similar barn walls by the Hall. The map records its altitude as 250.1 feet. Its design is typical of those times, with the measured line above and broad arrow below, being the standard symbol of government property often seen elsewhere (remember those cartoon convicts drawn with arrows all over?). 'Victorian' artistic tastes can also be recognised in the addition of serifs to the cut mark.

A releveling in the following century, using a new datum at Newlyn, Cornwall, produced much simpler versions. Likewise, later revisions of the maps became much plainer and less concerned with some detail, the issue being the need to cut costs.

The same time, 1881, was, of course, a census year, so one would hope to match mapped building with individual households recorded then. Unfortunately, the Bicton census enumerator appears to have been below standard. Households were not all recorded in the logical 'geographical' order and even farms up the village got left out, requiring a supervisor to fill them in afterwards. The 1871 census had similar failings - was the same man responsible? All very frustrating for a local historian.

On the bright side, thanks to Steve Lewis for recording the bench mark on his wall, which I am sure he will safeguard for future generations.

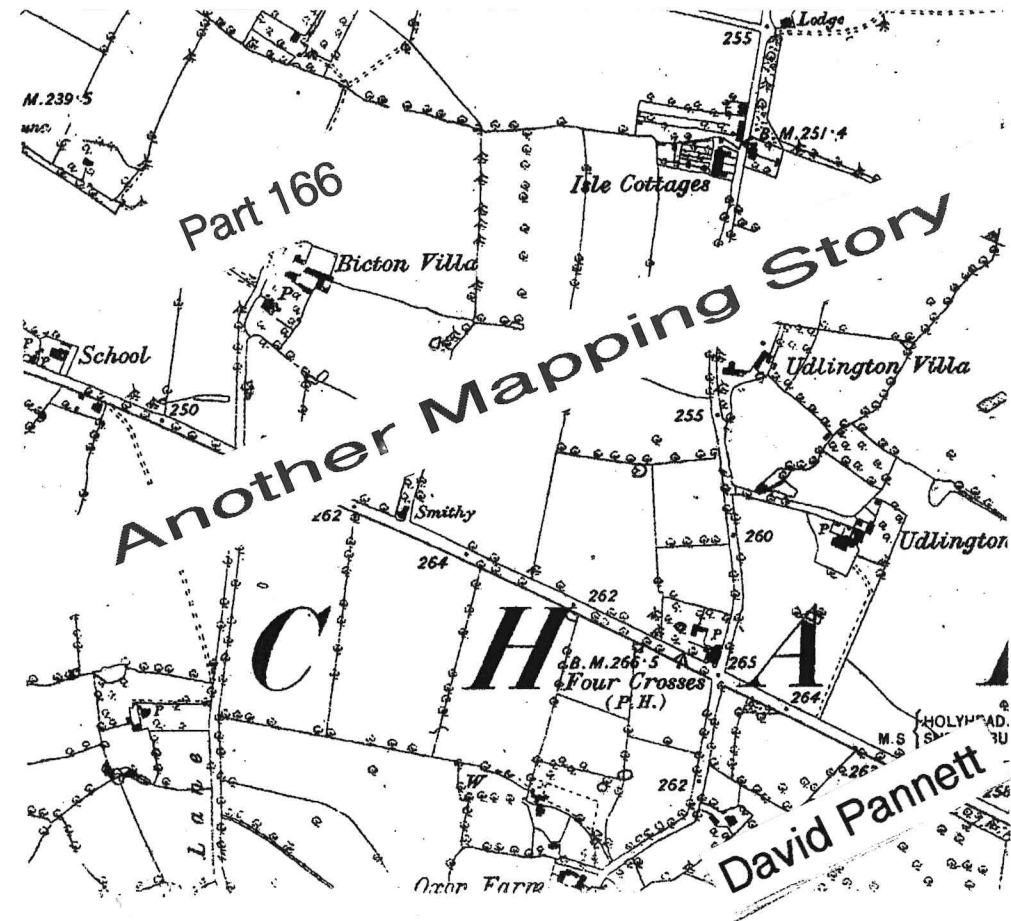


HISTORY of BICTON

Offprint from
May 2021
No 658

Bicton

Village News



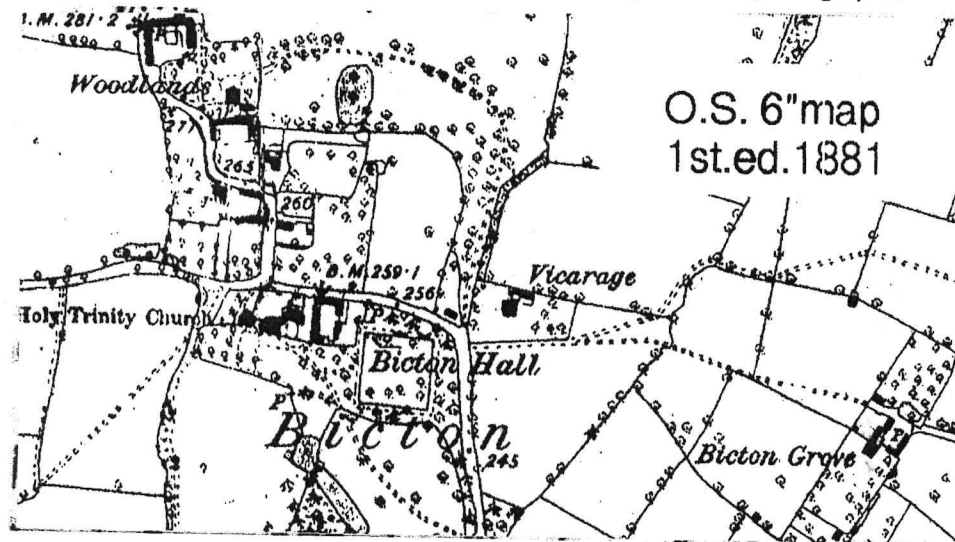
David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 166

Another Mapping Story

Last month in this series we 'celebrated' the centenary of geological mapping in our area and therefore it is appropriate that we also 'celebrate' the One Hundred and Fortieth anniversary of the first large scale Ordnance Survey maps of Bicton. It has also been a long time since we discussed the history of such maps (July 2008) and therefore some repetition would not be out of place, bearing in mind how many newcomers have arrived since then.

The first O.S. maps covering at least the southern half of Britain had been at the One Inch to One Mile scale. Then experience in mapping Ireland demonstrated the usefulness of larger scales, which were introduced to the mainland after the 1850s. Also, a national programme of levelling started, using observations at Liverpool docks to establish an 'official' mean sea level or 'Ordnance Datum'.

