

Our local chronicler recorded good examples of this for several years in the sixteenth century: e.g. in 1585 "This year and the sixth daye of October betwixt 8 and x of the clocke at nyght apeeried in the ellym't northward fiery inflamac'ons and aspringe flames very myrculows".

This event was actually the last of a series during the previous 21 years with one gap in 1577. There would be no more sightings for the rest of the century nor had there been any in 20 years before 1564. All this suggests changing solar activity related to the 11 year cycle of sunspots and perhaps a sign of declining sun power bringing the 'little Ice Age' towards the end of the century.

Today, there is a keen interest in solar flares, because our satellites and IT networks are very sensitive to such electric disturbance in the atmosphere. It is not just Putin to watch out for!

Meanwhile, down here on the ground, there are current worries about our energy crisis. Anyway, rural supplies dependent on overhead wires have always been at risk of disruption though high winds, falling trees, wet snow and lightning bolts. It is therefore always wise to have some backup from older technology. Thus antique oil lamps and candle sticks can make good ornaments in old cottage surroundings, while at the same time being instantly available when needed.

Likewise, as we reduce lighting, both public and private, to save power and cost, try to enjoy the night sky. This may be actually a novelty for newcomers from the city, where one could not always see the horizon. For some it can be a humbling experience to appreciate our little 'space-ship' Earth surrounded by the wider universe out there. At the practical level can you identify Orion or find the Pole Star with the aid of the 'plough'?

p.s. we also recommend reading the 'Shropshire Star'.

# HISTORY of BICTON

Part 185

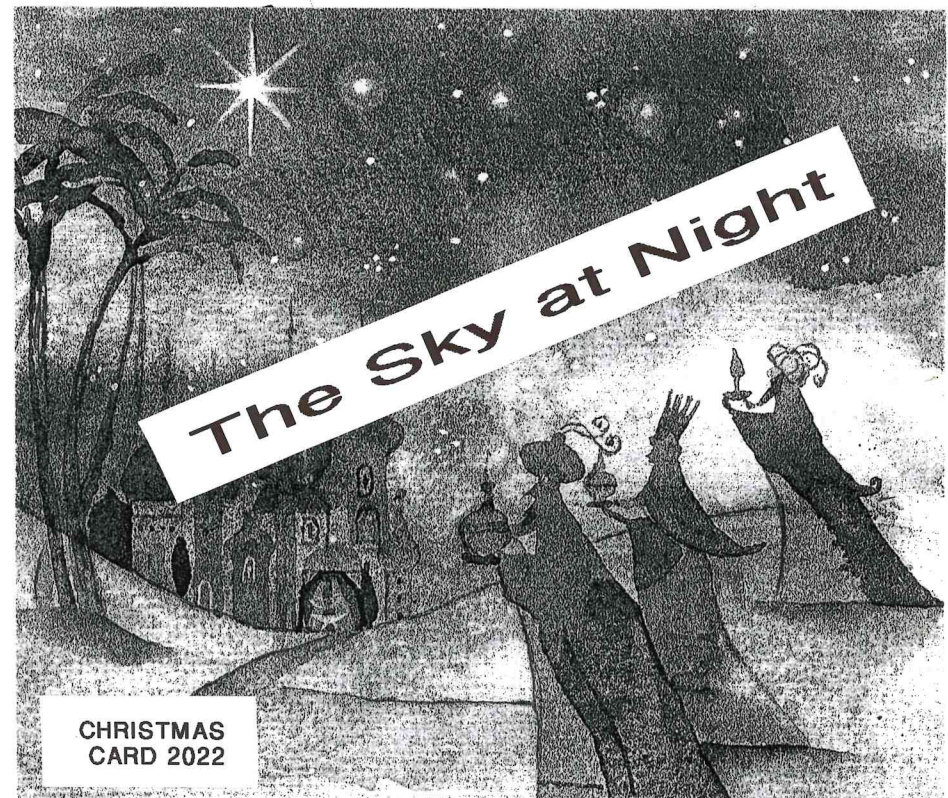
by David Pannett

Offprint from

January 2023

No 678

# Bicton Village News



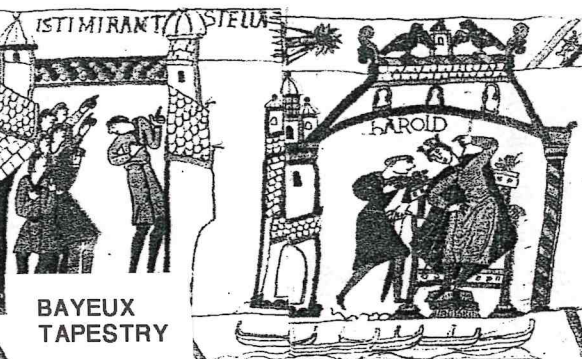
# David Pannett's History of Bicton - Part 185

## The Sky at Night

Another year gone and a new one arriving. Christmas is over, or rather not quite, for there is still January 6<sup>th</sup>, Epiphany marking the visit of the wise men to the baby Jesus. Though only appearing in Matthew's gospel (ch2, v1-11) it has since inspired many paintings, Christmas cards and carols, thanks partly to that 'guiding' star. The visitors have also been promoted to 'Kings' by some writers.



Another part of the story told by both Matthew and Luke (ch2, v21) was the baby's circumcision, an operation which originated as a health precaution in a desert environment, but was by now only a religious and tribal symbol. For this reason, early Christians felt it had become irrelevant (Epistle Rom iv 8) and so it



is most unlikely to feature on a Christmas card! It had to be done on the eighth day, which experience had shown posed less risk of infection (modern medicine confirms this). A related demonstration of the child's Jewish credentials was also Joseph's genealogy reaching back at least to David, listed by both Matthew and Luke.

Throughout history, strange sights in the sky, especially at night were interpreted as omens of momentous events. For example, a comet features in the story of the Norman Conquest, 1066, as shown by the Bayeux Tapestry. Other sightings could also have been a 'supernova', a flash of light from some distant exploding star, or the rare alignment of our local planets concentrating their reflected light in one place.

Orbits of planets and far-travelled comets behave 'like clockwork', so there has been much debate on the identity of those recorded in social history: our local chronicler for instance, observed a 'blazing star' - i.e. comets three times between 1540 and 1600.

The dry cloudless climate of deserts in the Middle East offered plenty of opportunities to spot any unusual features, such as that famous star. Also it is no surprise that the 'Star of David' and the Islamic crescent moon remain important religious symbols in the region.

In modern times and nearer home, anyone wishing to study the sky is becoming aware of 'light pollution', as the glow of well-lit, expanding urban areas interferes with the natural darkness. It was for this reason that the famous Greenwich Observatory moved its telescopes to Herstmonceux in Sussex, but even here the growth of nearby Eastbourne caused problems. Now, some areas of mid-Wales actually advertise their dark skies as a tourist attraction.

A related aspect of modern tourism is the number of 'tours' to visit Iceland or cruise northern Norway in order to see the Northern Lights or 'Aurora Borealis'. In such high latitudes the Earth's magnetic field concentrates the charged particles of the 'solar wind' at the poles where they interact with our upper atmosphere. Exceptional solar flares can, however, overwhelm this system, allowing the display to be seen in lower latitudes too, even Shropshire, especially near the Spring and Autumn equinoxes when the Earth is at a suitable angle.



