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Meanwhile, some archaeologists have taken this technology elsewhere and have discovered that large areas of Amazon rainforest were once well populated, before early explorers accidentally introduced European diseases. How does this fit our discussions of climate and pandemics?

# Bicton Village News

Offprint from  
January 2022  
No 666

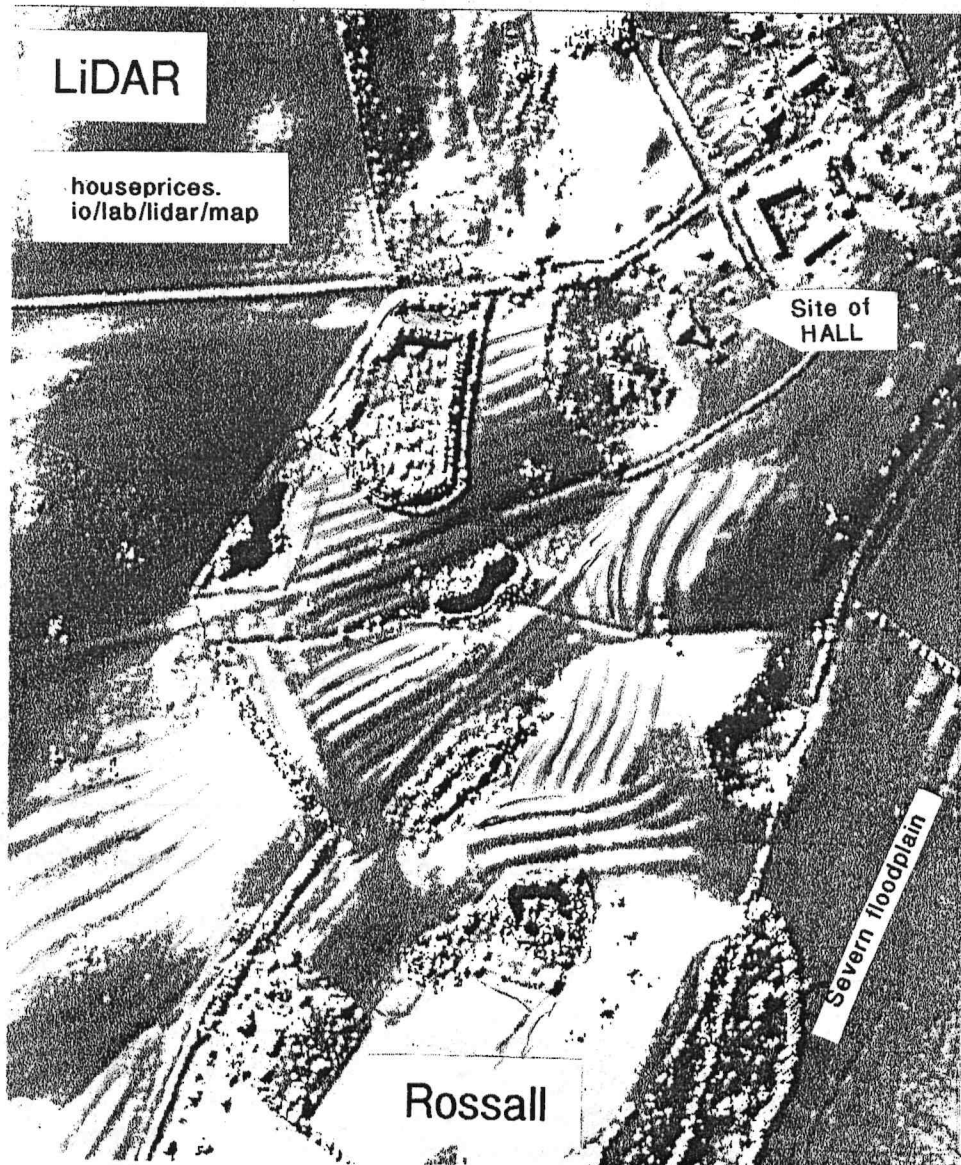


## David Pannett's History of Bicton part 173

### Our LiDAR Landscape

Three years ago we discussed how this 'light' based airborne 'radar' technology was becoming so useful in the study of our historic landscapes. By showing up minor undulations in the ground surface, even where obscured by trees, archaeologists were making new discoveries. In the Bicton area, anyone with an Internet link can access images along the Severn Valley made available by the Environment Agency. Just log on to [houseprices.io/lab/lidar/map](https://houseprices.io/lab/lidar/map) and search for Bicton, Shrewsbury.

Parts of the parish which are of particular interest in showing the value of LiDAR are Rossall and Preston Montford, where parkland around their respective 'Halls' has preserved a variety of features. This is a common situation, since parkland created in the 17th and 18th centuries can prevent continued cultivation, which could damage earlier medieval patterns. The minor undulation in the natural ground surface can also show up more clearly.



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At Rossall a deformed glacial surface overlies a buried, sand-filled channel, into which 'kettle holes' have collapsed. In between are irregular mounds, the whole pattern being cut off on the east by the Severn channel and floodplains.

In spite of this difficult surface, it is quite clear that almost the whole area was once cultivated in the Middle Ages with the characteristic ridge and furrow. The uneven site made it unsuitable for modern cultivation but ideal for a picturesque parkland, viewed from the 17th century Hall (since demolished). Newer garden features and carriage drives clearly lie on top of the ridge pattern, while a sandpit scars one spot.

Meanwhile, parkland around Preston Montford Hall, created by Samuel Adderton in 1705 occupies smoother ground where there are signs of more continuous activity, including those related to the field centre. Underlying it all are those same medieval ridges but in a more regular pattern, which also bears traces of more modern, straight ploughing right across them. An old roadway leading from Montford Bridge was always part of this old pattern, while Preston Montford Lane cuts off the ends of some ridges, showing it to be a newer feature. No doubt it was a diversion around the park, replacing the old road to maintain privacy.

The hall and garden also appear to overlay ridges, suggesting a new site outside the original farming settlement. Near the garden, abutting ridges have built up a broad headland, which is even visible on the ground where crossed by the drive.

Running northeast from the Hall a shallow valley is filled with a variety of earthworks associated with sewerage treatment, a pond and an artificial wet meadow creating diverse habitats for natural history teachers. Elsewhere new hedges run straight across older patterns.

To complete this 'thousand years' of landscape development, the A5 embankment cuts off the corner!

It was well known that earthworms ejected their excrement on to the surface as 'casts' and such soil sections were offering the chance to quantify the cumulative effect of this habit.

In order to understand more, he took a special interest in the evidence from archaeological excavations, principally at the Roman town of Silchester, but also at Wroxeter, where Thomas Wright had been exposing the walls of the bath house in the 1860s. It was typical of him that he went on gathering masses of such data, often repetitive, from such sites, before coming to definite conclusions about how the accumulation of worm casts could bury these ruins. Likewise, small items discarded on the surface could also become buried until found by archaeologists or metal detectorists centuries later.

Back home at Downe House, he even kept worms in pots in his study, in order to observe their behaviour, especially their response to light and food types - something anyone could do too. In the garden he observed many situations familiar to gardeners and was able to dispel old myths and misunderstandings about worms which they may have held.

One observation was the way which neglected gravel paths could gradually disappear. If kept clear, the action of worms can be better observed: e.g. casts or leaves pulled into burrows. A torchlight 'safari' on a mild damp night in early spring could reveal them in action. As the soil dries in summer they tend to hide deeper. Also, watch blackbirds hunting them on your lawn. In other words, many observations and experiments conducted by Darwin can be followed up by any of us with time to spare.

In particular, that soil section at Maer is not unique and versions of it may occur around Bicton, where old pastures survive. Look out for any exposures around gardens and building works, historical artifacts may be hiding.

**Bicton**

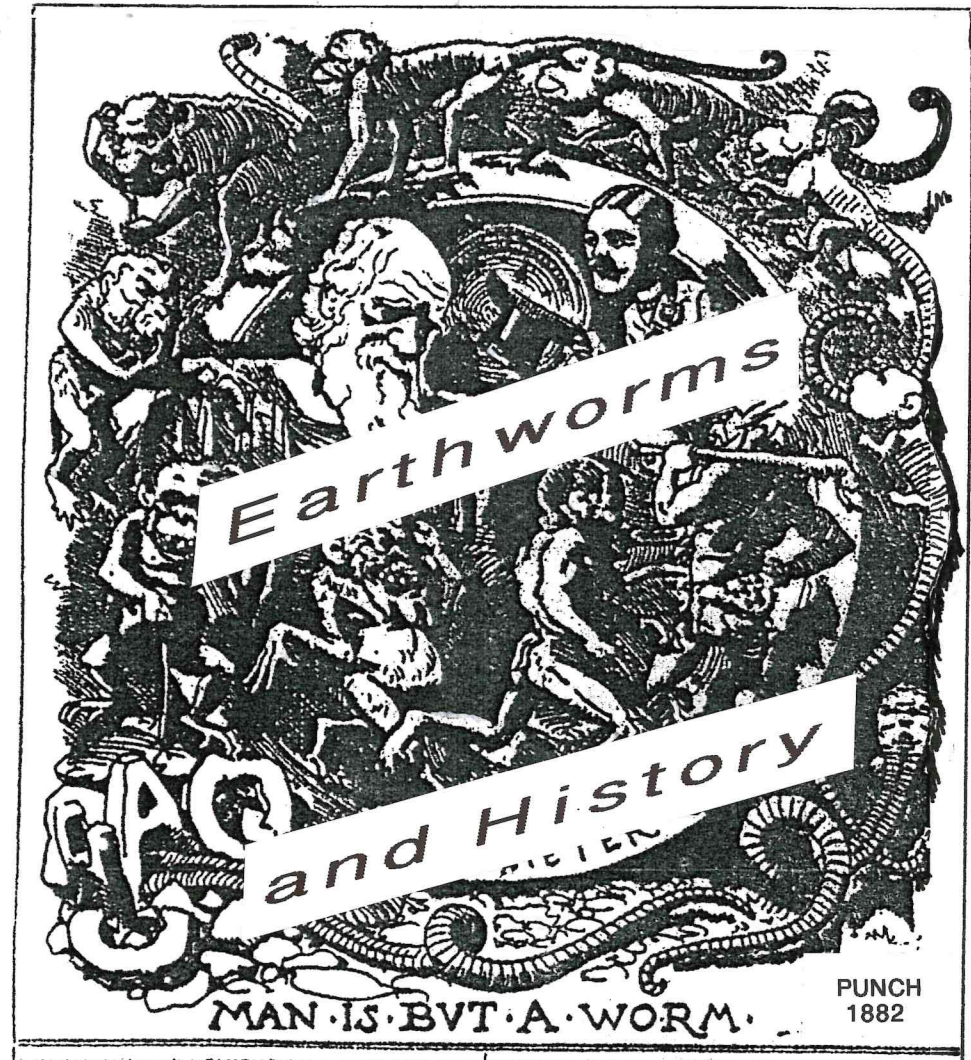
Offprint from

**February 2022**

**No 667**

# **Village News**

**David Pannett's History of Bicton Part 174**



## David Pannett's History of Bicton part 174

### Earthworms and History

As usual in February, we will be celebrating the memory of Charles Darwin, who explored our local countryside in his youth. He later became famous for work elsewhere including the publication of the 'Origin of Species'! For keen gardeners, perhaps including those in Bicton, a later book on 'The formation of vegetable mould through the action of worms with observations on their habits', published in 1881, was more significant.