After much argument between survey directors and their controlling committees, the new policy settled down to very detailed surveys at 1:2500 or 25 Inches to One Mile scale from which maps at 'Six Inch' and 'One Inch' scales could be derived. At first this was achieved mechanically, but gradually newly invented photographic



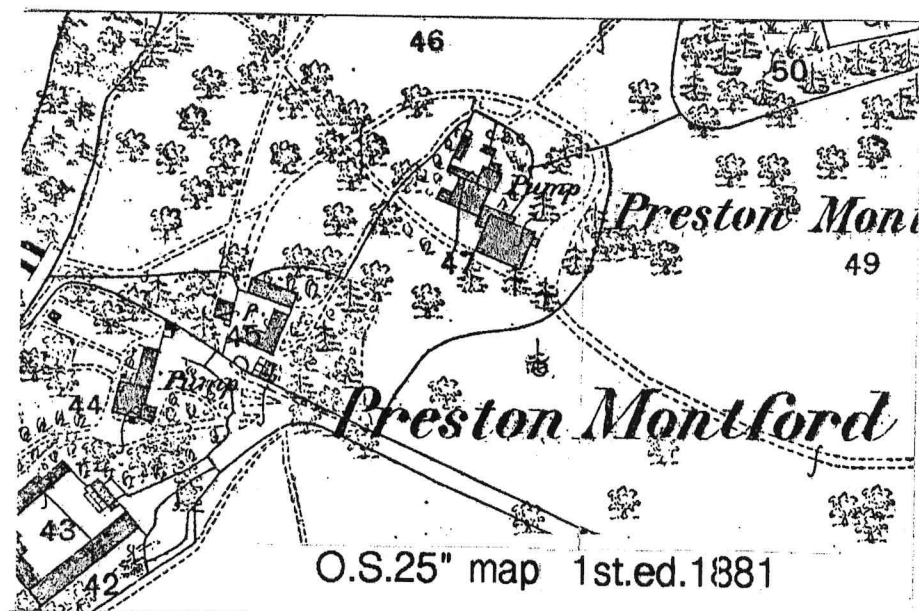
techniques were employed even eventually transferring images directly on to zinc printing plates.

In towns, including nearby Shrewsbury, mapping also took place at the 1:500 or 10 Feet to the Mile scale, thus providing later historians with a mass of historical detail.

This progressive programme of surveying and map publication gradually spread across the country, embracing Bicton in the years 1880-81. Since then, we have been able to use them in historical research and illustration in these pages. For instance, we recently pointed out their value in understanding the distribution of park and hedgerow trees, some of which we still appreciate as 'veterans' under threat from development (Jan 2021). One can also see how many have been lost already.

Buildings were also shown in detail enabling subsequent changes to be recognised. At Preston Montford Hall, for instance, the map recorded the original semi-detached service wing which burned down in the 1890s (May 2007). Nearby the two parts of the farmhouse also show up (July 2005).

Each field and garden plot was also numbered with acreages recorded elsewhere in a parish list. Anyway, by mathematical coincidence, at the 25 Inch scale, one



square inch represented approximately one acre, so areas could be easily estimated by farmers without seeking the reference book.

In this respect, the Ordnance Survey was now replacing the work of countless local

HISTORY of BICTON

Bicton

Village News

In Oxon, the Morris brothers, originally from Newport, had acquired the Spearman estate by both marriage and purchase. They had also bought Bicton House at its 1830 sale, but then passed it to Dr Crawford who had married a Morris. Bicton Farm went along too. Eventually the later Morris family lost interest locally, as Wood Eaton by Stafford became their principal residence.

'Next door' Lady Boyne held *Udlington*, but her connection is less clear; perhaps another accident of marriage? Meanwhile, the Isle estate just carried on from one Humphrey Sandford to another.

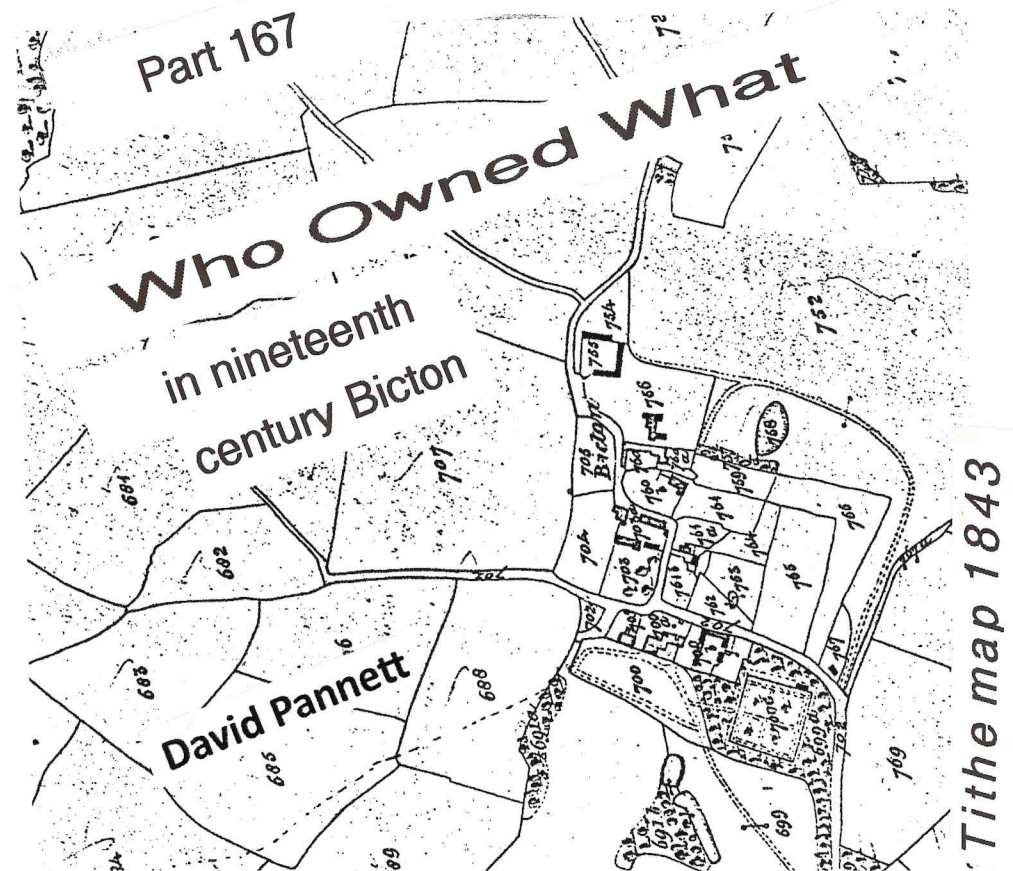
The pattern within Bicton itself was, and still is, quite unlike the other townships as it reflects the 'piecemeal' enclosure of a medieval 'Open Field' system, which survived here into the seventeenth century. The numerous exchanges of land between the four principal proprietors led to this 'jig-saw puzzle' and were still going on into the nineteenth century.