Robert Darwin was keen for his son to follow a serious career and sent him off to Edinburgh to study medicine. However, Charles had 'no stomach' for this and was rather idle in his studies anyway. He therefore moved to a divinity course at Cambridge, intent on becoming a country parson with spare time to peruse his real interests in natural history.

Gilbert White of Selborne would have been one model, but there were others, including a natural history tutor at Cambridge, John Henslow, with whom Charles went on beetle hunting trips around the area. He also associated with Adam Sedgewick, professor of geology with whom he explored parts of North Wales to interpret the sequence of rocks, staying at The Mount on the way.

Before Charles could actually start being a parson however, Henslow recommended him to be the companion to Captain Fitzroy on the proposed voyage of the Beagle. As they say, 'the rest is history'.

The book 'Principles of Geology' by Charles Lyell had already helped his understanding of the subject, but now, another about travels in South America by the German explorer Alexander von Humbolt became even more relevant, when the translation became available. Humbolt had been trained in Freiberg as a mines inspector, but after the death of his mother, he used his inheritance to travel, along with a French baronet. His 'professional' skills of observation and recording, along with the physical courage involved, would become a valuable inspiration to Charles by offering him a standard to live up to. Humbolt's work is not well known in Britain, but his influence could be detected in German geography textbooks right into modern times.



Alexander Baron von Humbolt

So much for such far-away places, what has it all to do with Bicton? The answer lies in the appreciation of field observation for studies of nature, which all these pioneers developed. Fast forward two hundred years and we have a 'Field Centre' at Preston Montford where, for 65 years young and old have been learning about nature through our environment.

# HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Offprint from

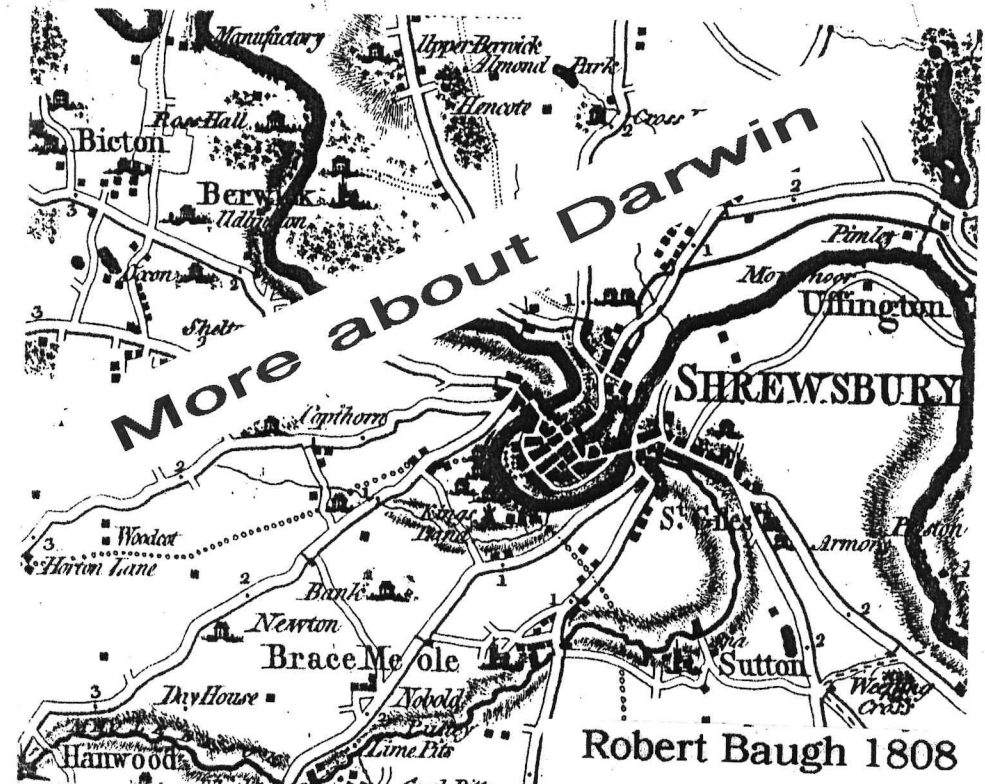
February 2023

No 679

Part 186

# Bicton

# Village News



Robert Baugh 1808

## David Pannett's History of Bicton - Part 186

### More about Darwin

Each February Shrewsbury marks the birthday of Charles Darwin with lectures and meetings celebrating different aspects of his life and work. A few years ago, in these pages, we summarised his early life, but there is always something new to say about him.

Bicton cannot claim any special link to him except by being part of the countryside near the family home on The Mount, over which he would have wandered in his youth, collecting and shooting. He certainly often rode by en route to his girlfriend at Woodhouse near Rednal. After, his father Robert, as a successful doctor, is likely to have had patients around here, taking Charles along too as an apprentice at one time. Robert was finally buried at Montford.

Charles was born in 1809 and for the following twenty years, at least, he would have called Shrewsbury his home, before the Beagle voyage, marriage and move to Kent. The commemorative statue of a youthful Charles at Shrewsbury School (or inside Mytton Oak Surgery) is therefore more appropriate than the bearded old man outside the original school (now library). A strange structure at Mardol Head is even less relevant.

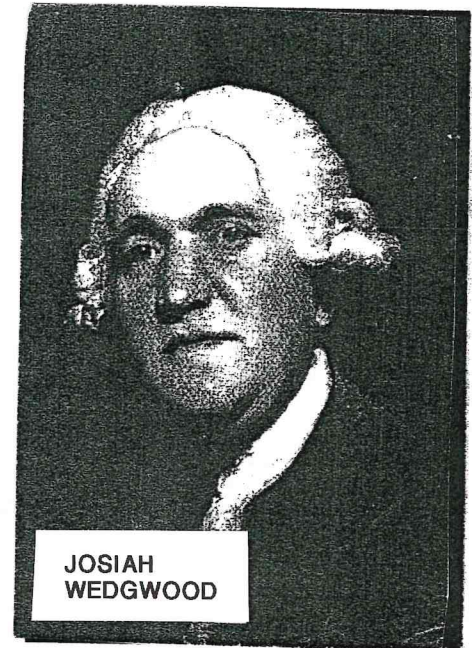
Ironically, one could say that Charles' succeeded in life in spite of his education at this school rather than because of it. Its emphasis on the classics left little room for science, so Charles and his brother Erasmus preferred to experiment with chemicals at home. Incidentally, although we now live in a scientific age, how many of the MPs who rule us actually have any scientific qualifications?

These brothers had been born to a family which had become much involved in two interrelated movements at this time: the 'European Enlightenment' and the 'Industrial Revolution'. One was more intellectual, emphasising the power of reason, the other more practical and commercial.

Their paternal grandfather had been Erasmus Darwin of Lichfield, a doctor, inventor and free thinker, even expressing ideas which we otherwise only associate with the later Charles.

These included antislavery and questioning of established views of religion. On the practical side, he invented the front axle design which we still use on our cars today.