It was to be his last one, which no doubt the old man enjoyed writing, as it made use of his lifetime of observations, without stirring up more controversy regarding evolution. (Odd letters in the Shropshire Star show that this is still going on!). Worms were familiar creatures, which many people could relate to and share their own observations. No wonder the book proved a best seller, and prompted a cartoon in Punch.

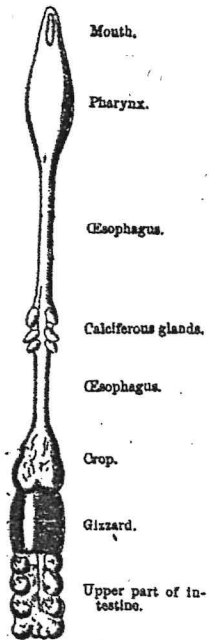
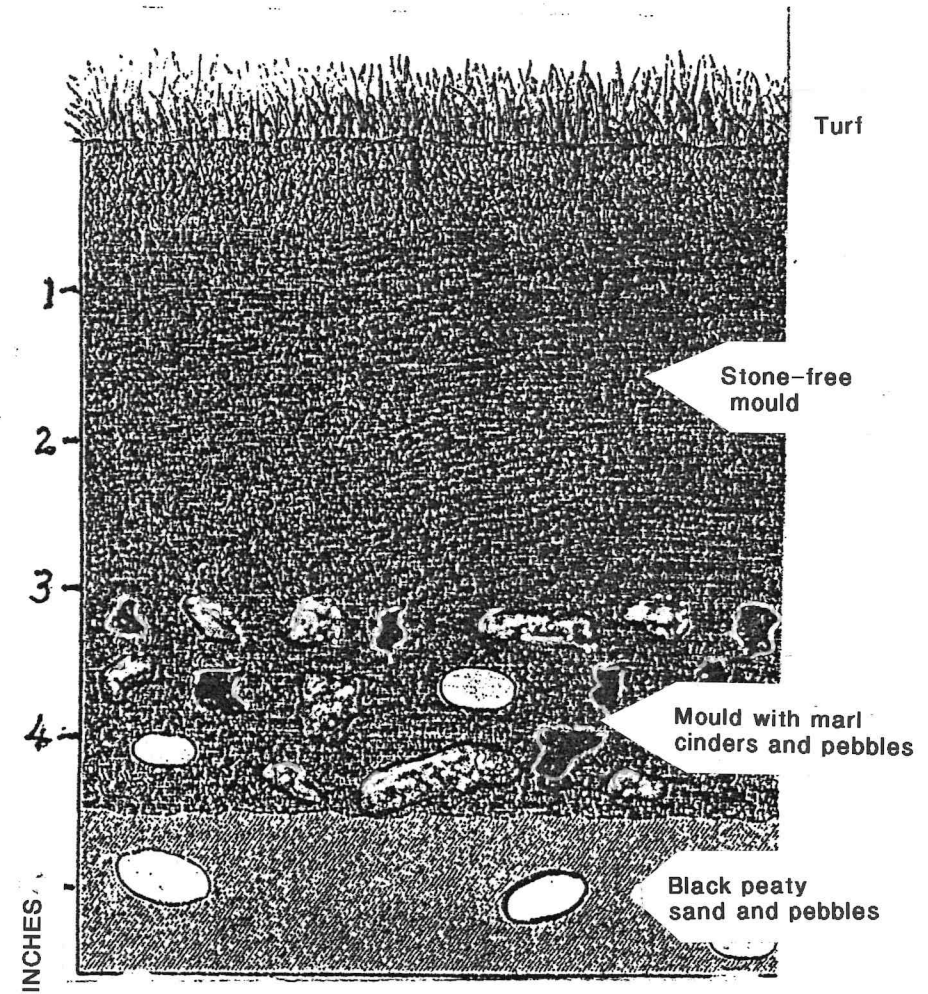


Fig. 1.

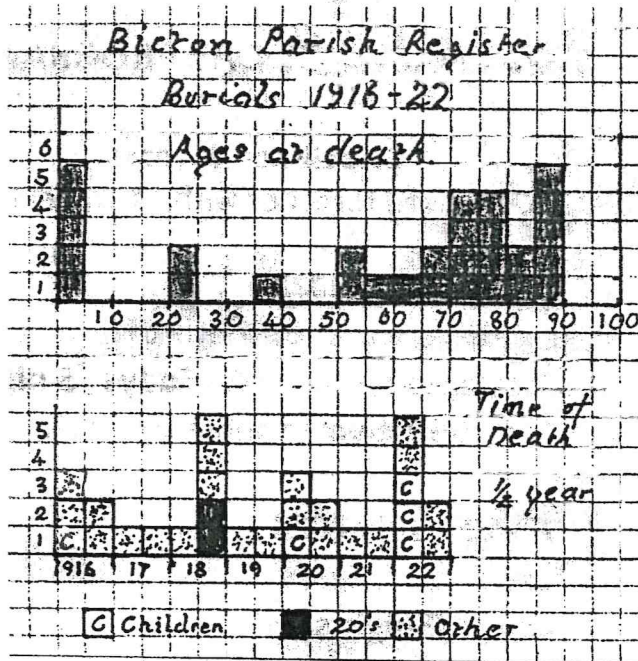
Diagram of the alimentary canal of an earthworm (*Lumbricus*),

By this time, several naturalists in Britain and elsewhere in Europe had already published their own studies of earthworms, concentrating on recognising different species and their anatomical structure. Thanks to his wide network of correspondents, Darwin was conversant with all this and therefore focused his own work on their behaviour and contribution to soil development. In this their digestive system was most important, because they passed soil and rotting vegetation through their gut in order to extract nutrients.



### Soil section at Maer

He had been made aware of their activity back in 1837 at his father-in-law's estate at Maer in Staffordshire. There, in an old meadow which had been spread with burnt lime and coal ashes some fifteen years earlier, pits were being dug revealing how this material now appeared as a layer several inches down under otherwise stone-free loam.



So much for the general story, how did it affect Bicton? Once again the parish registers offer clues: Between 1916 and 1922 29 burials were recorded, revealing a typical pattern of some infant deaths, after which most survivors had a good chance of reaching 'three score years and

ten'. The few exceptions included two girls aged 20 and 22, the very age group which was most vulnerable to the flu; i.e. born after the 1876 epidemic of Russian flu which now appeared to have given the older generation some protection.

The timing of their deaths is even more significant, as October 24<sup>th</sup> and November 1<sup>st</sup> coincided with the autumn peak of infection in 1918. The only year to have as many deaths was 1922, when perhaps a cold spell caused high infant mortality.

Thus the grave of Harriet Lewis lies in our churchyard quite close to that of Thomas Edge of Calcott Lane, who died of his wounds in 1915. Each reflects an aspect of that war, but, while one is commemorated, the other has been forgotten.

**HISTORY  
of BICTON**  
by David Pannett

Offprint from

March 2022  
No 668

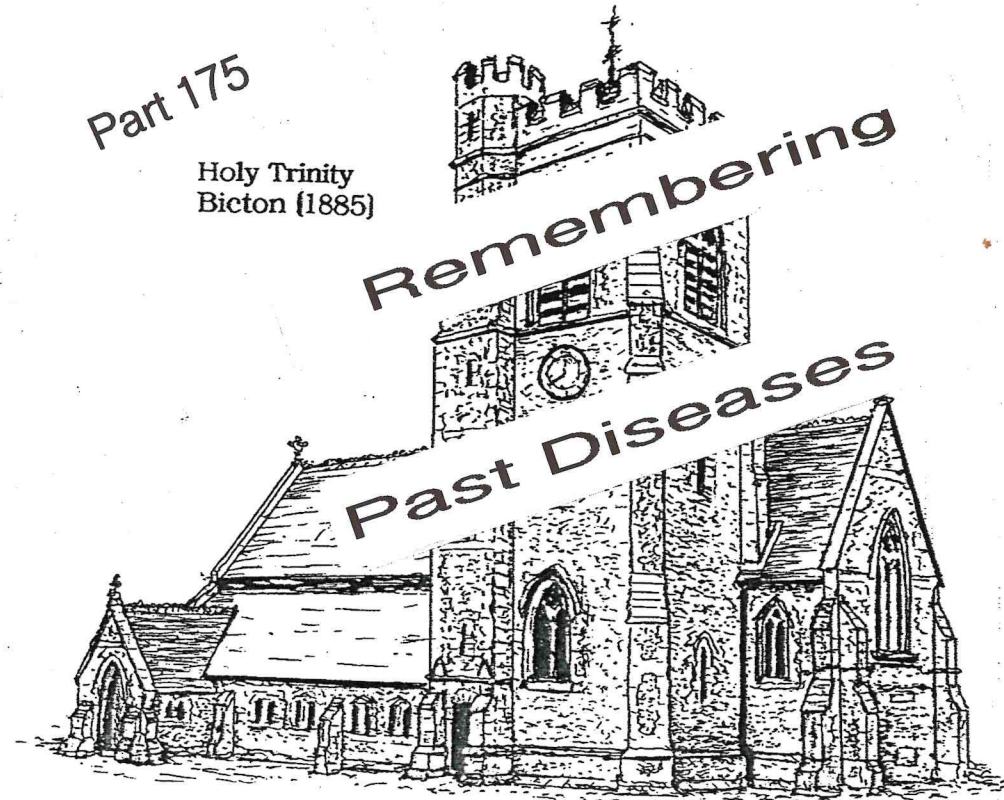
# Bicton Village News

Part 175

Holy Trinity  
Bicton (1885)

Remembering

Past Diseases



## David Pannett's History of Bicton part 175

### Remembering Past Diseases

The current pandemic is still constantly in the news, including arguments over vaccination. All this calls to mind the pioneer work of Edward Jenner, whose story should be well known, even to antivaxers! He also had problems with similar people back then.

The focus of Jenner's experiments in 1796 was the use of cow pox as a protection against smallpox, which otherwise could kill half of those infected, while leaving survivors with characteristic pock marks on their skin. Although it was a well known disease at that time, it was rarely recorded as a cause of death in parish registers any more than the many other diseases in circulation.