Farmhouses remained together in the village street in a way commented upon by contemporary agricultural writers as inconvenient, though common in the county. Where they were able, dominant owners could redesign the layout, as at Montford, but obviously not here.

At the Woodlands, John Lloyd was a 'gentleman' farmer while next door, at Red house, John Gittins, a tenant farmer on the Montford estate, here had been investing in his own freehold. Bicton Farm was currently held by the Morris Crawford family, already mentioned. At the Hall, the Jenkins family had acquired the property by marriage in the eighteenth century and treated it as a gentleman's residence, letting the land to neighbours for actual farming. Sir Richard Jenkins, as MP, had now moved to London.

Between these contrasting patterns, there was a zone of smaller properties, roughly along the site of the heath, where ancient encroachments and new allotments made in 1768 had produced a very irregular pattern. Some cottages and smallholdings had later been absorbed by big estates such as the Wingfield's but some still gave opportunity for smaller proprietors to own their little patch.

All this is but a general summary of some more detailed stories already appearing in these essays. Whatever the future of Bicton it will still take place within this ancient framework.



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 167

Who owned What

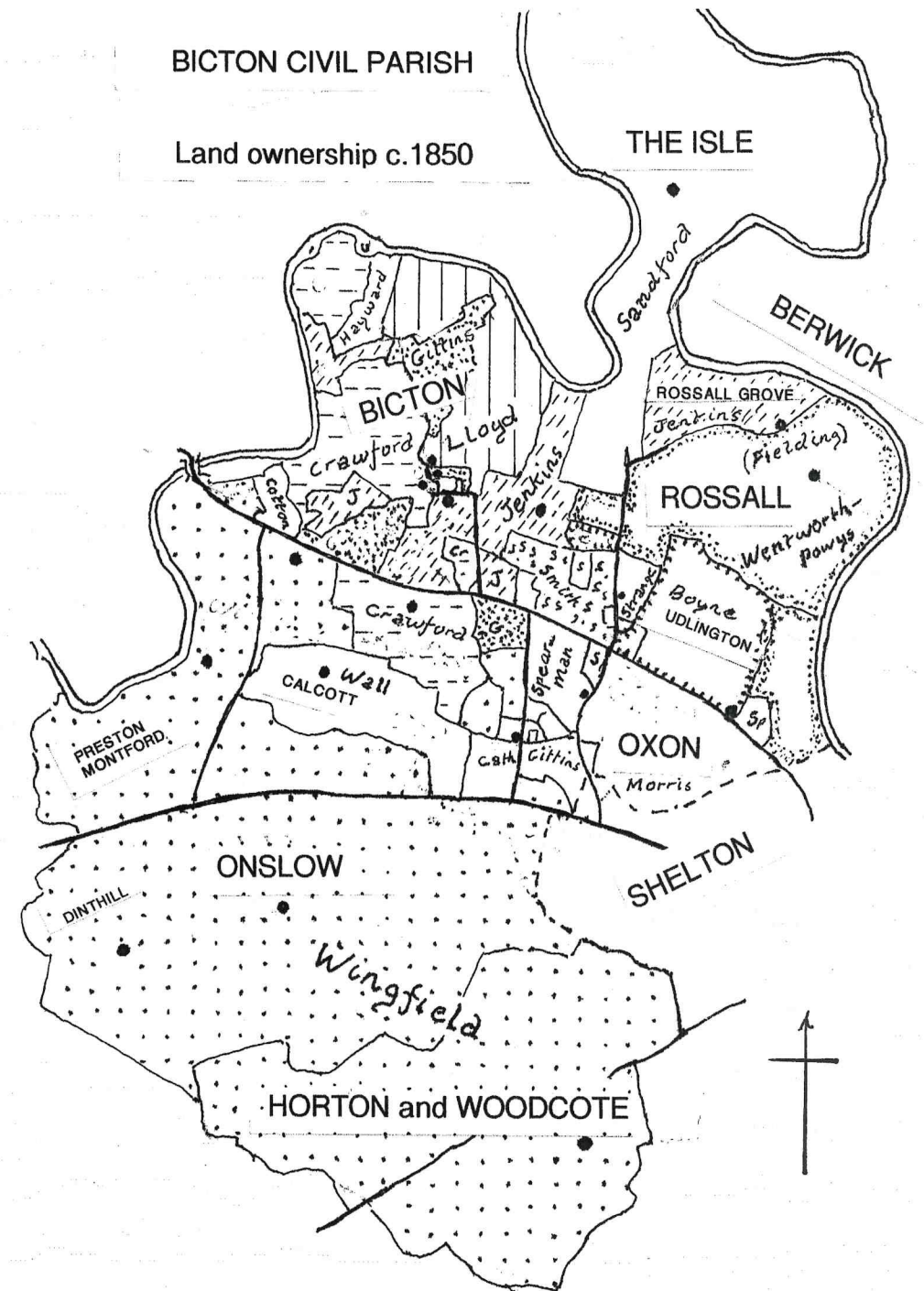
From time to time discussions about future development, footpaths, trees and now allotments all hinge on landownership. It is therefore appropriate to explore this subject, especially the origins of the present pattern.

The modern civil parish of Bicton embraces several ancient townships, where, in some cases, their individual ownership stories can be traced to Domesday manors. The best starting point for the ownership pattern is, however, the tithe maps of the mid nineteenth century, compiled to assess the share of tithe payments due from each landowner. Their tenants were also recorded, often showing how some working farm units involved more than one landlord (any different now?). Directories and other estate records help in some cases.

On the overall map of the parish it can be seen that the Wingfield estate was then the largest, having been brought together from several smaller estates during earlier decades. Originally, Rowland Wingfield of Preston Brockhurst bought Onslow in 1780, where he raised his two sons, John and Charles.

John, after military service, married Mary Rocke, whose family were Shrewsbury bankers - a very significant aid to his plans! First, a new mansion was built, then neighbouring estates were acquired by exchange or purchase as and when they became available: former Mytton smallholdings on the heath, 1824; Preston Montford and the Grange held by Hills of Hawkestone, 1829; Smith and Waring property in Woodcote at the same time; and Dinthill owned by another Wingfield in 1846. Meanwhile Charles had married a Jenkins from Bicton Hall and could step in when Sir Richard Jenkins died in 1853. Thomas Wall's Calcott was also added about this time, 'rounding off' the estate boundary.

Meanwhile, estates in the other townships were able to continue their own independent development. Rossall, in particular, was experiencing rapid changes. The inclosure of Rossall Heath in 1830 had given it a western boundary interlocked with its neighbours; otherwise the river provided much of its boundary. Opposite, across the river lay the Berwick estate, once home to Thomas Powys. By now his successor by marriage, Henry Wentworth Fielding had also acquired much of Rossall, perhaps safeguarding the landscape viewed from Berwick House and providing a suitable home for his mother. He also changed his name to Powys. In the 1850s, however, all was to change when he sold the whole of Rossall, including the Jenkins part, to John Harley of Shrewsbury. The Harleys now lie in our churchyard, while the Berwick estate still holds parts of Shelton.