Maternal grandfather was Josiah Wedgwood of Stoke, the famous potter, whose commercial success had laid the foundation of the family's wealth. He had met Erasmus through membership of the 'Lunar Society', a gathering of leading industrial innovators and scientists in the Midlands (they met at full moon for ease of travel, hence the name). Their radical views often upset conservative laymen, while exchanges of practical knowledge helped drive the industrial revolution forward. At the personal level, the pair could set up the marriage of their children Robert and Susannah.



One important by-product of the Industrial Revolution, with its mining and construction of canals and roads, was a surge in the understanding of geology and its implications for the great age of the Earth. William Smith, for instance, was able to produce his geological map in 1815 and then Charles Lyell published his first book on the 'Principles of Geology' illustrating fossils from different ages.

Locally Robert Darwin was able to invest in such canals and turnpike roads and thus secure extra income.

Shrewsbury had been sharing these two movements with the likes of Thomas Telford and William Hazeldine, the iron founder, demonstrating innovation in their activities. Local naturalists were also planning to open Shrewsbury's first museum of natural history. One naturalist, 'Old Mr Cotton', was able to introduce Charles to some interesting features. He had gained his own knowledge while growing up amongst the Stiperstones lead mines, when his father was rector of Shelve.

The old school building was still in good shape and hopes were expressed in finding a suitable alternative use. Fortunately this has come about.

The Social Club continued to flourish with a programme of activities and entertainment. For an annual fee of £2.00, members could enjoy low priced drinks, e.g. Bitter £2.05 pt, Lager £2.20 pt, Guinness £2.40 pt. Bob Mills also reported on his dim cousin in Gornal in the 'News'. Related to club affairs, Jean Williams retired from typing the 'News' after many years of loyal service.

In the church, the 'Roll of Honour' board, listing those who served in WW1 was restored thanks to a grant from the KSLI. As a related issue the church clock needed repairs, but the parish council had yet to learn that it originated as a public war memorial. One aim of the history essays was now to help understand all this and a lot more.

County guides had once dismissed Bicton as a rather dull, uninteresting village, so now the challenge would be to prove them wrong.

Judge for yourself in the subsequent essays, which are all still available as offprints.

Bicton Village News  
no.488 MARCH 2007

### THE HISTORY OF BICTON

Part I of a series of articles first published in this Newsletter over 20 years ago.

#### INTRODUCTION

Many years ago the Shell Guide written by Michael Moulder described, or rather dismissed Bicton as a 'decayed village off the Holyhead Road near Shrewsbury. A white stuccoed manor house, a ruined and overgrown eighteenth century church, a red-brick Georgian farmhouse with a monkey-puzzle tree make up what there is. The new church (1866) has a very ugly tower....'

The church is actually 1836. I like the tower - the monkey puzzle tree was cut

## HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Offprint from

March 2023

No 660

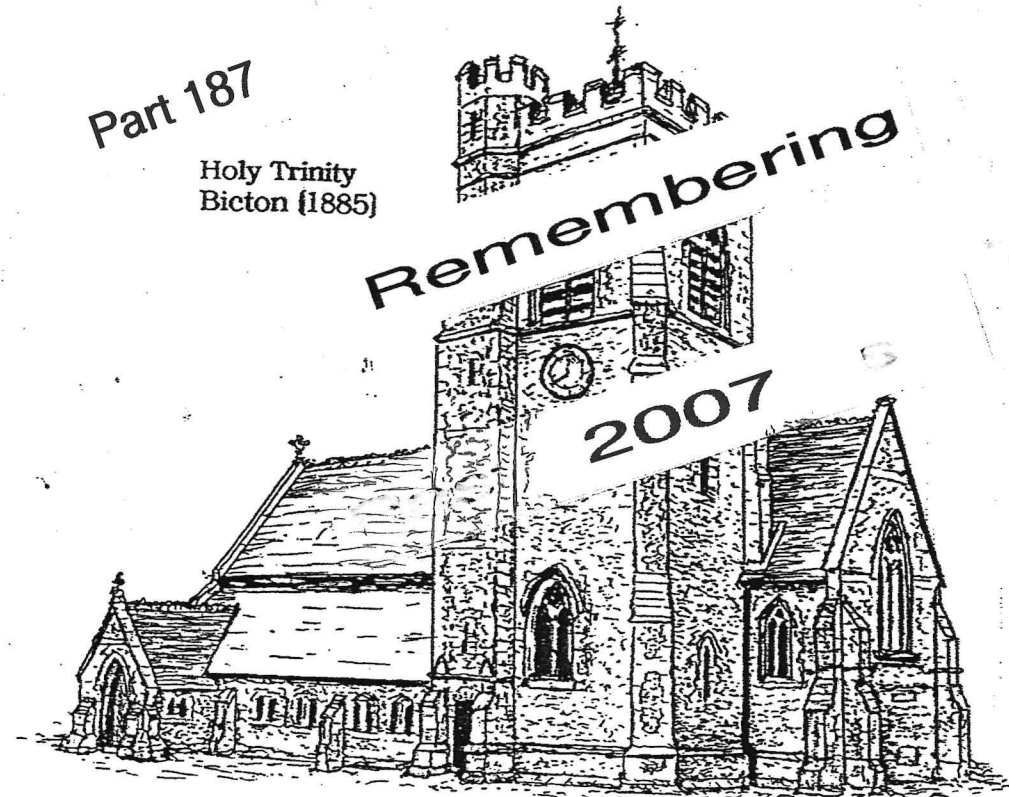
# Bicton Village News

Part 187

Holy Trinity  
Bicton (1885)

Remembering

2007



## David Pannett's History of Bicton - Part 187

### Remembering 2007

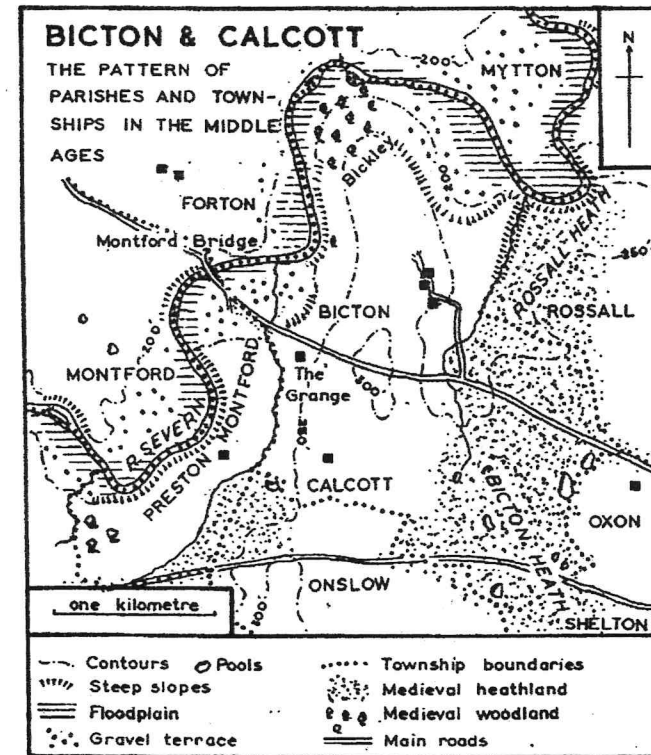
The February essay, part 186, on Charles Darwin completed sixteen years of these historical essays. They had started in March 2007 with a general introduction to the parish, relating historical patterns to the underlying natural landscape. Those first few essays had actually appeared some 20 years earlier, when the 'News' consisted of stapled sheets, but now editor Muriel Morris revived them to fit the new A5 booklet format and encouraged continuation of the series.