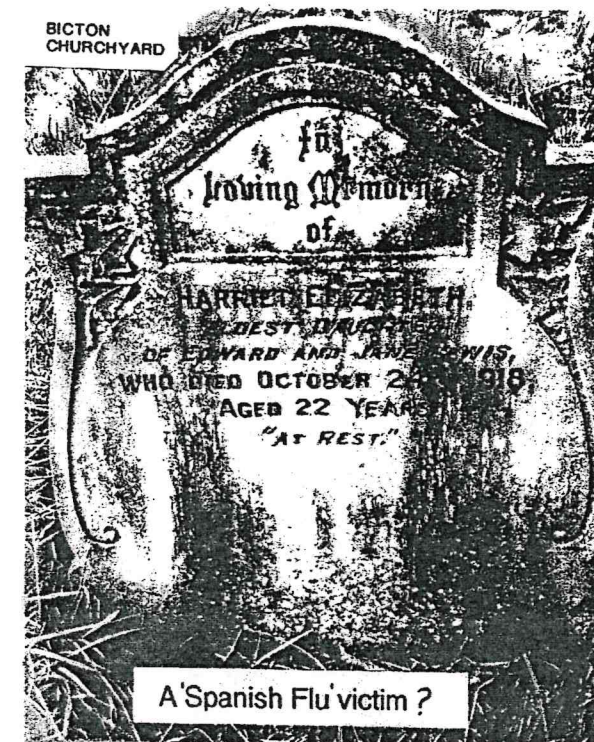
One exception to this general rule occurred locally when Rev'd Adam Newling, rector of Shrawardine and vicar of Montford, recorded twelve deaths from smallpox between December 1748 and September 1749. By coincidence this was the very same year when Jenner was being born.

Starting with a child of a labourer at Forton Heath, it spread amongst various tradesmen there, then on to Forton and both sides of Montford Bridge. Two deaths from 'consumption' (TB) and one of breast cancer were also noted in passing.

It spread no further in the parish, or at least nobody died from it, perhaps suggesting that the mainly 'agricultural' population were being protected by their closer association with cows. This was the very thing which Jenner would later notice in his native Gloucestershire. Otherwise, a degree of 'social distancing' was probably helping. One last isolated case was then recorded at Shrawardine in late 1751.

In recent years, even before the current pandemic, scientists have been taking renewed interest in the famous 'Spanish influenza' pandemic of 1918-19, since they understand virus protection much better now. Thanks to a native Alaskan lady buried in frozen soil, they have even been able to study the actual virus. It turned out to be a strain of a well known avian flu, which somehow crossed to humans.

Where and when this happened is still open to debate, but all the comings and goings associated with the war helped spread it around the globe, killing more 'at home' than on the 'battle front'. The impact of it in Germany may have hastened the end of the war. Neither side had a vaccine to fight it.



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No 669

# Bicton Village News

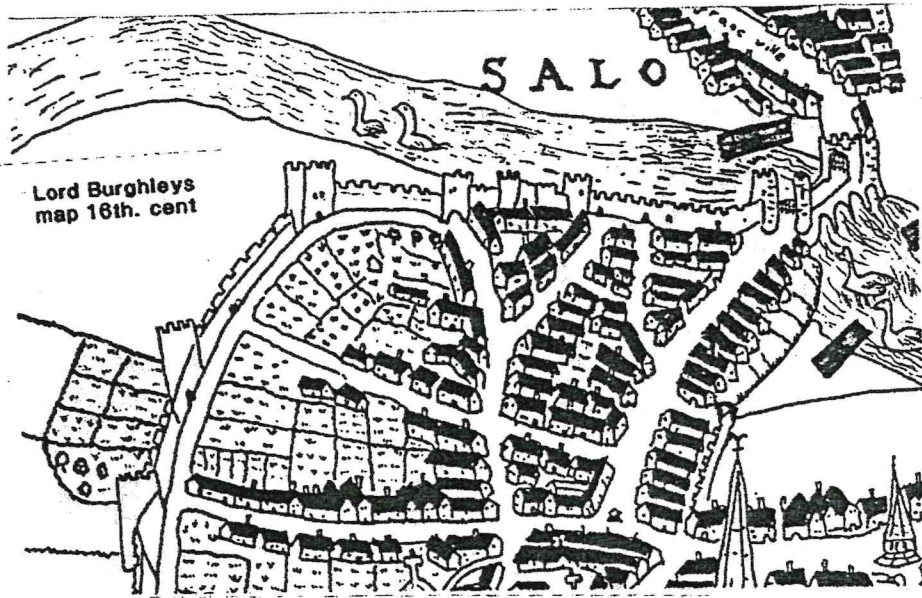
David Pannett's History of Bicton

Part 176

War and Peace



in our Landscape



Shrewsbury town walls

With the death of Henry in 1272, son Edward took over, returning as a successful warrior from the crusades. He now put this military experience to good use in controlling the Welsh situation.

The English kings had long claimed feudal overlordship of Wales and thus in 1276 he condemned Llywelyn's successor, Grandson Llywelyn, 'as a recalcitrant vassal' and declared war (like Putin?). Edward's forces invaded along the north Wales coast and finally confined Llywelyn to Snowdonia, all being settled by treaty.

Peace did not last long however, as Llywelyn rebelled, regaining much of his lost territories. Edward therefore assembled a much bigger force in 1282 and crushed Welsh independence once and for all. Llywelyn was killed in action, but his brother David was brought back to Shrewsbury for trial and execution (details on wall of Barclays Bank). A cruel world, but now royal authority guaranteed peace for the following centuries.

## David Pannett's History of Bicton part 176

### War and Peace in our Landscape

While abroad the tragedy of Ukraine unfolds, here we are celebrating both our past and faith in the future by planting trees, especially oaks.

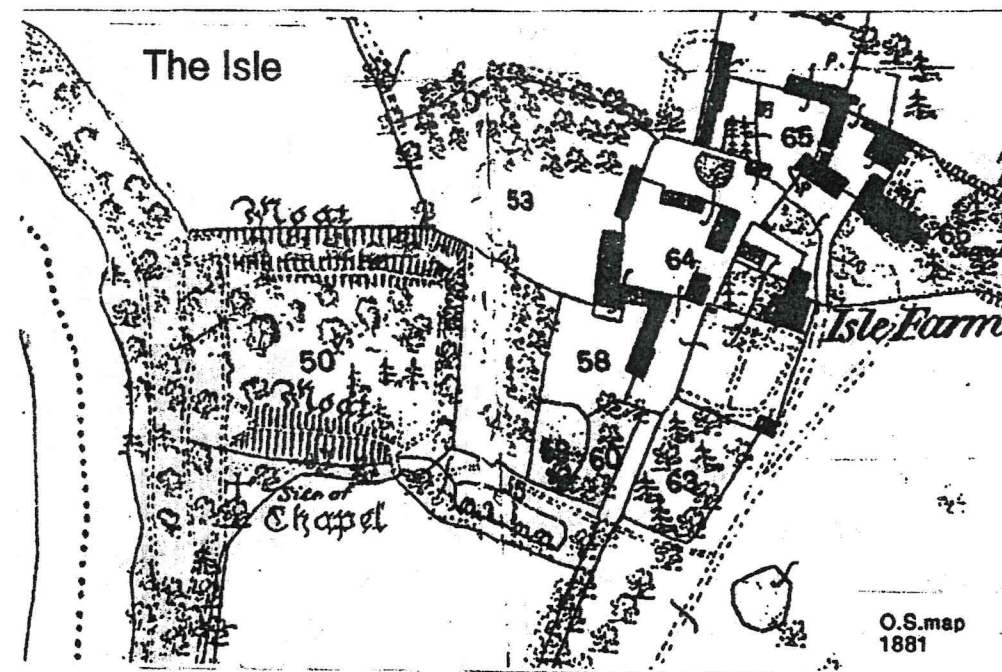
A few years ago a Europe-wide survey of 'veteran' oak trees revealed that most of them were to be found in Britain, rather than on the continent. One likely explanation of this is that the British countryside has enjoyed centuries of peace, while during that time (and even now!) parts of the continent have been ravaged by local and national wars. Apart from the stress of passing armies, the disruption of landed estates can deprive woodlands of long-term care. Just think of all those battles and invasions in our history books, mainly related to the evolution of the 'nation states' we know today.

Most of the really ancient oaks survive in former parks and hunting forests and therefore Bicton cannot boast such specimens. Nevertheless, we do have some fine examples of hedgerow oaks planted in the eighteenth century. Anyway, Bicton has shared in that national peace, disturbed only by localised episodes in various civil wars, aimed at 'regime change'. One must, therefore, go back over 740 years to find warfare which may have affected the village directly or, at least, passed by along the main road to and from Wales.

Ever since the Norman conquest 'Marcher Lords' from Hereford to Chester had been gradually conquering Wales, sometimes advancing, sometimes retreating. Much of this involved a network of castles and local alliances and treaties with Welsh Lords. Only the northern mountains and Anglesey remained in the hands of native princes at that time, including Llywelyn 'the great'

During the reigns of John and his young son Henry III however, the barons were preoccupied with civil wars and their relationship with the crown (e.g. Magna Carta 1215). As a result of this Llywelyn was able to reassert his power over the rest of Wales and even raid parts of England including Shrewsbury. Bicton may have suffered on the way.

To counter further attacks the new King Henry encouraged the town to improve its defensive walls. These included fine gates near the castle and on the bridges. Just to make sure, an extra tower overlooked the ford below the Welsh Bridge. It is also likely that the manor house at the Isle was fortified. The building did not survive the Middle Ages, but its rectangular earthworks remain to be seen today.



Site of fortified manor house



Although local population has been increasing, the size of garden plots, both for decorative ornament and food production, has been decreasing. The fortnightly 'parade' of green bins shows how few have room for a traditional compost heap. Apart from estates, some individual houses have been inserted into older gardens and orchards belonging to earlier cottages and farmhouses. One wonders what space the latest housing estates will have?

Growing one's own vegetables and fruit was once very important in those earlier years and with the current cost of living crisis perhaps we should revive such old habits. How about planting a 'fruit' tree for the jubilee? There is still plenty of advice available! Potatoes can be grown in big pots while climbing beans could decorate a wall.

Many of our current problems stem from worldwide events, which now include Vladimir Putin's nostalgia for that 'Soviet' era. So we are back to the 'Cold War' with a localised 'hot' one!

On the brighter side, we can look forward to old style open air community celebrations for the jubilee. The old saying claims that if the oak comes out before the ash, we will have a splash, but if the ash comes out before the oak, then we will have a soak. So far the omens look favourable.



Offprint from

# HISTORY of BICTON

June 2022

No 671

by David Pannett

# Bicton Village News

Part 178

Remembering

1952

SHROP.  
STAR



The Queen and Duke at Shrewsbury School.