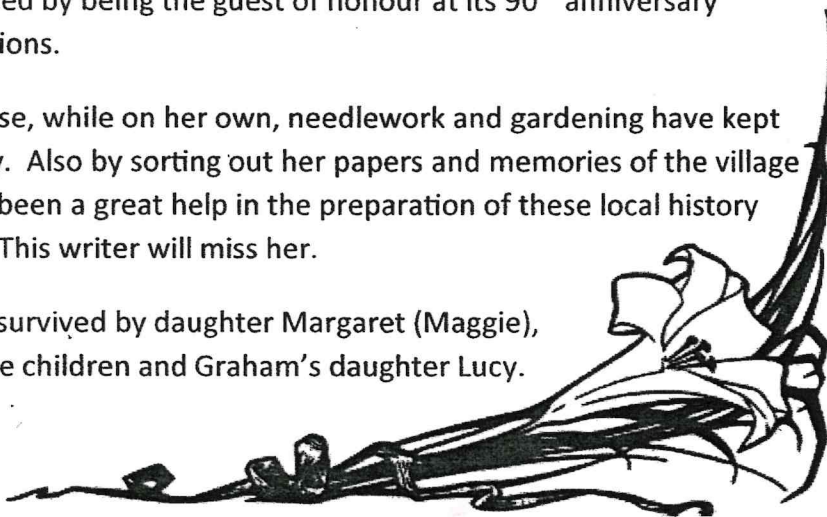
She was to spend the next thirty years here sowing, propagating, potting and making floral arrangements until her retirement, as a result of which she became well known to many beyond the village. On the way, she even acted as an extra 'Mum' to the Pannett children, when their parents found life busy.

While all this was going on, Mary was following her mother as an enthusiastic member of Bicton WI, contributing to displays of cookery, needlework etc., as well as performing at parties and taking a turn as president. Arising from this she had, as early as 1964, been chosen to join the County delegation to a Buckingham Palace garden party. In between all this, Mary found time to be a school governor, parish councillor, even its chairman, and act as local correspondent for the Shrewsbury Chronicle. Then, as all these good efforts were becoming widely known, she was invited to be a JP, just like her Great Uncle John.

Retirement brought a more peaceful life spoilt by two tragedies, first the sudden death of Raymond in 2002 and later the death of son Graham in 2014. That same year her past contribution to the WI was recognised by being the guest of honour at its 90th anniversary celebrations.

Otherwise, while on her own, needlework and gardening have kept her busy. Also by sorting out her papers and memories of the village she has been a great help in the preparation of these local history essays. This writer will miss her.

Mary is survived by daughter Margaret (Maggie), her three children and Graham's daughter Lucy.



David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 168



Olive 'Mary' Fowles 1927-2021



On 17th May, Mrs Mary Fowles of Old School House passed away at the Isle Court Nursing Home, aged 93. Not only had she become the oldest inhabitant of Bicton, but also one of the few who had spent her whole life in the village, witnessing its history and making her own contribution to it.

Mary was born on 11th November, 1927, to James and Olive Paddock at Oxonia in Church Lane. Father belonged to a family of farm workers, gardeners and tradesmen which had been expanding locally in the usual 'Victoria and Albert' fashion, while Mother had come from the similarly large Edwards family in Shrawardine to work at Udlington.

James' original home had been nearby at the Pound, where his father Alfred still lived as a smallholder and carpenter. His uncle John, Alfred's brother, also a carpenter, lived nearby on the Holyhead Road

in a house which he had built. John was also undertaker, parish clerk and secretary to the local branch ('court') of the 'Ancient Order of Foresters' friendly society. Later, he was to become chairman of Bicton Parish Council and, unusually for a 'working man', a JP, all of which must have influenced Mary's own attitude to life as she grew up. We have already written about him in these pages (June 2016).

When Alfred died in 1931, James and family moved back to the Pound and its small farming enterprise. The dwelling was still a basic rural cottage and therefore it is no surprise that it has since been totally rebuilt to meet modern standards.

By this time Alfred's other brother James had become tenant of Bicton Farm and a few years later, at the start of the War, Mary's own father James was offered the tenancy of Redhouse, after James Roberts.

Farming in the 1930s had been financially difficult for all concerned, but locally had been kept going by the expanding milk trade in Shrewsbury. The work therefore revolved around a small herd of cows, besides a little bit of everything.

The War, of course, demanded increased production with plenty of hard work for everyone, including German prisoners of war based at the Ellesmere camp. They much appreciated the family's kindness to them, including good farmhouse food. Two kept in touch after repatriation and gave thanks for food parcels.

Mary had attended Bicton Primary School under headmistress Miss Connie Chidley (whose brother had been James' best man in 1925) and by now had won a scholarship to the old Priory School, which would introduce her to life and work beyond farming.

Great Uncle John had died in 1939, having already passed on his role with the Foresters to father James. It was therefore no surprise that Mary's first employment was at the Foresters' office in Shrewsbury.

Before the modern 'welfare state' really got under way after the War, friendly societies, such as the Foresters, Oddfellows and Buffaloes, were very important to the working man in providing support in the time of need. Mary was thus able to witness their real life problems.

In her free time, Mary had often visited a relation living near Mytton and thereby got to know Raymond Fowles, whose father had come from Sussex to be chauffeur at Mytton Hall. They married in 1952, when their reception was the first to be held in the Village Hall, newly erected on land donated by Great Uncle James Paddock. The vicar, Rev'd Arthur Smith, had also been most helpful in this project to acquire second-hand military huts in 1951 and joined Mary in writing a Nativity play for its first Christmas. Mary, of course, played Mary!

With 'National Service' over, Raymond pursued a career with the railway. Home life was now on the Holyhead Road, first in that 'John Paddock' house and then at Old School House, which had always been attached to the Redhouse, where their parents were continuing to farm with the help of son, another James.

Now, Mary and Raymond started their own family with daughter Margaret, born in 1956, which meant more time spent at home and around the village. Here, Jack Overy, the Shrewsbury outfitter, and his wife sought Mary's help in running their home at Bicton Hall, until his death in 1964.

Mary then worked at Paddy's shop in the village (now Dairyscope) before joining Merton Nurseries, which the Lewis brothers, Alan and Herbert, were establishing opposite the Four Crosses.