With each passing year, 'history' actually gets longer, so that 2007 is becoming a distant memory to Bicton residents, some of whom were not even in the village then. Most local children had not even been born. Fortunately, the Village News recorded many events during that year, some of which were important to the continuing story of the Village.

As so often happens February brought a late blast of cold air with thick winter snow for a brief period. Otherwise, the main talking point that year was the wet summer. In a normal year Atlantic depressions dump most of their moisture on the Welsh uplands, leaving Shropshire in a 'rain shadow'. Floods mainly occurred along the Severn valley. In the summer of 2007, however, thundery lows drifted up from the south reversing this pattern. The smaller catchments of the Shropshire Hills 'overflowed' with sudden floods, even destroying a bridge at Ludlow.

In Bicton, the sodden ground hindered the levelling of the playing field, while the parish council worried about the clearance of roadside ditches. The bowling club were thankful that their green had a good ditch around it, but appealed for volunteers to help with mowing the rapidly growing grass. The Village Fete in July was lucky to enjoy one fine day between the showers.

Chairman of the parish council was then Roy Bound, while regular inputs came from John Cooke as district councillor. Bicton was still part of the 'Borough of Shrewsbury and Atcham', but the Government had just given the green light for the creation of Unitary Authorities instead. Much discussion on this issue therefore followed through the rest of the year, until the present arrangement took over.



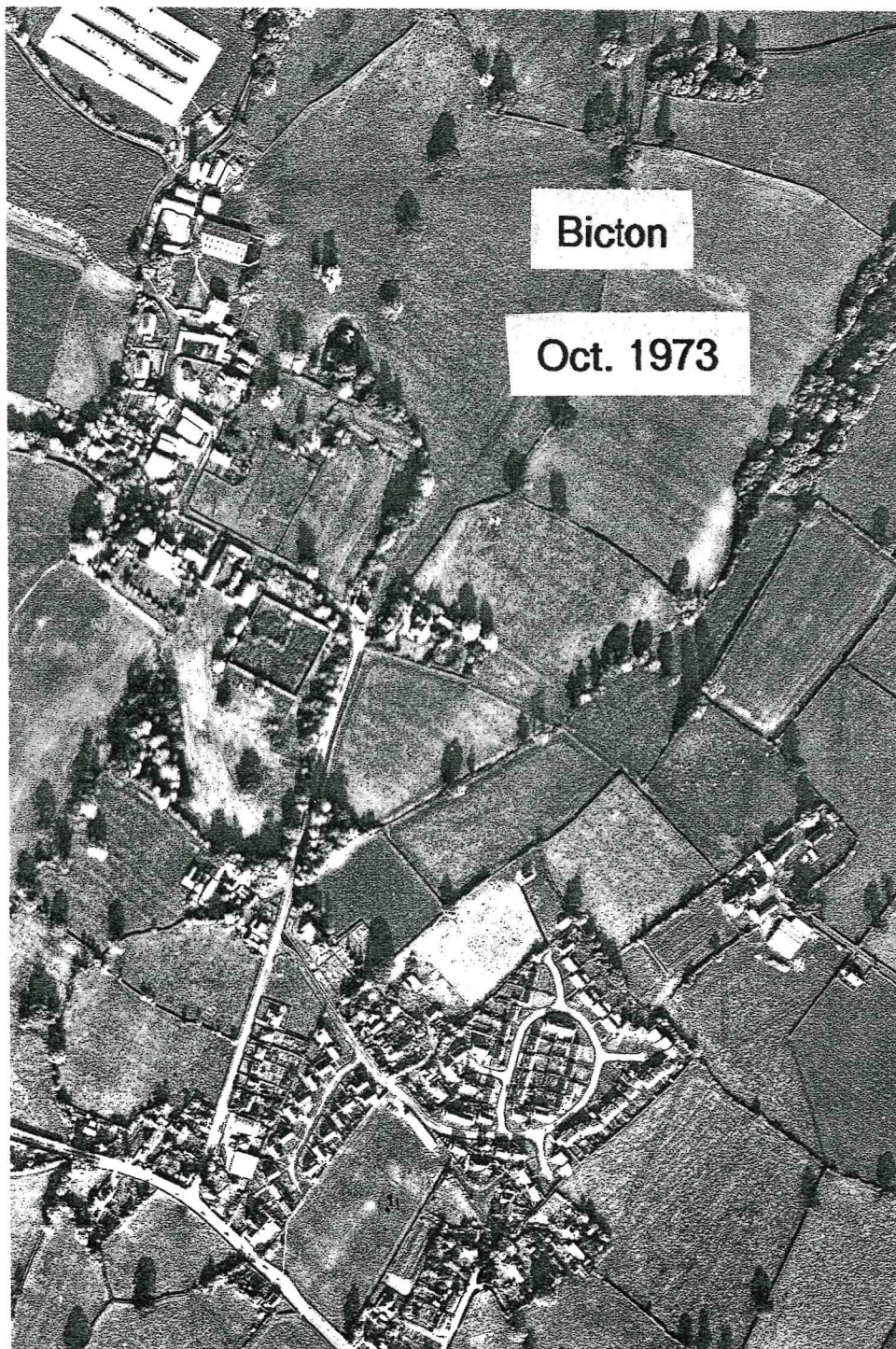
MAP USED IN 2007

Church affairs also changed with the appointment of Christopher Deakin as 'Priest in Charge'. The post had been vacant for several months since Mark Godson had moved on to further his career in Hampshire. By contrast, Christopher was taking a new career after teaching at Ellesmere College. As a teacher, he soon used his contributions to the 'News' to explain various aspects of religious history and practice. Thus readers were now getting a double dose of education! Christopher also found himself responsible for those churches 'around the loop' from Shrawardine to Leaton.

A more visible change in the village was the move of the school from its old to the new building. At the official opening Dorothy Lewis of Milnsbridge was a guest of honour, being the oldest ex-pupil still in the village. Her memories were to become of great help to the history essays until her death in 2020, aged 100.

Little was to change in the position of the parish council and we remained in the Tern Ward of the County, whose boundaries reflected the original Atcham Rural District. A later essay explained all this.

As all these changes came about, the parish council discussed road and verge maintenance with the County Council, including the regular problem of that footpath over Grange Bank to Montford Bridge.



Bickton

Oct. 1973

Offprint from

# Bickton

April 2023

No 681

# Village News

## David Pannett's History of Bickton - Part 188

### Stepping Stones towards our Modern World

From time to time our local newspapers dig into their archives to remind us of what happened 100 years ago, 50 years ago etc. Perhaps we could try to do the same for Bickton and neighbourhood and maybe even find some important events which could be considered 'stepping stones' towards our modern world.

To start with, 620 years ago, in 1403, the famous 'Battle of Shrewsbury' took place north of the town, beyond the complicated ground of the river valley and 'Old Riverbed'. The complexities of medieval politics are too great to discuss here and anyway the battle only affected Bickton indirectly. Such was the slaughter of old style feudal nobility that it provided the way for the emergence of the modern landowner more concerned with education, home comforts and profitable estate management. At the same time the power of central government grew, whoever sat on the throne.