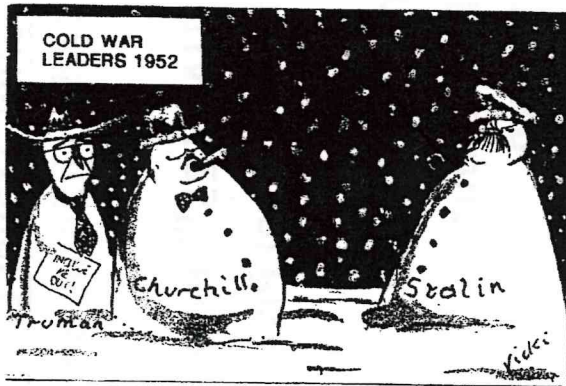
## David Pannett's History of Bicton part 178

### Remembering '52

Jubilee celebrations will remind us of the world of 1952 and, by implication, reveal some of the changes which have taken place since.

Back then, wartime austerity was easing, while the Nation's morale had just been raised by the Festival of Britain in 1951. Now there was a coronation to look forward to, which could herald a new 'Elizabethan Age'. However, there was still trouble in the world, including the war in Korea, in which the locally based regiment of the KSLI had been playing a part.

This war was part of general tension between 'The West' and the communist world, particularly the USSR, and was known as the 'Cold War'. Constant discussions of military spending and overseas commitments became an important element of politics.



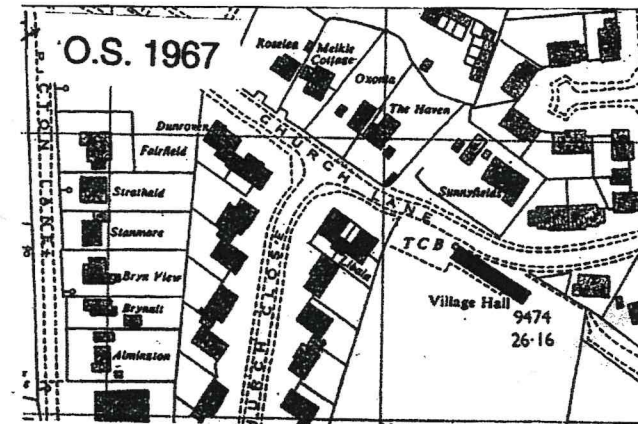
Politically, a conservative government had just been returned after some several 'labour' years and included local MP, Sir John Holt.

The new Queen soon performed her duties, which included a visit to Shrewsbury, where, amongst other things, she laid the foundation stone for the new library at Shrewsbury School, as part of its 400 year celebrations. Bicton had also been part of this story by once providing tithe income to start the school during The Reformation.

Meanwhile, here in Bicton in 1952, attention was on the newly opened Village Hall, in which the first big event was the wedding reception of Mary Paddock of Red House and Raymond Fowles from Mytton. Now various local organisations had a suitable base after years of using the tea room behind the Four Crosses Inn.

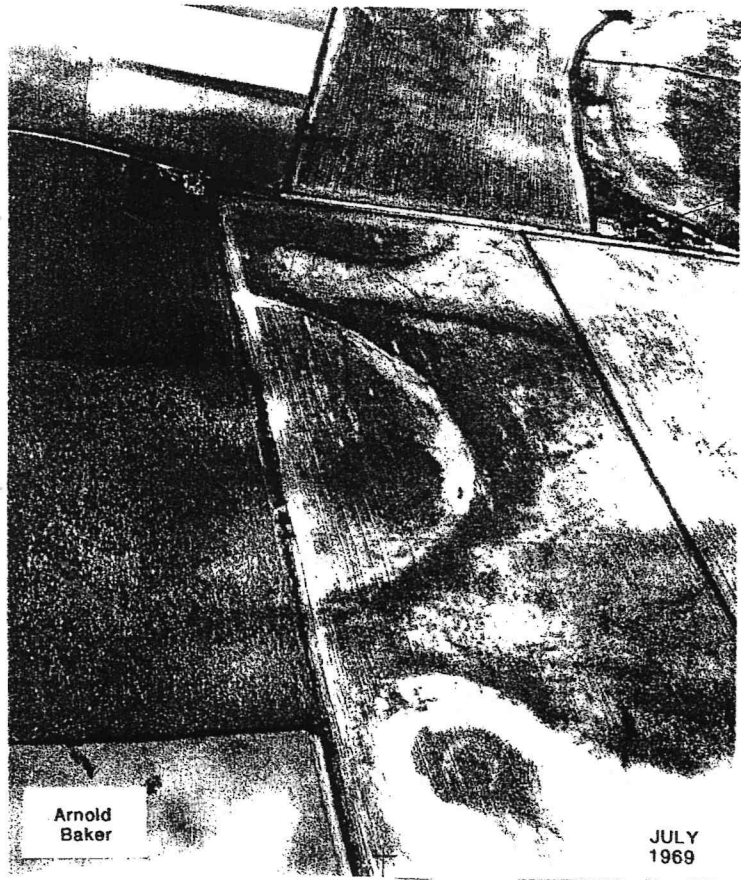
The 'Hall' was actually a second-hand wartime hut from the former camp at High Ercall, bought with money raised by a committee over several years. The National Council for Social Services also helped with a loan arrangement while Vicar, Arthur Smith, was useful in 'pulling strings'.

James Paddock of Bicton Farm donated a strip of land for the new site and later sold the committee the remaining field on condition it would remain for public use and not sold for building. The farming community then provided transport and storage for all the bits and pieces until a local builder could put them all together again.



It was given a 20-year temporary planning permission, during which it was to be hoped that sufficient funds would be raised to build a more permanent structure. Thus, after some slight delay, our present hall opened in 1974.

Altogether this was a fine community effort, which should be an inspiration to later generations. Sadly not all local organisations using the hall have survived, such as amateur dramatics and the horticultural society.



*National Monuments Record. air photographs  
ST 404.1/1*

Crop marks near Montford

In the view there are also patterns which are also found elsewhere in this area, including 'glacial' shapes and straight lines. They do not show up well on grassland but LiDAR has confirmed some shapes continue here.

On the ground the soil is very gravelly on both high and low parts and has required raking to remove stones which could confuse the potato harvester. There is obvious need to probe beneath the surface for possible explanations.

In this history series we have tried to interpret our local landscape but with some features we must admit defeat.

# HISTORY of BICTON

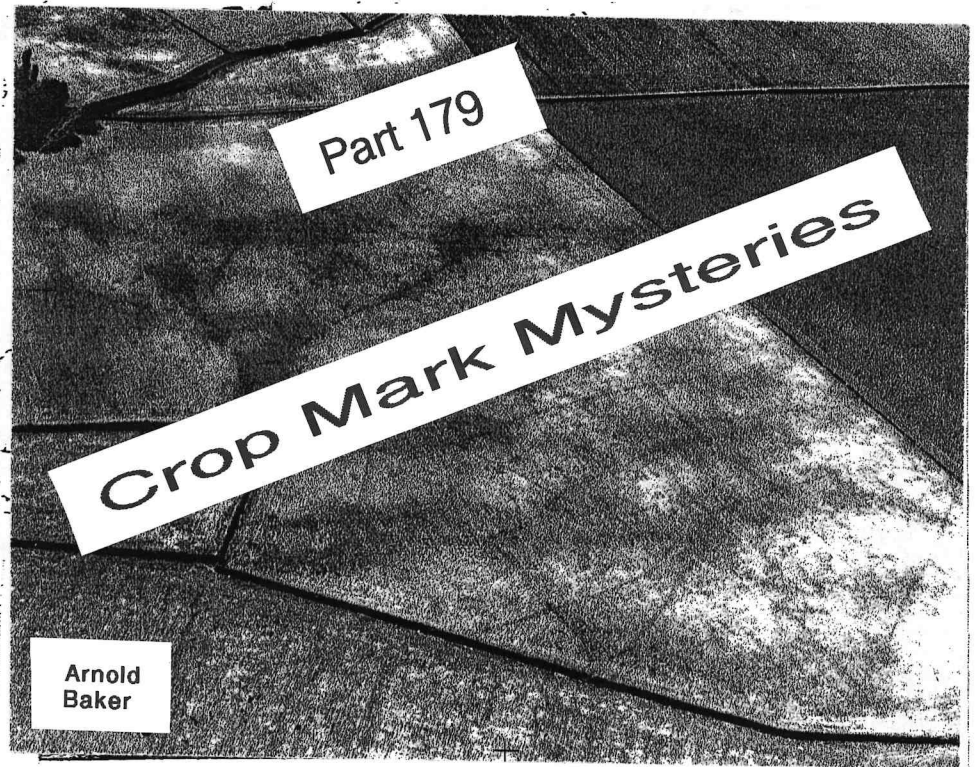
by David Pannett

Offprint from

July 2022

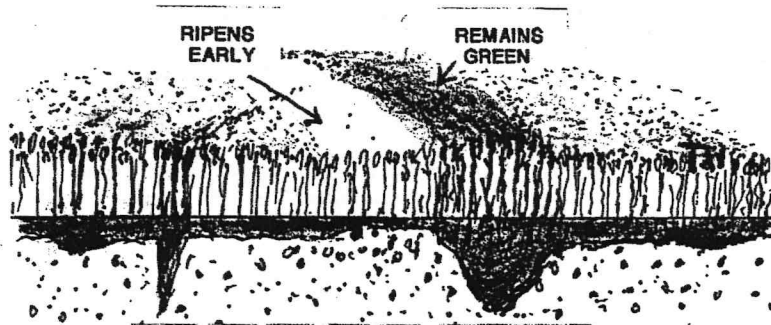
No 672

# Bicton Village News



### Crop Mark Mysteries

Each July, as harvest time gets nearer, farmers cast an anxious eye over their crops, especially cereals, during changing weather patterns. They are not the only ones taking such an interest at this time of year, since the ripening crops can also reveal hidden features of interest to archaeologists.



Origin of crop marks

On well drained sandy and gravelly soils, those plants growing over hollows filled with finer topsoil will stay green longer, while those over shallow stony parts will ripen earlier. Thus, for a brief period, as the whole field ripens, patterns of old ditches, roads, banks or buildings may appear as 'crop marks'. For instance, most of the roman streets and major buildings at Wroxeter have been mapped in this way over the years.

Geologists can also find natural patterns caused by the freezing and thawing of ground during the last ice age. Thus in Shropshire some 'natural' and 'man-made' features can get mixed up.

In Bicton most of the soil is heavy 'boulder' clay, which is not the best type to reveal things. The more gravelly soils only cover the slopes of the moraine around The Grange and Upper Calcot, where the late Trevor Roberts was proud of the good quality barleys he grew there. One archaeological feature, which was discovered here, turned out to be a simple Iron Age enclosure when investigated before being destroyed by the new A5.

Across the river, however, there are more suitable soils around Montford, both amongst the hummocky 'moraine' towards Shrawardine and the 'outwash plain' towards Montford Bridge. Again, the latter had a good reputation for growing barley (wheat prefers heavier soils).