Bicton

September 2021
No 662

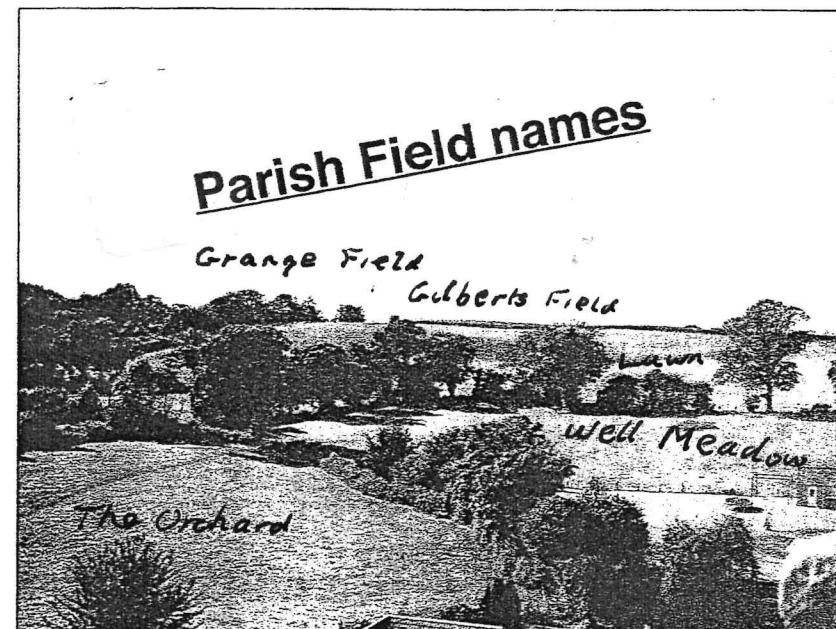
Following the Severn Way out of Bicton towards Montford Bridge, Chapel Hill obviously relates to the Old Church, but on the opposite side of the Way lies "Uptons", formerly Hopton's Yard.

George Hopton is recorded as having 2 hearths in Bicton in 1672 and 1677. He may have occupied Bicton Farm. Down by the Severn on the old road to Bickley Coppice is a mysterious field called Cadreley. The origin of the name "Rednalls" on the line of the Bicton Brook near the Severn is not known. Near the church is "Britchells". This may be a surname but the term Breach often means a field taken in from heathland, as does the common fieldname "Piece" found in the small fields along the Holyhead Road. Which Doctor did Doctor's Piece refer to? Does it relate to Dr Crawford?

Sometimes fields are descriptively named e.g. "Thistley". Sometimes fieldnames more explicitly described the flora – Bines Field, close to "Weed Wells", might refer to bindweed, but an earlier name is the Boyne which suggests a name from the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

The Severn Way leads down to a still recognisable "Rushy Marsh". By the primary school we have a further Well Meadow and also an area known as The Old Orchard. Animals also feature in the Cow Pastures by Muriels Little Wood and Ox leasow near Montford Bridge. Sometimes old names appear. The track from Bicton to Bickley Coppice has Snig Meers and Snig Meers Meadow – a snig is an eel.

Other useful descriptions appear. On the same path is Brickkiln Field. Bricks made from boulder clay complete with pebbles are common in old Bicton. In 1838 50,000 bricks and 15,000 drainage tiles were offered for sale at Bickley. Coal probably came by river to feed the kilns. "Beaches" adjacent to the cow pastures by the Old Vicarage refers not to trees but a batch, or narrow valley. Enchantingly, the field "Paradise" is adjacent to Bicton Church. This may not be as it seems. Foxall notes that in the 15th century "Paradise seed" was imported from Morocco and Tunisia and sown, but is not forthcoming on what it was, and what the crop induced!