The victorious King Henry IV founded a charity church on the battle site, which after a chequered history of success, neglect and restoration, is now one of the churches 'around the loop' served by the Bickton team of clergy.

During its history, the reformation occurred, driven by central government, i.e. the Crown, so that the people of Bickton were given a revised pattern of worship at St Chad's. To mark the completion of these changes, 550 years ago, in 1573, the Bishop of Lichfield carried out an official inspection in the town to check that 'the wishes of the Queen' were being carried out.

Fast forward to only 180 years ago, in 1845 Bicton was surveyed and mapped for calculation of money payments now replacing tythes paid in kind. Along with John Saxton's map of 1812 (Shrewsbury School) its list of field sizes and names, land use, owners and tenants are a valuable start to any historical studies, so that it has been referred to several times in these pages.

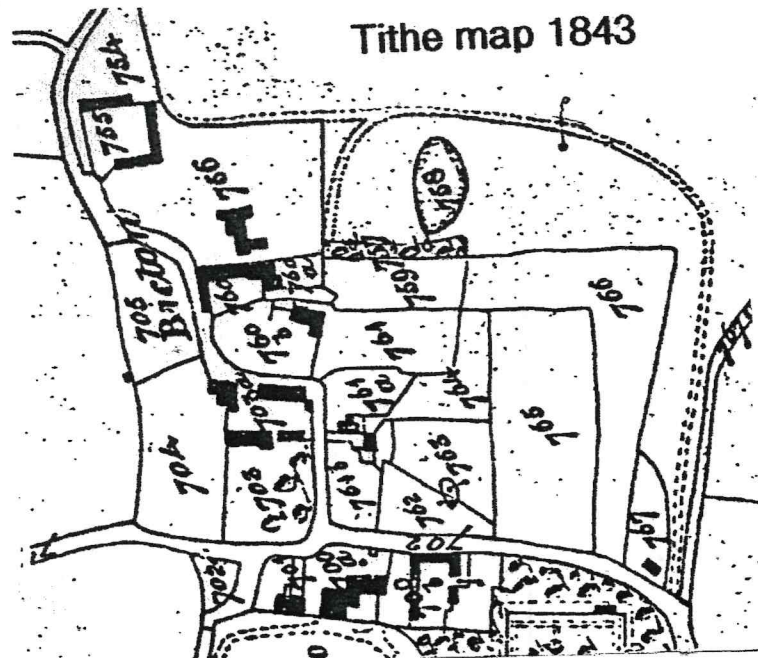
Then the 'township' of Bicton and Calcot was one of the local townships belonging to St Chad's parish, but 170 years ago, in 1853 it became the nucleus of an independent parish. Thus, the old chapel was promoted to 'parish church' with

its own vicar and registers. The first in the post was William Sanford from the Isle, who could now move into a new 'parsonage house'.

100 years ago, in 1923, in a general election, Shrewsbury voted in the liberal candidate by a narrow margin, in a traditionally 'Conservative and Unionist' safe seat. Was it just the effect of the War, or had the contribution of the women now made a difference?

By this time, Bicton would have noticed increasing road traffic, as the 'motor age' developed. One result of this, 90 years ago, in 1933 the new Shrewsbury by-pass was opened by the Princess Royal at a ceremony at Shelton.

80 years ago, in 1943, the tide of war was slowly turning in Europe, with much action concentrated in Italy where several Bicton lads were



serving. Of these, Leonard Ratcliff, Royal Artillery, was the first to die at the infamous Monte Cassino and, at the age of forty, would become the oldest casualty listed on our memorial.

Meanwhile, in London, a meeting of academics was sounding a more positive note by establishing 'the Council for the promotion of Field Studies'. The aim was to set up residential study centres after the war and in this way the Field Centre was opened at Preston Montford in 1957.

We have been experiencing some cold spells this spring, but, 60 years ago in early 1963 we had a memorably long one. The freezing temperatures seem to have lasted almost two months with snow on the ground until March, while ice grew thicker on the ponds and rivers. Local people could enjoy skating on Oxon Pool, for instance.

After the thaw, Bicton shoppers would have witnessed the demolition of Shrewsbury's ornate Victorian market hall and its steady replacement by the present, rather bland, structure.

By now, the old by-pass was feeling the strain of ever increasing through traffic, so ideas were being explored for a new road. Planning consultants needed to update maps and turned to aerial photography to help. Thus, 50 years ago, in October 1973, a flight covered Bicton giving us a snapshot of the area at one point in time.

In the old village the farm buildings included both old and recent structures, of which the chicken 'farm' appeared dominant. In the 'new' village the Oval was there, but extras such as Brookside and the bungalows opposite the church remained to be built. The old wooden Village Hall can also be recognised. There would be an interesting project for someone to check what trees are still standing. (When viewing such photos, the brain interprets shapes better if you turn the print so that 'south' is to the top of the page).

So, step by step, we had reached the modern world and therefore it came as quite a shock, 20 years ago in March 2003, for Shrewsbury to be visited by an American team promoting 'Answers in Genesis'. They were pushing the debate back at least 150 years by basing their ideas on those ancient texts written about 2700 years ago, meaning everything had to be squeezed into a short time scale. Of course, Noah's flood was an important event in moulding landscape!



The significance of this story is that the Hall escaped further major alteration, preserving some original features to this day. Changes, however, continued to take place in the surrounding estate after John Chambers had secured the controlling interest. When he died in 1767, his wife Hannah, originally Adderton, returned to her old home and during her widowhood set about consolidating the estate by first adding the cottages in Drury Lane. These had been built beside the main road where the Borough of Shrewsbury were 'owners of the soil'. They sold them for £60. Then, at the other corner of the estate, the former common land of Onslow Hill was enclosed with the agreement of adjacent landowners. The straightness of the roads around the junction of Preston Montford Lane and the Welshpool Road was a product of this.

Hannah died in 1791 and the estate passed to her son-in-law John Hill and his heirs so that by the early years of the following century, it passed to Sir John Hill, although actually occupied by Francis Brian Hill. Then, when it was taken over by Sir Rowland Hill, the family arranged to pass Preston Montford to John Wingfield of Onslow by exchange of land in 1829. In this way both sides could benefit from having more compact estates near home.

Under the Wingfields the Hall continued to house members of the family or other gentry, including retired military men. The Hall experienced one major change when in 1890 the service wing had to be rebuilt after a fire. However care was taken to blend the old with the new leaving the Adderton home still recognisable. What happened next, leading up to the Field Centre is another story.