No two years are quite alike and it is the drier ones which tempt archaeologists to take to the air with their cameras. Thus, in July 1969, Arnold Baker flew around our area with great success, especially over Montford.

The 'outwash plain' was seen to include lines of old field boundaries together with a confused pattern of dark and light patches due to the disturbed glacial deposits. Further west, however, the hummocky moraine, once occupied by Shrawardine Castle Park, showed more confusing and interesting features which have puzzled both archaeologists and geologists ever since.

The main feature, which also shows up on modern LiDAR, is like a round shield, complete with central boss some 100m in diameter. The 'boss' is a low mound which was once occupied by a small building on the 1728 estate map (Shrop. Archives Powys Collection). The straight hedges probably date from the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, when the deer park was turned to agriculture after the destruction of the Castle in the Civil War. The symmetry of the whole feature suggests human activity, but, on the other hand, it is not the only round shape within the surrounding natural landscape.

In the same view, nearer the river, is another odd feature, not standing so proud, which may have been produced by an eruption of ground water escaping from beneath the frozen surface. However, within the central area, there appears something more 'man-made'.

This aerial photograph was first published in a book by the late Graham Webster, in which he thought it might be of Iron Age date, but since then it has not been seen in print because archaeologists really do not know what it is. Geologists are not sure either.

\* Graham Webster, *The Cornovii* Alan Sutton 1975; 1991

This allowed other improvements to take place, especially the draining of the shallower pools recorded by their 'Inclosure Map', and therefore absent in subsequent maps and surveys.

However, they have reappeared from time to time, when drains became overwhelmed or blocked. This has been especially the case in recent years, when the likelihood of urban development was making the maintenance of drains a low priority, thus allowing 'nature' to return. One wonders how much of this will survive development?

Faced with all this mixture of firm and soft ground and undulating surface, the developers are scraping the whole area clear in order to reveal what lies beneath the topsoil. Now to fit their grand design to the realities of this ground, they need to use piles rather than conventional foundations for some buildings.

All this is not an unusual situation on this side of Shrewsbury, as a visit to the Radbrook Shopping Centre can illustrate. The supermarket and health centre stand on masses of stone tipped into a large 'kettle hole' here, but as the ground has settled, some parts of those buildings developed cracks, which must be watched. The car park settled too in places! To avoid this, a later multi-storey residential block was built on long piles reaching down to firmer layers.

Across the road, a pool has been developed as a landscape feature, turning a development 'problem' into a public asset. Pools within built-up areas are now considered aspects of drainage control where there are so many hard surfaces around, causing rapid run-off. The landscaping of 'kettle holes' is also illustrated in several others nearby and, more recently, the developer of the Radbrook College grounds had to reduce the number of intended houses, in order to accommodate them.

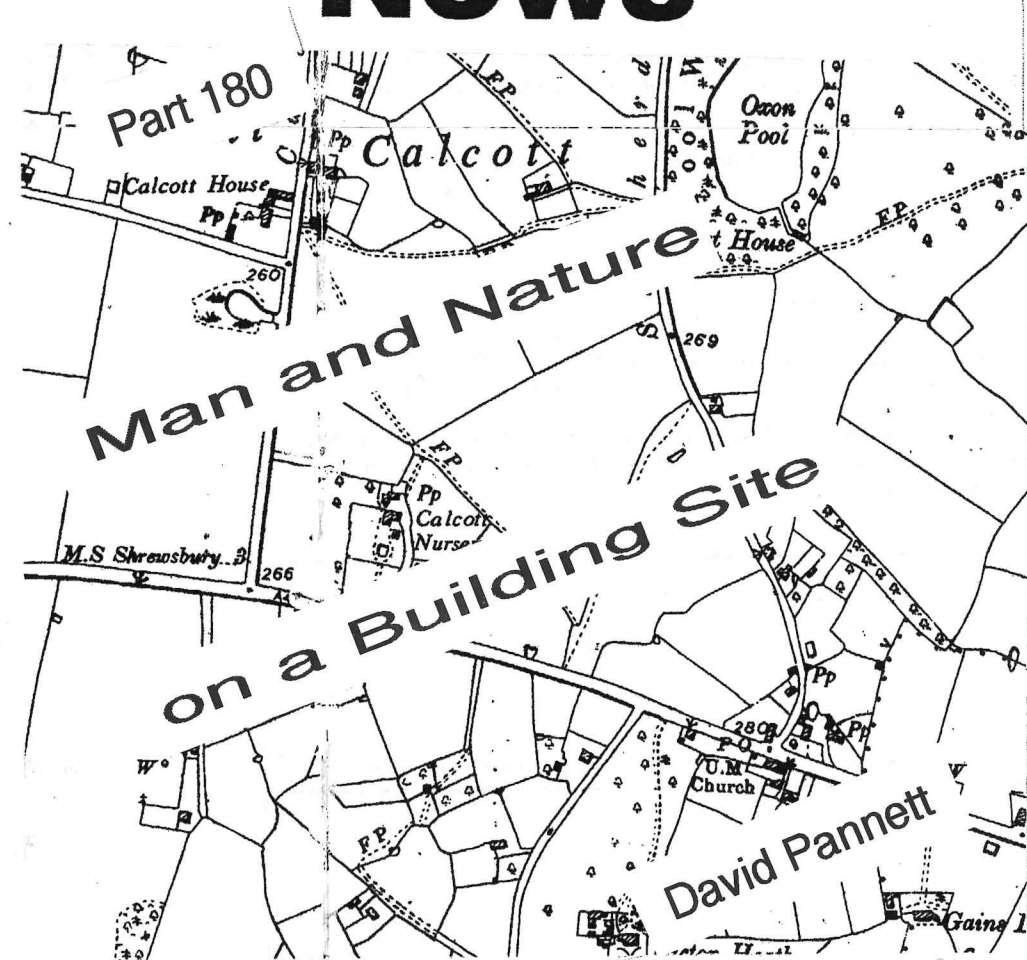
How these lessons will be applied at the current development remains to be seen. It all boils down to economics, with competing demands for the use of the land available. Here, such is the pressure for houses, they must take over even unsuitable ground, hence the pile driving!

**HISTORY  
of BICTON**

Offprint from

August 2022  
No 673

# Bicton Village News



# David Pannett's History of Bicton - Part 180

## Man and Nature on a Building Site

For some weeks this summer, the inhabitants of Bicton have been serenaded by the thump thump of pile driving as the development of the 'Shrewsbury West Sustainable Urban Extension' finally got under way. At the same time southerly breezes have brought us the usual hum of A5 traffic.

With this area in mind, two years ago we discussed the problems facing developers and road engineers in our 'glacial landscape' around Bicton. The surface is uneven upon layers of silty boulder clay, sand and gravel some 35 metres (100') thick, hiding the underlying 'solid' sandstone.

One reason for such thickness is that 20,000 years ago, at the height of the last Ice Age, the Severn Valley glacier, fed by the Welsh ice cap, here met ice coming south via the Irish Sea. Both could therefore make a contribution with material characteristics of each source region, e.g. dull basalt from Wales or lighter grey and pink granite from the Lake District.

All this offered more scope for the burial of detached blocks of ice, whose subsequent melting caused parts of the surface to collapse into hollows great and small. Many of such 'kettle holes' formed pools filled from local rainwater, or perhaps leaking from gravel layers beneath.

Then, vegetation grew, died and formed peat filling the more shallow basins.

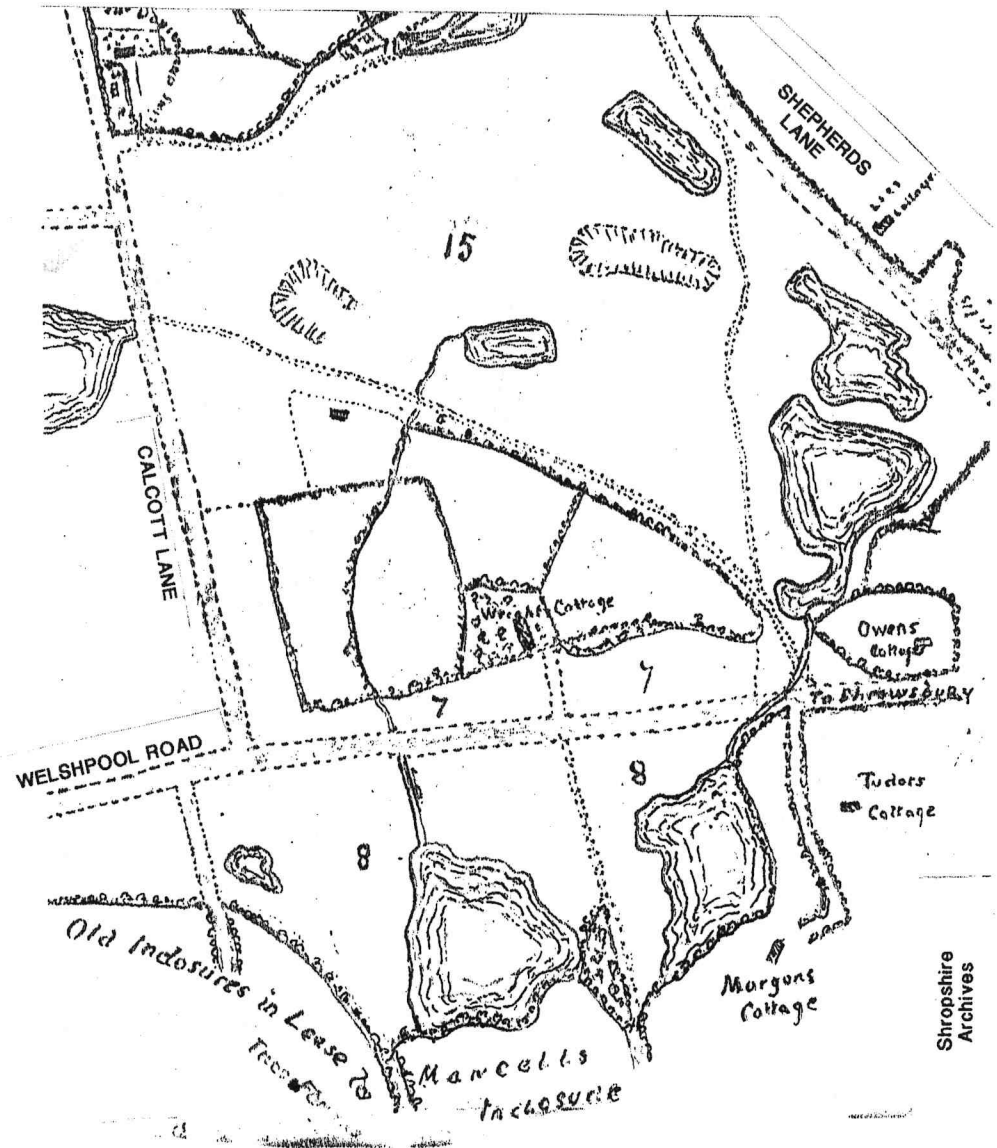
Much of this was dug for fuel in the Middle Ages, but some still remained here and there, including in the path of the proposed link road.