Village

News

HISTORY of BICTON

Part 169

Rod Warren and David Pannett

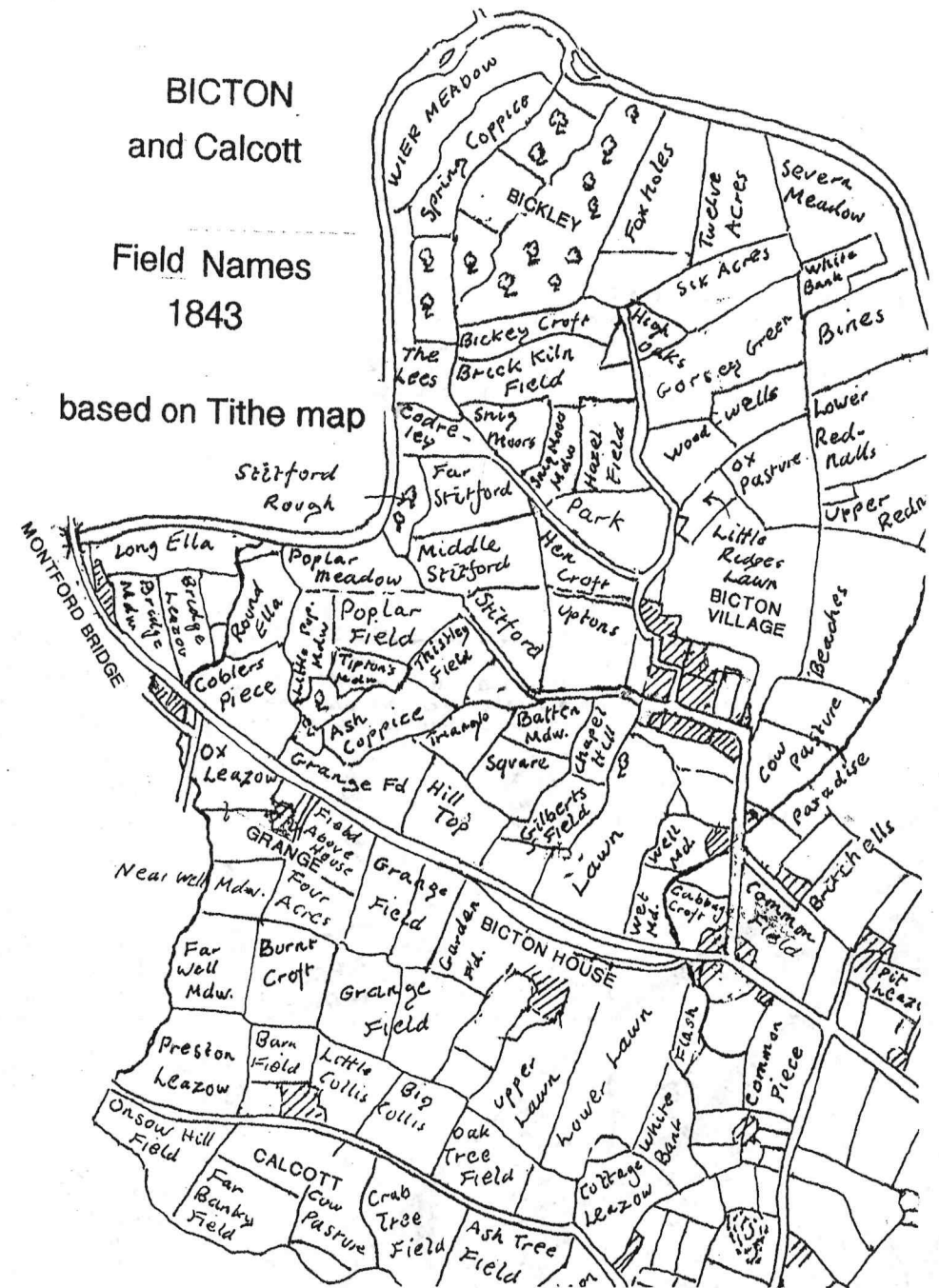
Parish Field names

Rod Warren and David Pannett

Nowadays a global positioning satellite and a hand device tell you the Ordnance Survey grid reference you want to describe. Before this, locations were commonly described by referencing buildings. However, as Shropshire is the most sparsely populated county in England, fieldnames were an easier way of describing where people were working. Sometimes the field name refers to previous occupants but names change and sometimes this mystifies. In WW1 terms "Send three and fourpence we are going to a dance" is not obviously derived from "Send reinforcements we are going to advance"! Shropshire field names are varied and sometimes of great antiquity as HDG Foxall makes clear in his book, "Shropshire Field Names", published in 1980 by the Shropshire Archaeological Society. The field names in the parish of Bicton are not well known although still used by some farmers but offer some interesting historical clues. The hedge boundaries were mapped in the Ordnance Survey 1881 first editions, although many have changed with the construction generation of the A5 Shrewsbury bypass and changes in farming mechanisation leading to hedgerow loss. Names are found in the 1843 tithe map.

What noteworthy names are there in Montford Bridge and Preston Montford? Long Ella and Round Ella bordering the Severn do not reflect a mysterious Saxon or a long dead Lady. According to Foxall in 1812, "Ella" was "Alloe" and this is probably a reference to alders, a tree common in wetlands. Next door is Cobblers Piece – a more obvious derivation. Just North of Preston Montford Lane, Far Well meadow and Near Well Leasow are names that are common throughout the county and suggest a water source.

Further up Grange bank - reflecting the old Buildwas Abbey Grange based on Grange Farm - are Grange Fields and on the opposite side of the road down towards the Severn Way runs Gilbert's and Upper Gilberts Fields. We do not know Gilbert's identity! Tipton's meadow refers to Roger Tipton living in Bicton in 1672. A large field between Bicton Hall and the Holyhead Road on the Montford side of Bicton



Brook is referred to as "The Lawn" which indicates it was formerly grassland in front of a gentleman's residence - the Hall. Similar "Lawn" fields exist close to the Isle and Rossall.

At about this time, the County Council were disposing of smallholdings, under pressure from the Government to get maximum return. Even their plan for some housing around Oxon Farm was rejected by the Borough planners. In those circumstances what hope was there of housing development being allowed at the nursery nearby? Even socially desirable retirement bungalows would have broken the rules, although a large cowshed might have been OK.

A review of the 'structure plan' held up hopes of a more relaxed attitude, but proved disappointing. Arguments back and forth were reported in the press in such a way as to give the impression that the nursery had already closed. Thus even fewer customers ventured down the B4380.

Meanwhile, the Mount congregation of the Plymouth Brethren were seeking a less congested site for a new meeting hall. Planners offered them a site along the Welshpool Road, but the Brethren found the already landscaped nursery site much more desirable. Still the planning officers said no, but eventually the planning committee could see the logic of all this and voted it through. As a 'non residential community project' it was able to slip through a loophole in the rules, leaving that sacred 'structure plan' intact.

Fast forward a few more years, the councils were reorganised again and then the Government tore up all those planning restrictions. The results can be seen all around us, both in Bicton parish and other 'rural' villages in the County.



Bicton Village News

Offprint from

October 2021
No 663

David Pannett's History of Bicton part 170

Roads and Planners

Today discussions over planning policies and new road developments are constantly in the media. This all brings back memories of similar issues affecting Bicton in the past.

It is now almost 30 years since the opening of the new A5 Shrewsbury Bypass, which cuts through the parish. It was planned to be opened a year earlier, but continued problems which one of the estates traversed caused a delay, during which a local girl was also killed on the old road at Montford Bridge.

This year also marks the 20th anniversary of the closure of Merton Nurseries, opposite the Four Crosses, after almost 40 years of trading. There is a connection since the A5 trunk road through Bicton had always been important to a series of roadside businesses, which now found themselves on the B4380 with less passing trade.

Two aspects of the road changes made this impact even worse. Firstly, the old and new roads beyond Montford Bridge met at a 'T' junction, in spite of pleas by local councils for a roundabout. The

Department of Transport thought they knew best and held the money anyway (similar arguments raged over a possible underpass at Bailey's Island, now 'Dobbies').

The Coroner said he could foresee trouble here and has been subsequently proved right. Following some tragic deaths some improvements were made to the slip lane and road markings, but still the layout and signs now discouraged anyone from using the old route via Bicton. Less traffic here, but more through Bicton Heath instead.

Secondly, the authorities took the opportunity to repair Montford Bridge, which involved closing the road for many weeks. The hard winter of 1964 had damaged Telford's original parapet and deck, so that urgent repairs were obviously necessary. However, these needed to be carried out at the utmost speed to avoid lengthy road closure.

The Council's highway team came up with an ingenious solution using precast beams to replace the old deck and also provide a cantilevered foot way on each side. Quick-setting 'high alumina' cement held the segments together, thus avoiding a long road closure.

So far so good, the road duly opened, but as the years went by, engineers on many projects were noticing how this new 'wonder' material was turning to dust! So now, with the new road open, engineers could take their time in replacing the deck with well-ried reinforced concrete cast in situ, which could be allowed to cure slowly. It is a tribute to Telford and his contractors that their work has continued to function underneath all this.

As a result even regular users of this route had to learn the new one instead. The proprietor of the Wingfield Arms complained he was now on 'a road to nowhere' and then annoyed the authorities by making a hole in the hedge to give the locals a short cut off the new road.

At the nursery, the timing of the bridge work in the early spring was hitting its peak period, when serious gardeners normally prepared for the growing season. They found it easier to use supermarkets instead!

From now on, trade continued to decline, demonstrating that there was no future in this site, but how to escape? This is when planners got involved!

Today we are under the 'Unitary Authority' of Shropshire Council, but then Bicton lay in the 'Borough of Shrewsbury and Atcham', which earlier had been produced by the amalgamation of Shrewsbury Borough and Atcham Rural District. Shropshire (Salop) County Council had some County-wide duties, such as education and highways, but delegated most planning and development control to the districts.

Each district had by now drawn up policy maps classifying areas reserved for agriculture and those where development might be possible. It was indeed a sacred document placing most of Bicton out of bounds for new housing, however logical a particular development might appear.

future development unit

Retirement village bid dashed by inspector

Hopes by the owner of a struggling nursery to create a retirement village in the countryside near Shrewsbury have been dashed by a planning inspector.