Incidentally the 1829 deal included the first mention of Edward Lewis, who along with John Wingfield, was one of the few people to leave descendants still living in the parish today. Thus we have both the Wingfield Arms and Lewis *way*

Offprint from

May 2023

No 682

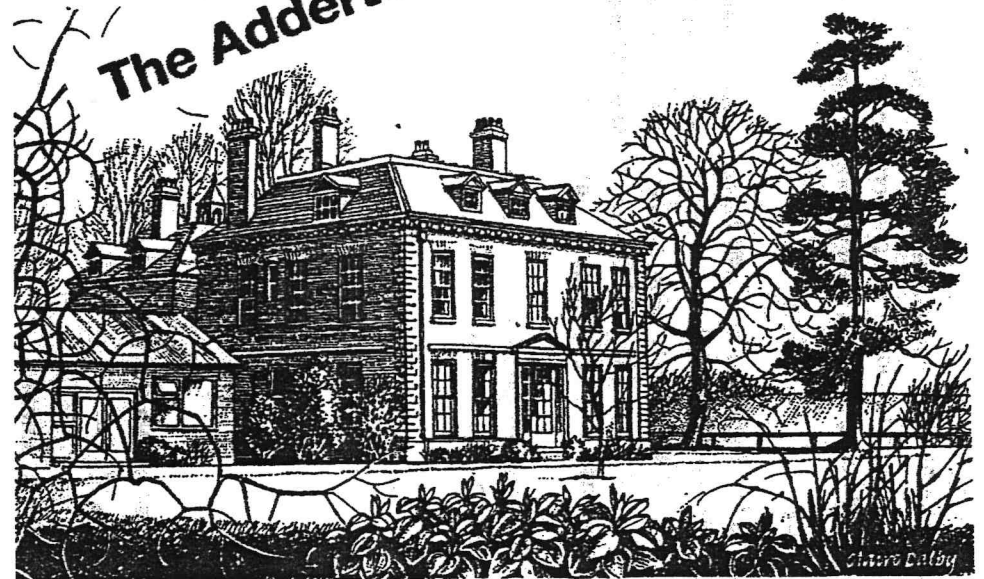
# Bicton Village

David  
Pannett's

## News

History of Bicton  
Part 189

The Addertons of Preston Montford



The Addertons of Preston Montford



A noticeable feature of TV programmes today is how many are repeats, often without any indication of original date. With this in mind, and after so many years of these history essays, would any repeats be noticed? Anyway, with the constant turnover of our local population, some repetition would be of interest to newcomers occupying both the old and the new dwellings.

This is certainly the case at Preston Montford, the Hall, farm and houses down the lane to Montford Bridge, which were first discussed exactly sixteen years ago. That essay coincided with the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Samuel Adderton who had built the Hall in about 1705. Dying on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1707, he did not enjoy it for very long and now lies in Shrewsbury Abbey between the first five pews and the modern communion rail. This part of town had been his original home and several other family members also lie in and around that church.

The year 2007 was also the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Field Centre at the Hall, and the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Thomas Telford, the designer of Montford Bridge and Holyhead Road improvements, all of which we have also described since. We must therefore concentrate on the Adderton story.

In the Middle Ages Abbey Foregate was almost a separate town under the control of the Abbot, but at the reformation it was united with the Borough of Shrewsbury. Now its citizens could participate in the trade and politics of the whole town, and now included Robert Adderton, a shoemaker newly arrived from Lichfield.

As the family expanded here, they continued to build up their fortunes as smiths, tailors and drapers over the next generations. They also involved themselves in various public duties such as church wardens at the Abbey. Eventually, in 1694, one Samuel Adderton even became Mayor of Shrewsbury and member of the Drapers Company.

In 1696, he would have witnessed the building of 'Newport House' (later Guildhall) in Dogpole which displayed the very latest fashion of brick building, which we now know as the 'Queen Anne' style. This must have been quite a sensation in such a 'timber-frame' town and no doubt Samuel would feel he needed something similar to match his new status.

The opportunity came with the purchase of the Preston Montford estate, formerly owned by the Calcott family, who also had links to the cloth trade. This meant he could enjoy life as a 'country gentleman' away from the congested town, while still being close enough to maintain business and social links. Indeed, he would have been but one of a succession of Shrewsbury businessmen, then and now, enjoying life in and around Bickton, which after all was then still part of the Shrewsbury parishes and 'Liberties of Shrewsbury', i.e. St Chads (Bickton and Rossall) and St Alkmunds (Preston Montford).

The new 'Hall' was built beside the old settlement and surrounded by a small park, which incidentally ensured the survival of some older ploughing patterns, which we have more recently discussed.

For greater privacy the present lane now replaced an earlier lane from Montford Bridge and where its former junction with the main road near the bridge is still marked by the orientation of the pub building. At the 'Hall' the rainwater heads still bear the initials of Samuel and his wife Eleanor.

When their son, also Samuel, took over he classed himself as a 'landed gentleman' and married into another local landed family. His children did likewise. The downside of all this, however, was that the various marriage settlements transferred some interest in the property to these other families, so that the Adderton grandchildren found themselves with less. In this way the Hills of Hawkstone, the Chambers of Petton and the Vernons, who also intermarried, took over the Hall and used it as a spare home, a dower house or let it out to other gentry, including Thomas Wingfield.

Nearby, along the road 'Montford Little Bridge' was built in similar style about the same time. Likewise a similar bridge still takes Preston Montford Lane across the same brook.

On the Montford side, the new approaches bypassed the small community in the valley around the original bridgehead. However the 'Clive Arms' Inn, formerly the 'Pheasant' and later the 'Powis Arms' was still accessible. On the Bicton side, some roadside waste was filled with buildings, including the 'Nags Head' public house.

Opposite side of the road, then in Preston Montford, the Swan Inn had long been there, with its stucco hiding a timber frame from the seventeenth century. The corner of its barn almost projected into Telford's new bridge until within living memory.

Actual contractors employed to build the bridge were Messrs. Carline and Tilley who subsequently obtained the contract to both design and build a new Welsh Bridge in Shrewsbury. Telford was naturally disappointed, but by now had plenty of other work to keep him busy. In 1800, the British and Irish parliaments were united and soon Irish MPs were lobbying the government to improve the roads between. Thus, after many surveys, reports and delays, money was allocated for the Holyhead Road project. Since by now Telford was a 'national' rather than just a local figure, he was appointed to oversee it all. In a bold move he chose a direct route through the Dee Valley rather than via the coast and Chester so that our local road became part of an important national route.

Bit by bit the necessary improvements were made and eventually in 1835 it was the turn of 'Montford Hill' (Grange Bank), where a steep gradient needed reducing. So now a combination of a deeper cutting at the summit and higher embankments each end ease the journey between Bicton and Montford Bridge, bypassing the roadside cottage community we know as Drury Lane. This final work was actually directed by John Provis, since Telford had just died. He always had a reputation for leading a good team of engineers, but they tend to get overlooked because of the fame of their chief. The new bridge was able to serve this route well for the next 172 years with little trouble, but then came the winter of 1964. All that is another story some other time.

# HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Offprint from

June 2023

No 683

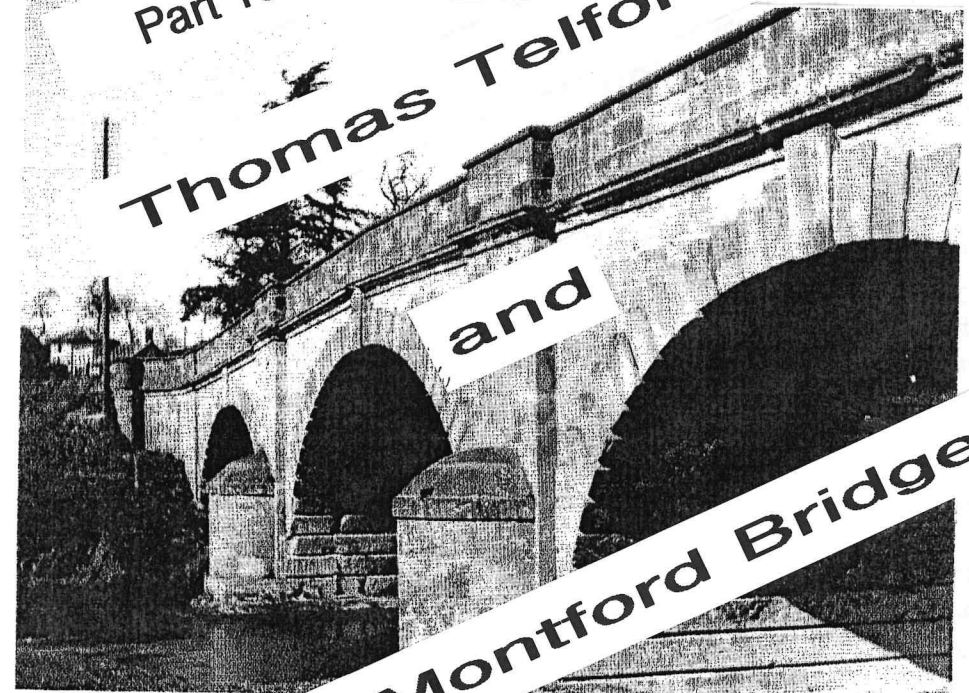
# Bicton Village News

Part 190

Thomas Telford

and

Montford Bridge

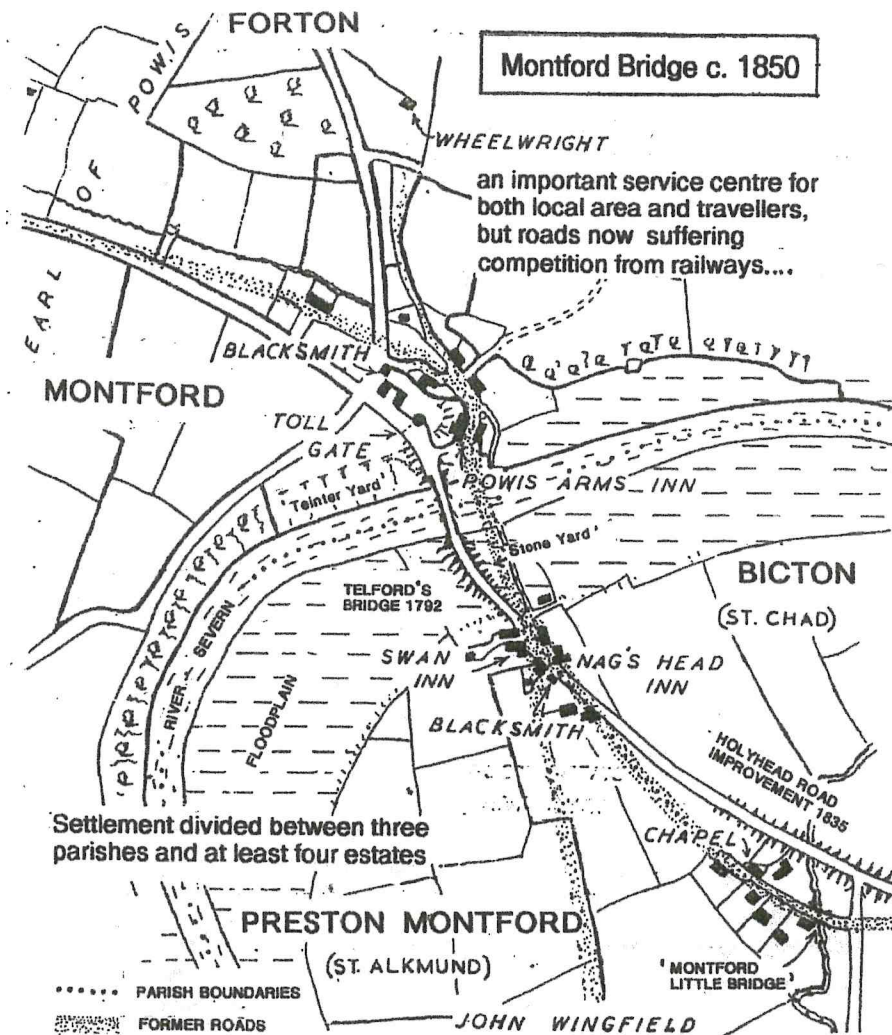


### Thomas Telford and Montford Bridge

Last month we commented upon the steady turnover of our local population, especially in the Montford Bridge area, where so many new houses are being built on both sides of the river. Newcomers may not even be aware of local history this century, let alone earlier ones. Now, as the summer holiday season approaches, there can be even more 'temporary' residents in tents and caravans in much the same position. Also, many motorists who cross the river on a modern concrete deck may be unaware of the fine stone bridge, hidden beneath, designed by the famous Thomas Telford in 1792. Cue for a repeat essay!

The earlier bridge had once stood a little further downstream, where its approach road could descend a small valley to reach it. Throughout its 500-year life it needed regular repairs, perhaps because of flood damage or just decay of its wooden deck. Between 1245 and 1412, the Crown granted the right to levy tolls in order to pay for them. In 1538 Leland reported that 'the fine stone bridge had been lately renewed'. Later, in 1608, the borough of Shrewsbury, now responsible for it, ordered minor repairs and, in 1628, levied a special tax in the town for major work. A century and a half on, it was becoming a question of a total replacement to meet the demands of increasing traffic in the 'Turnpike Age'.

After leaving his native Scotland, Telford had worked as a mason in London and Bath, gaining skills and experience before being invited to Shrewsbury by its MP, Sir William Pulteney, in 1787. The initial project was the restoration of the Castle for his patron, but work at the prison soon followed, which enhanced his reputation. All this led to his appointment as 'County Surveyor', which thereby gave him the task of rebuilding Montford Bridge. To avoid flood damage, he sprung it from the high cliff on the Montford side to a high ramp on the opposite side where it crossed the flood plain to reach the drier terrace surface. The old bridge was completely removed, and no doubt helped to fill this ramp and the interior of the new structure. It was therefore necessary to build a temporary bridge while all this was going on.



About the only relic of the old bridge is a stone bearing the date 1630, built into the back of the new toll house, which may be a reminder of that 1628 repair order.

For both bridge and toll house, Telford used red sandstone from Nesscliffe, as it was more conveniently accessible than the popular and better quality pale stone from Grinshill. Perhaps he had already been introduced to Nesscliffe by his work at the Castle, where colour matching had been important. Anyway, authorities kept him to a tight budget.

Elm also grows from suckers and once planted, can aggressively dominate whole lengths of hedge as can be seen in the heath area. Sadly, many show signs of Dutch Elm disease, but as old tops die the rootstocks continue to throw up new shoots, whose smoother bark is first uninviting to the dreaded beetle.

Planting such a mixture of suckers dug from local woodland and wasteland was typical of this 'enclosure' period and was actually described by an agricultural writer c1800. This certainly undermines that one species per century 'rule'.