Altogether, the area was quite unsuited to arable farming in the Middle Ages, so most was left as heathland, stretching from the village southwards to beyond the Welshpool Road. Around the margin and on drier spots, cottages were built from the sixteenth century onwards.

In 1768, during 'the age of improvement', the local landowners agreed to 'inclose' the heath, dividing the land between them to create the hedged landscape we see today.

part of Bicton Heath 1768

Inclosure map  
with added labels



With the ongoing expansion of the town into both catchment areas, including the uncertain watershed between them, worries about drainage management naturally arise. Fortunately, modern attitudes to this are improving, especially in the construction of ponds upstream to store away any excess water before it contributes to floods downstream. The pond at the Oxon Business Park is a good example. Absorbent paving is also recommended at houses and businesses. We look forward to seeing these in the new developments.

Meanwhile, the Severn around Bicton causes few problems to the community, since building has not moved on to the floodplain - a lesson which should be headed by other communities downstream.

Politicians, not noted for their knowledge of natural processes, like to lend a sympathetic ear to constituents who have problems with floodwater. Recently these issues have been raised at Meverley, which lies in a glacial lake basin, which we have also discussed. The inevitable floods, here are usually interpreted as a disaster in need of prevention. However, they occupy a valuable 'washland' holding back water, which would otherwise flood more populated areas downstream, where other politicians are seeking ways of protecting their constants from floods by looking upstream!

**HISTORY  
of BICTON**

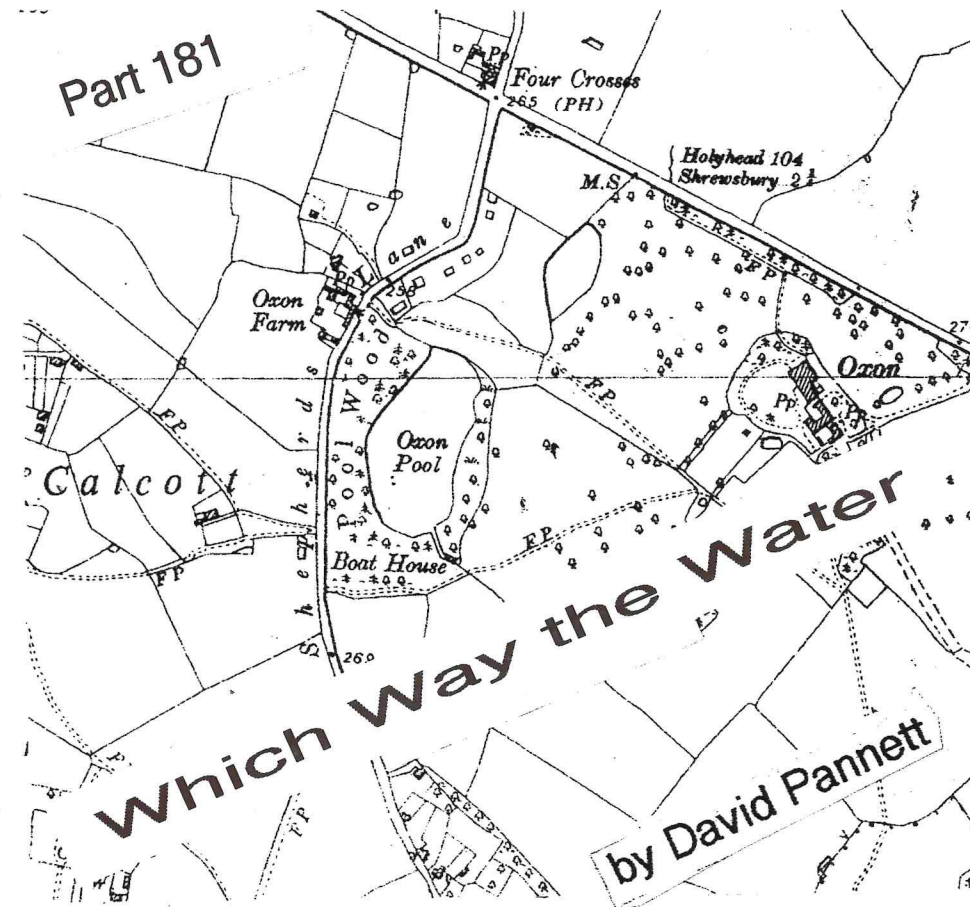
Offprint from

**September 2022**

No 674

# **Bicton Village**

## **News**



## David Pannett's History of Bicton - Part 181

### Which way the water?

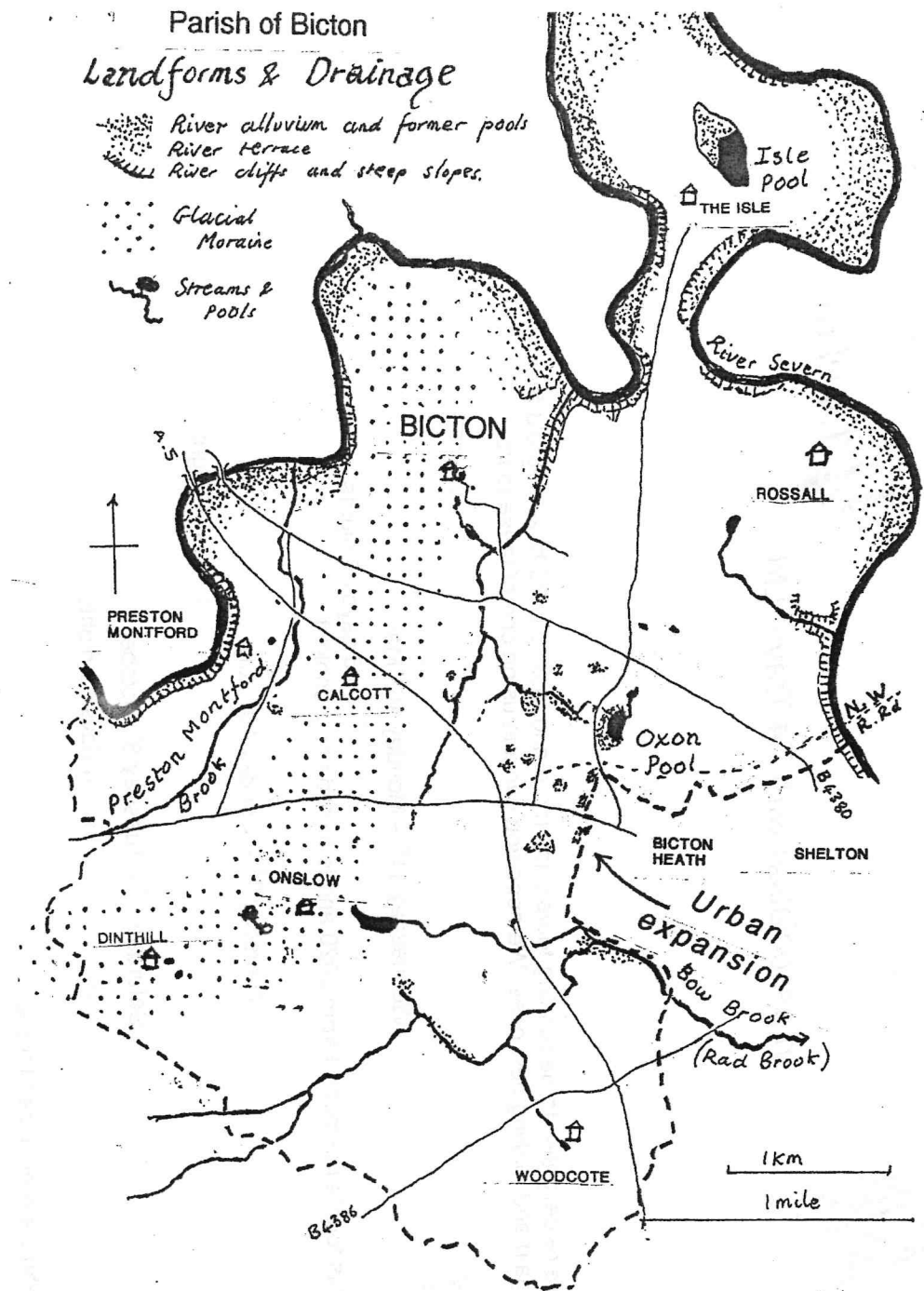
Nine years ago we discussed the drainage network of Bicton Parish, prompted by an exceptionally wet autumn and winter. February fill dyke was living up to its name with well filled pools and floods along the Severn. The usual discussions, of course, continued regarding flood prevention and memories of such times have kept them going ever since, even in dry years such as this. It is therefore appropriate to reprint our maps of the drainage network for the sake of new comers and neighbours.

Away from the river severn, Bicton has special drainage problems thanks to its 'glacial history', which we have referred to several times. Agricultural land with field drains and ditches has been able to cope with the situation, but urban development and major road building may not. Hard surfaces and buildings can shed rainfall very quickly, so 'climate change' must be taken seriously. Bicton people therefore rightly ask whether the local stream system can cope and would be reassured if there was an overall plan rather than separate actions by different developers and agencies.

The area drained by the Bicton brook is bounded on the West by a prominent glacial moraine, but on the South and East the watershed is less clear. Here the 'headwaters' are a network of artificial drains and ditches, some of which followed the enclosure of former heathland. Water thus moves from one pool or wet hollow to another. Eventually, the watercourses look more 'natural' once it reaches the Holyhead Road. Then after flowing past the school and through 'the pound' it passes under Bicton Lane at Muriel's Little Wood.

At this stage it is still a small channel in a broad hollow, but for the rest of its course to the Severn, it descends through a recognisable valley cut since the Ice Age

Meanwhile, South of the Welshpool Road the Bow Brook follows a similar journey, though on a larger scale, from Onslow and Ford Heath to the Severn at Kingsland, becoming the 'Rad Brook' on the way.





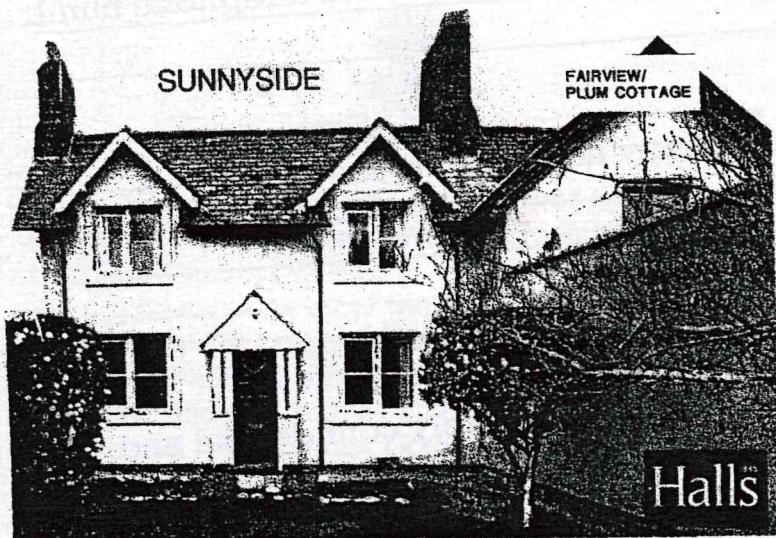
Meanwhile, there is a hint in the 1921 census index that Edward Lewis, farm labourer, was now in 'Sunnyside' with wife Jane. In the 1939 national registration record they were still there, aged 71 and 68, where they also provided a home to Matilda Cumberland, 35, and her young daughter. She was probably a widow who, soon after, was able to remarry.