Mr David Bushby says he sees no reason to allow Merton Nurseries at Bicton to breach planning rules.

Owner David Pannett had told the borough local plan inquiry his family business had been virtually killed off by the new A5, which bypasses his premises, and competition from big garden centres.

He had suggested creating a retirement village there, consisting of about seven bungalows.

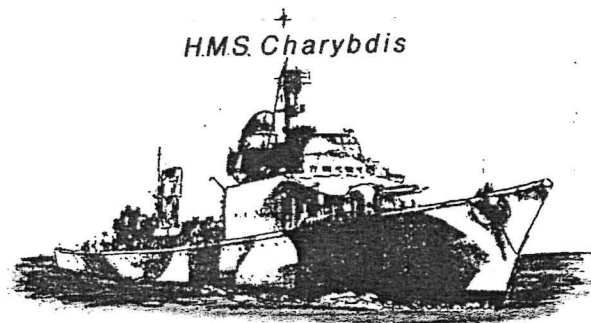
Shrewsbury-based firm Galliers Homes had expressed an interest in buying the site.

But in his report, Mr Bushby says borough council planners are right to argue that the site lies in countryside and is not appropriate for new homes.

"As for the unfortunate sharp decline in trade at the nursery, it is not a matter that determines planning policies or decisions."

Shropshire Star 1999

While all this was going on, the newly built HMS Charybdis (named after a mythological Greek sea monster) was entering service, mainly in the channel and western approaches. As the tide of war was beginning to turn by 1943, more efforts were being made to blockade French ports to restrict German trade links. As part of this, the ship led a small fleet of destroyers to intercept a German convoy leaving Brest.



The task force approached under cover of darkness and dull autumn weather, but were spotted. To make matters worse, star shells designed to illuminate the enemy actually showed up the British ships, so that a pack of German E-Boats could unleash their torpedoes before being spotted themselves.

In this way, the Charybdis and the destroyer Limbourne were struck. As it turned away from danger, another struck it amidships causing engines and electric power to fail, leaving no option other than 'abandoning ship'. Unfortunately as the ship listed, launching boats and life rafts became difficult, so that many crew were just tipped into cold water, which itself now became a killer, as they awaited rescue by the destroyers. Out of a crew of 668 only 150 were picked up.

After so many years developing bigger ships with bigger guns, the Navy was now discovering the importance of aircraft and torpedoes, while well-armed big ships also presented bigger targets. Thus our local lads were caught up in significant historical events.

On the bright side, Herbert Edmunds' widow remarried in 1969. By next year we hope to have the stories of Jack Green and Dennis Griffiths.

Offprint from

HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

November 2021
No 664

Bicton Village News

Part 171

Holy Trinity
Bicton (1885)

Bicton memorial:

Lost at Sea



David Pannett's History of Bicton - part 171

Lost at Sea

Once again in November we remember those who fell in recent wars, especially those listed on the Bicton War Memorial inside the church. Over several essays we have already told the stories of all those WW1 casualties and most from WW11, explaining their backgrounds within the village and circumstances of subsequent deaths (Nov. 10, 14, 15, 16). Four stories remain to be told, two of which we will deal with now: the seamen Brown and Edmunds.

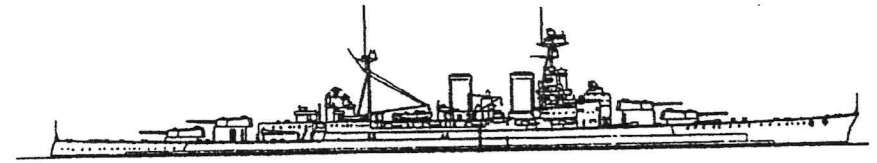
Dennis Brown, 21 from Isle Lane, went down with the battle cruiser HMS Hood on 24th May 1941, while Herbert William (William H' on memorial) Edmunds from Montford Bridge, was lost with the light cruiser HMS Charybdis on 23rd October 1943.

Dennis, was a contemporary of Dorothy Lewis of Milnsbridge and appears on the same school photograph which we published in her story (Mar 20).

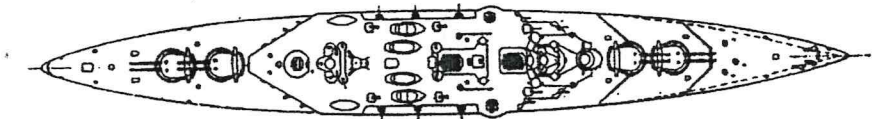
Herbert was born in 1911 to William and Alice (nee Lewis) Edmunds at Hollyhurst next to the school. Father was gardener to Miss Millbank at the Hall, to which this cottage was 'tied', so that mother and son had to move to Rose Cottage nearby after his tragic death in 1926 (suicide?). Then, in 1942 Herbert married Marjorie Owen and set up home in Montford Bridge. At sea he gained the rank of Petty Officer.

Dennis and Herbert did not die alone, but along with almost all their shipmates. The loss of the Hood became a particularly famous event, since it involved the greatest single loss of life to befall the Royal Navy in WW11. Of a crew of 1,418, only three survived.

The action took place in the Denmark Strait between Iceland and Greenland, where the German battle cruisers Bismarck and Prinz (Prince) Eugen were intercepted by the British ships Hood and Prince of Wales.



H.M.S. Hood



What followed was almost a continuation of the WW1 Battle of Jutland, in which the action revolved around heavy calibre gunnery.

The German fleet had sneaked out of Bergen to threaten Atlantic convoys, but were spotted and shadowed by some British ships until those with bigger guns could join them from Scapa Flow.

Of the salvos fired by each side, only very few actually scored a hit, but such was the size of the shells just one could cause serious damage. Thus, after only twenty minutes of engagement, one penetrated Hood's aft magazine, setting off a blast which broke the hull in two, detaching parts of the superstructure. She now lies on the seabed in three pieces.

The battleship Prince of Wales continued firing, but being so new, it was still suffering some 'teething troubles' with its guns, so that the captain thought it wise to break off the action. Thus Bismarck was able to slip away in the fading light, but since one of the Prince of Wales' shells had punctured its bows, its thoughts turned to seeking repairs in France rather than harassing convoys.

'Sink the Bismarck' became the national battle-cry, as the Navy sought revenge, now drawing in many other units. Once contact was renewed, carrier-based 'Swordfish' torpedo bombers joined in and eventually one struck Bismarck's rudder. Now slower and harder to control, she became more vulnerable to British guns and then more torpedoes at close range which finished her off, after having taken an amazing amount of punishment.

All this triggered a return to cold conditions in Northern Europe for over a thousand years. A small ice cap in the NW highlands sent a lobe south into Loch Lomond, which provides a convenient name for the period. Further south, small glaciers occupied the corries around the peaks in the Lake District and North Wales.

One below the summit of Cadair Berwyn sent a lobe down into the Nant-y-Llyn valley near to the well known Pistyll Rhaeadr Waterfall. Since, in geological terms, all this was happening 'only yesterday', the resulting features are still very clear. This makes the point that, while we enjoy a mild 'interglacial' climate, there is still an 'Arctic landscape' beneath our feet. Take a walk with the included painting of the Berwyns!

One important difference between this interglacial and earlier ones is, of course, the human contribution... but that is another story some other time.

The Berwyns 12,000 yrs ago



Offprint from

Bicton

December 2021

No 665

Village News

David Pannett's History of Bicton part 172

Our Glacial Past

Climate has been very much in the news recently, with fears expressed for the future, but less reference made to the past. In this context, several essays over the years have introduced readers to various aspects of past climates and the clues in our landscape.

By now readers should be familiar with the features produced by the last Ice Age in and around Bicton: the curving moraine from Bicton to Onslow, the 'kettle holes' with their 'meres and mosses', the stony clay soils and the shapes of the Severn. We have also tried to explain the mechanisms which led to such climate swings: e.g. wobbles in Earth's orbit and tilt, plus CO₂.

Now, as climate issues are discussed nationally we need to put our local 'Ice Age' landscape into a wider context. Also, if readers are encouraged by the numerous celebrity TV travel shows, to explore more of Britain, they may recognise similar features elsewhere (not normally mentioned by those guides).

Over the last 2 million years, at least, several cold periods have affected the British and the northern continents, leaving clues in marine sediments, while successive layers of the Greenland ice cap have provided a timescale. On land, however, since successive Ice Ages tend to destroy the evidence of earlier ones, we can only recognise two in the landscape.

The southern countries escaped successive ice sheets, but nevertheless experienced periods of frozen ground and seasonal snowfall. The meltwaters could therefore erode the normally permeable chalk, leaving a network of valleys, which are now dry. In response to lower sea levels caused by so much water being locked up in ice caps, such valleys could also cut very deep, spreading flint groves out on the exposed sea beds. Today, the rising sea levels have drowned the lower reaches of valleys, as best seen in Devon and Cornwall, while waves have driven the gravels onshore to build the pebble beaches of the south coast.

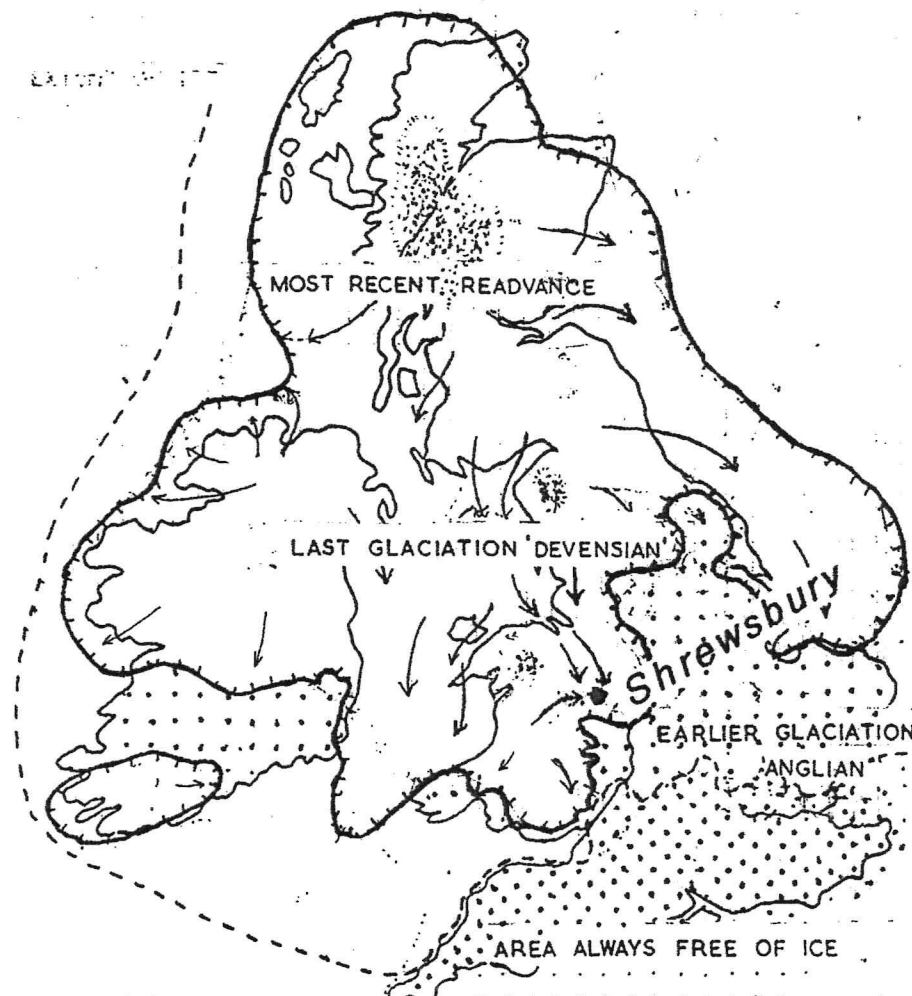
About 45,000 years ago an ice sheet eventually reached as far as the south Midlands and East Anglia and it is therefore called the 'Anglian' cold period by geologists.

Lasting effects include the soils of Norfolk and Suffolk and the diversion of the Thames from its original route through St Albans. On the way, the ice must also have contributed to the erosion of deep mountain valleys with their characteristic 'U' shapes. Beneath the lowlands, buried meltwater channels remain out of sight in places, possibly including some in Shropshire, reused by later ice sheets.

After a brief 'interglacial' warm period 240,000 years ago, another cold period followed, but its features have been obscured by the next, with which we are more familiar in Bicton. Geologists call this the 'Devensian' after Deva, the roman name for Chester, since the best features are to be seen in the Shropshire/Cheshire Plain. The period started slowly some 80,000 years ago and, after a series of fluctuations, the ice reached its peak about 20,000 years ago, before rapidly shrinking.

Ice caps developed in the western uplands from which they spread out across surrounding lowlands and exposed sea floor, carrying rocks from particular source areas which give clues to the directions of flow. Thus in the Shrewsbury area, the white and pink granites from the Lake District and Galloway indicate the northern ice, while dull basalts and mudstones reflect a Welsh origin. Boulders gathered from fields are often found built into walls, as seen in contrasting collections in Bicton's old village with those at Little Lyth.

THE BRITISH ISLES : GLACIATION



Meltwater created the present Severn Valley, including the Ironbridge Gorge. As was typical with most Ice Ages, the end was coming quickly, liberating vast amounts of water. Perhaps rather too much was suddenly reaching the North Atlantic out of Canada at the time, since the ocean currents were now disturbed by the fresh water, which refused to sink and allow warmer saltwater to come from the south.