Edward eventually died in 1945 aged 77 while at Rhyl, but was buried somewhere in our churchyard amongst the many other characters in this story.

Thus we have a century of comings and goings at this strange split building, but we are none the wiser about who financed it all. Nor have we learned more about the relationship between those two ladies. Perhaps the census enumerators were confused! Further studies of old deeds may offer more if available.

We wish the new owners well.

Special thanks to Family History Society helpers at Shropshire Archive for trying to sort this out.



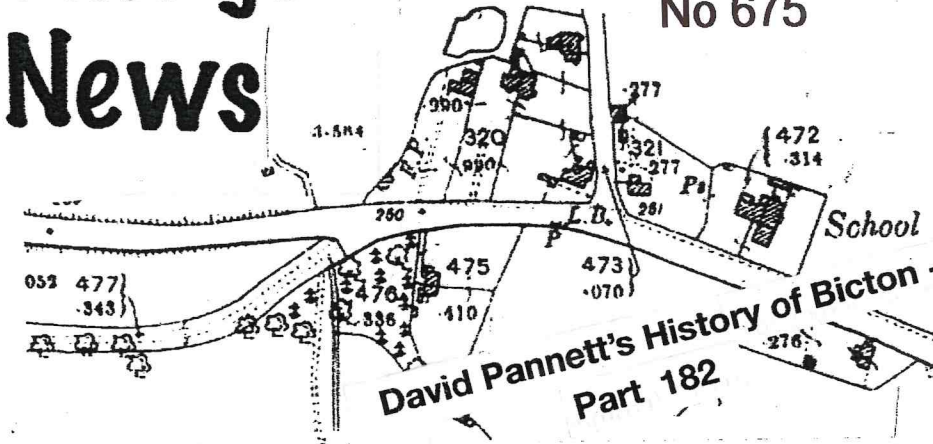
# Bicton Village News

Offprint from

October 2022

No 675

Ordnance Survey 1902



## House Full of Mysteries

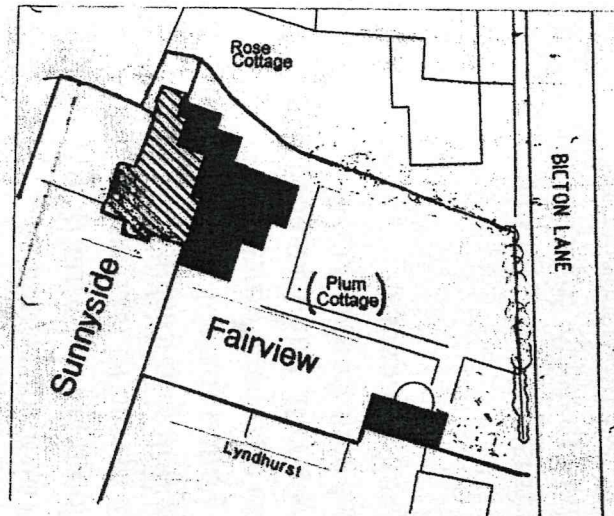
In the current discussions about the costs of home heating, many of the older generation have been reminding us about their experiences growing up in traditional rural cottages without modern facilities – no double glazing, loft insulation, central heating etc. They recount horrors of scraping ice off the inside of bedroom windows and visits to the outside loo in all weathers!

Over the years such old cottages in Bicton have been improved with builders a regular sight at several properties as a younger generation brings them 'up to date'. This is especially true amongst cottages around the junction of Bicton Lane and Holyhead Road, where 'Plum Cottage', formerly 'Fairview', has just been enlarged, while next door, 'Sunnyside' is ripe for improvement by new owners.

These two properties are actually 'interlocked' in a rather unusual way, hard against outer boundaries at the rear, while having long gardens at the front. Local oral tradition speaks of two ladies living here, who subsequently 'fell out' requiring the building to be divided. What do records suggest?

The original plot at the corner site once contained one cottage, but about 1840 it was replaced by the present 'Sunnyside' and 'Lyndhurst' which had to be fitted into opposite corners, before the old cottage in the centre was removed later.

By 1851, the census suggests that the pattern we see today had emerged, with Thomas Edwards, road surveyor at 'Lyndhurst' and Mary Pritchard, 'a gentlewoman's' assistant at 'Sunnyside'.



The census also recorded that Mary, 42, had a visitor, Jane Minton, 37, who then went on to live with her as a 'friend' for the next thirty years at least until her death in 1889. The 1891 census then records Catherine Preece, 36, as a new companion. Mary eventually died in 1896 aged 88.

Mary's earlier life is not clear, apart from being born in 1808 at Wallop in Westbury to a farming family and in 1841 being employed at the Bennett family farm nearby when aged 30. There is no clue to the identity of the 'gentlewoman' whom she once assisted nor the source of income which allowed her to live 'by her own means' for the rest of her life, or who built the house.

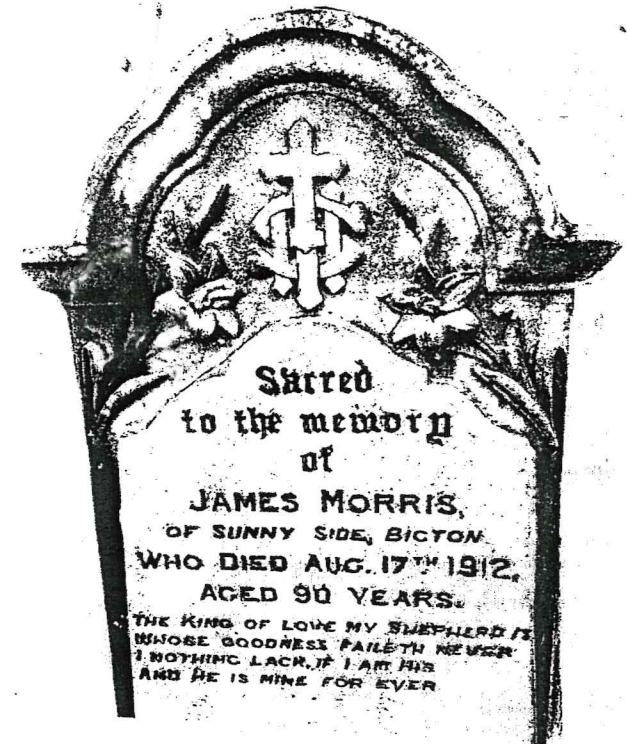
Meanwhile, Jane Minton was born in 1814 to Benjamin and Sarah Minton at Baschurch. The parents had been married in 1809 at Montford, where Sarah, also a Minton, belonged to a leading farming family there. What Jane did before joining Mary is not clear from the census.

Mary was followed at 'Sunnyside' by James Morris, a retired butler, who was recorded here in 1901, along with housekeeper Kate Bickley. After leaving employment at Shenstone in the 1870s he had first lived with other retired servants, grooms and coachmen at Claremont Buildings in Shrewsbury., before also trying his hand at farming in Pemberton about 1890. He eventually died in 1912 and lies in our churchyard under an expensive gravestone.

The census enumerators in 1871 and 1881 appear to be rather unreliable, but in 1901 they recorded 'Fairview' as occupied by Frederick Chambers, a gardener. Then, by 1911, he had moved to nearby 'Myrtle Cottage', while James Cartwright (also known as John) and wife Mary moved into part of 'Fairview', while another part housed Anne Webster, the local nurse.

James was another 'domestic gardener', probably employed at Bicton Hall by Miss Milbank, who was also involved in running the Oxon Nursing Association employing Anne. She may also have owned the house,

James died in 1920 at the age of 78 while Mary survived until 1934 aged 93. They lie somewhere in our churchyard.



Hannah, with two young children, was now but one of many war widows - for instance Enid Evans of Bicton with daughter Hilary, was another victim, when losing husband John in Normandy that same year.

The Durham Light Infantry had been part of the Eighth Army driving Rommel out of Africa and continuing through Sicily and Italy. On the way Italy pulled out of the War, but the Germans took over the fight (this political change explains why an Italian PoW now had more free time to 'chat up' local girls, while working at Churncote).

Churchill had talked of attacking the 'soft under-belly of Europe', but the geographical realities facing the troops proved rather different! Rugged mountains gave every advantage to the defenders, but only a hard slog of those trying to advance.

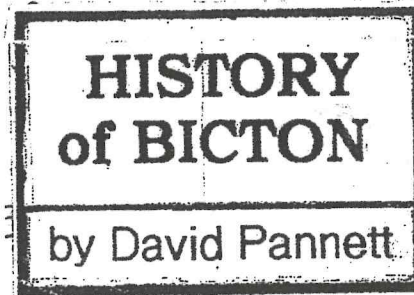
In particular, the Germans established a series of defensive lines as they fell back, where serious fighting was therefore concentrated. This led to most casualties, as at the famous Monte Cassino, where 'gunner' Ratcliffe of Bicton fell.

By August, the allies were faced with the Gothic line, which made use of the mountain range, where the Germans had also built concrete bunkers to overlook the passes. Only the eastern end offered a route for advancing armour and it was here the British concentrated their effort, while the Americans tackled the western end.

This area was such an important gateway to the plains beyond, that the Germans fought back most savagely, hence the high rate of casualties and the size of the cemetery. Most died in early September.

Today those concrete bunkers still survive along the old Gothic line and there are even moves to preserve some as monuments to this period of Italian history. They may therefore become part of local heritage, along with medieval cities and renaissance palaces visited by tourists!

Again, thanks must go to the 'experts' in the Family History Society for help in sorting all this out.



Offprint from

November 2022

No 676

# Bicton Village News

Part 183

Holy Trinity  
Bicton (1885)

Bicton memorial:

War in Italy



# War in Italy

## David Pannett's History of Bicton - Part 183

Once again in November we commemorate past wars and the sacrifices made by so many, especially those listed on the Bicton War Memorial. Over the years we have been working through these names, recording family backgrounds and circumstances of their deaths in both World Wars. Indeed European tours by Bicton Travel Club have even visited some graves in passing.

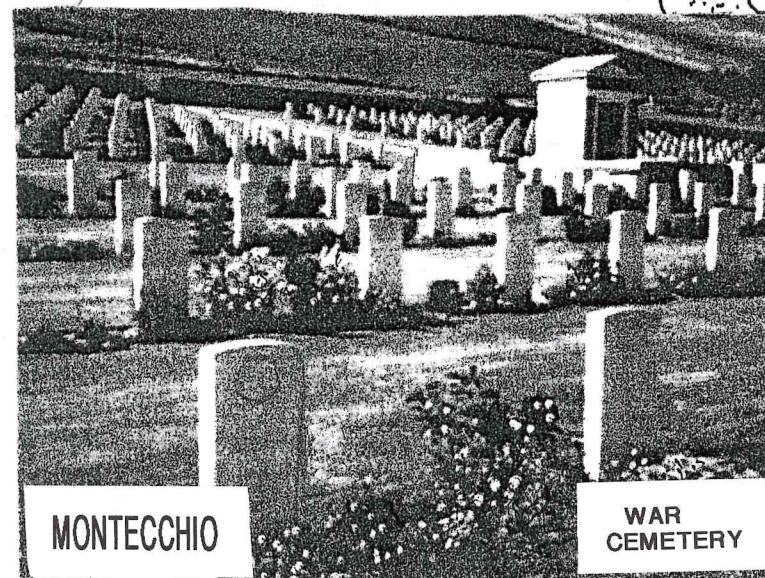
Newcomers to the village may have noticed that there is no typical war memorial to be seen. This is because here in Bicton it is the church clock, installed in 1921, which as a public 'monument' is maintained by the parish council rather than church authorities and kept wound up by a succession of devoted volunteers. The associated list of casualties stands on the wall safely inside the church, now rarely visited, so these pages are useful in making them better known to the present population.

As part of this project we had been unsuccessfully searching for the story of Jack Norton Green, a WWII victim, but his name was actually Jack Lorton Green, so now we can understand him better.

At the time of his death he was no longer living locally, so that his Bicton connection is through his parents John and Caroline Green living in The Crescent, Montford Bridge. As a postman John had moved several times, meeting Caroline in Birmingham and later living near Church Stretton, where Jack was born in 1920.

Perhaps to distinguish himself from father John, Jack took his mother's maiden name 'Lorton'. Then as he grew up he also moved around, marrying Hannah Stephenson at Northwich in 1942 after which they started a family in Durham with children Barbara and Trevor.

No sooner had family life started than war service intervened. As a resident of the area, he naturally joined the Durham Light Infantry, which was then heavily involved in the Italian campaign. Thus Jack very soon finished up in the Montecchio War Cemetery at the age of only 23. 'Gunner' Charles Griffiths, 35, from Isle Lane was to join him very soon after, along with many others in September 1944.



For most of this time, the St Chad's church to which we are referring, was not the prominent 18th century building overlooking the quarry, but the original medieval one, the remains of which now hides amongst the houses around Belmont.

Although of Saxon origin, like St Mary's, it was rebuilt in the Norman period and then enlarged and altered during succeeding centuries. Thus the 18th century painting reveals the characteristics of each architectural period from 'Norman' to 'Perpendicular'.

Early phases used the local red sandstone from the nearby local quarry, now the Dingle, while more Grinshill stone appeared later.

As the graveyard steadily filled up, perhaps a grave too many weakened the church foundations, causing cracks to appear in a major pillar. Thus in 1788 the newly arrived stonemason Thomas Telford was asked to advise.

He recommended taking down the whole tower and rebuilding it, but the church authorities took fright at the cost and chose a cheaper repair instead. A few days later, early in the morning, following bell-ringing at a funeral the day before, half the tower collapsed wrecking much of the church below.

As a result of this, it was decided to build the replacement on a different site, which we see today. While tidying up the ruins, the opportunity was taken to widen the surrounding streets and reuse the stone for the high retaining walls needed. Today the extra space for parking is very useful.

Bicton people, who venture into town for Christmas shopping could perhaps also seek the relative peace of this church site, which played an important part in the village history. Today, so much history teaching in school covers recent wars, that the contribution of such earlier periods is often neglected, even though they laid the foundation for the world we live in.

David Pannett's  
History of Bicton

Offprint from

December 2022

No 677

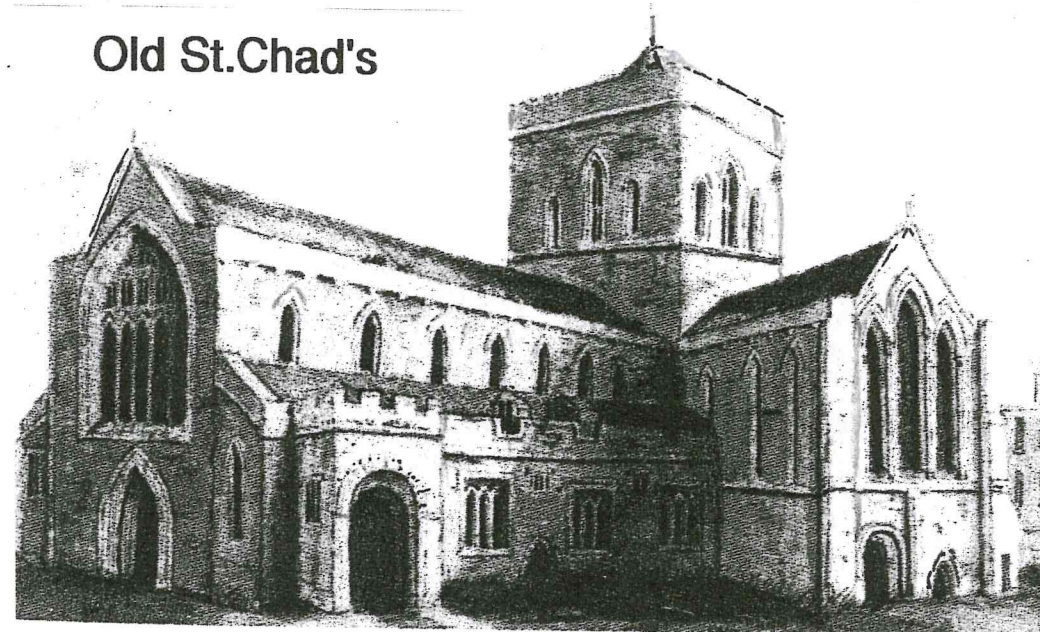
# Bicton

Part 184

Bicton  
and  
St. Chad's

# Village News

Old St.Chad's



## David Pannett's History of Bicton - Part 184

### Bicton and St Chad's

Once again December comes around with thoughts of Christmas celebrations and family gatherings. This year we have added worries of the cost of it all and the risk of social gatherings prolonging the current pandemic.

Celebrations for the rebirth of the sun after the winter solstice have a very long history, so it was natural for the Christian church to adopt it to its own story, with the result that the significance of the solstice has almost been forgotten.

Way back in prehistoric times, Neolithic folk gathered at the early Stonehenge from all over the country, bringing their own pigs to contribute to the feast. However, such habits may have helped the spread of plague introduced by Bronze Age invaders who replaced the Neolithic culture. Pandemics are nothing new!

Today, secular fun and religious observance compete for the spirit of this old midwinter festival with thoughts of shopping and attendance at Church.

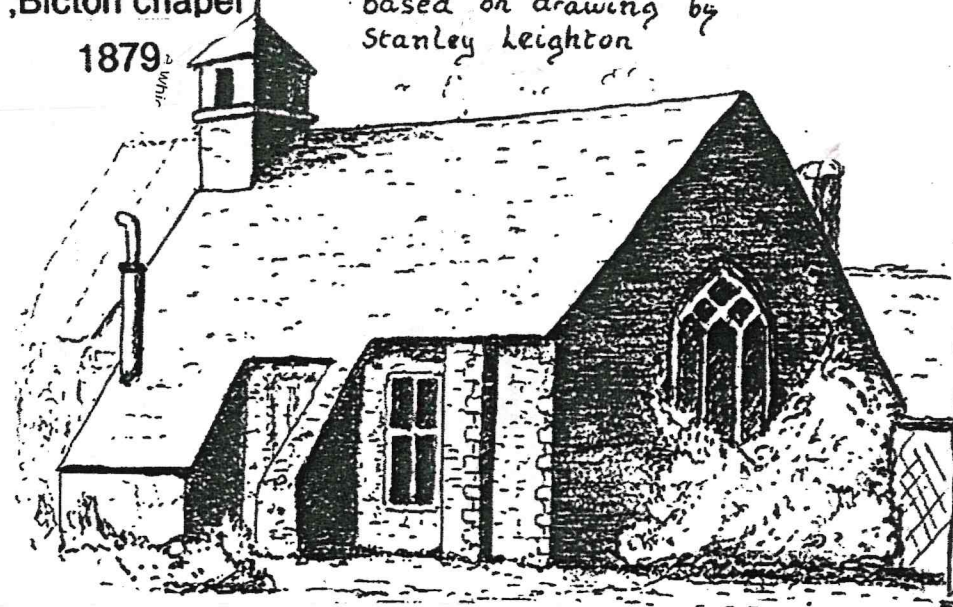
In Bicton the present parish church only dates from the 1880s, when it replaced an earlier one, now attached to Bicton Hall. They served in turn the ecclesiastical parish created in 1853 during a reorganisation of Shrewsbury parishes, which also saw the building of Oxon church nearby.

The old Bicton church, with its graveyard now ruined, dates from the late seventeenth century, when it was built as a 'chapel of ease' belonging to the 'mother' church of St Chad's in Shrewsbury. It therefore did not have its own registers, so that Bicton entries had to be included with those at St Chad's. Even earlier, before the chapel was built, Bicton inhabitants had to go into town in person, for regular services, baptisms, weddings and burials. No wonder some found it more convenient to use churches at neighbouring Montford and Fitz, especially as the town graveyard was getting full of plague victims.

Bicton chapel

based on drawing by Stanley Leighton

1879



All this original parish system dates back to Anglo-Saxon times, when the town was being developed. The King founded St Mary's, while St Chad's was founded by the Bishop of Lichfield, a successor of Chad, who had been the first bishop of this Mercian diocese.

Their parish boundaries spread out around the town embracing several rural villages and hamlets, including those around Bicton. Then, later in the Anglo-Saxon period, the churches of St Julian's and St Alkmund's were added to this pattern, resulting in some odd boundaries around Shelton (St Julian) and the separation of Preston Montford (St Alkmund).

These early churches were 'collegiate' institutions with a community of priests serving both the local and the wider area. To finance this they were also the 'feudal' overlords for most of the area around Bicton, when recorded in the Domesday Book, 1086.

At the reformation these 'colleges' were closed down as they were classed as monasteries, leaving the churches to be staffed as normal parish centres. All this released some tithe income, which the town authorities petitioned to use for the foundation of a 'Free Grammar School'. This has given a long connection between Bicton and Shrewsbury School, as seen for instance in John Saxton's 1812 maps of the village and other records housed in the school library.