Hawthorn' or 'quick' by contrast, is raised from seed and became the preferred material once commercial nurseries became established in the nineteenth century, (Including one on the Welshpool Road, known to have supplied plants to many gardens around Shrewsbury). Now mass planting of this simple species could take place, as along the new road towards Montford Bridge. It was also used to repair gaps in older hedges, while birds did their bit to spread seeds around.

Holly, also spread by seeds, appears widely for the same reason. Along parts of Calcott Lane it may also have been deliberately planted as an alternative to thorn.

Oak usually appears as standard trees, planted in hedges of many dates because of its timber. They often stand at regular intervals. Fine old specimens line Shepherds Lane, but where is the next generation?

Ash and Sycamore spread with winged seeds and can invade any hedge, the latter being a particular 'weed' shading out other species. Birds also spread Elder making hedges of all dates more diverse.

The latest hedge planting, apart from that around new 'suburban' gardens, has been along the new A5. Now with thoughts on nature conservation, mixed planting has been returned, even including Field Maple. So we are back to the 'Middle Ages'!

# HISTORY of BICTON

by David Pannett

Offprint from

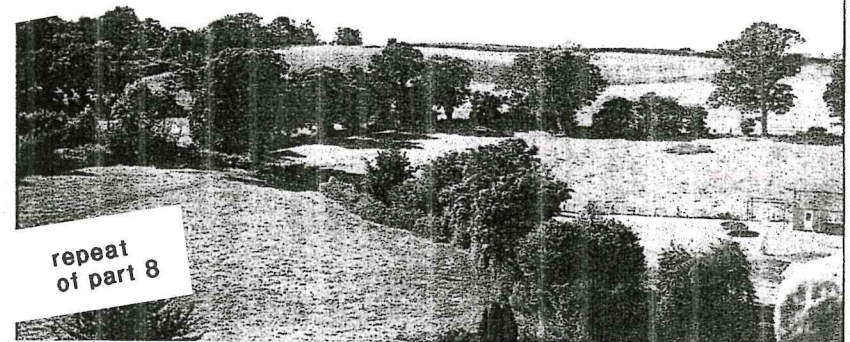
July 2023

No 684

# Bicton Village News

Part 191

## Hedgerow Shrubs and Landscape History



In July our hedgerows are in their prime, after spring growth and before annual trimming begins. As you explore our local landscape do notice what they are made of, as this can be of historical significance. A repeat of an old essay might help.....

## David Pannett's History of Bicton - Part 191

Part 8 - Hedgerow shrubs and landscape history  
(originally published October 2007, BVN No. 495)

Earlier instalments have explained the development of our local field pattern in terms of the enclosure of the open fields and heath, cottage encroachments and the improvement of the main roads. The actual plants forming the hedges, however, have not been discussed and this omission must now be corrected, before they shed their leaves this Autumn.

Many years ago, a professor of 'Local History' collaborated with an ecologist to explore the relationship between various hedges of known date and the trees and shrubs which they contained. They found that old hedges usually contained many more species than newer ones. In spite of the many variations in detail, they drew a straight line through their 'graph of data' which suggested that, on average, a hedge would gain a new species about every hundred years. One would just count the number in a sample 30-yard stretch and 'hey presto' you have a date! Such a simple rule was welcomed by the general public, reproduced in books, quoted by 'Jennifer Archer', Alan Titchmarsh and even by other presenters this very year. It is for this reason we must mention it, if only to chop it down a bit.

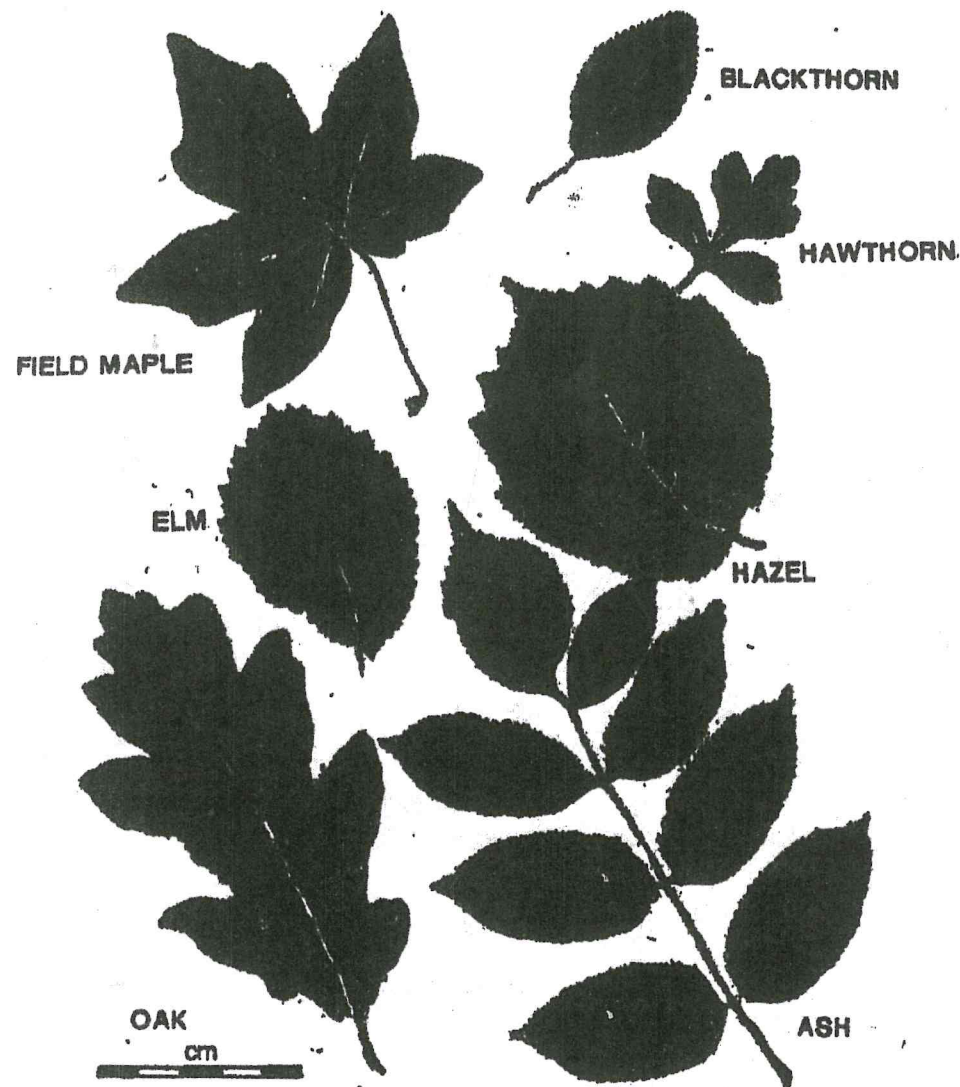
Detailed local studies, including some around Bicton, certainly confirm that old hedges are richer in species, but also reveal that the actual ones present are more significant than crude total numbers. Each has its own biological character which has influenced its place as a relic of the past, selected barrier or invading weed.

The most common hedgerow trees and shrubs around Bicton illustrate this principle well, as follows:

Field Maple our only native acer, and Hazel, do not spread very easily, but were important elements in the original wild woodland. They can be good clues to 'assarts', fields created directly from cleared woodland, and are found in hedges close to Bickley Coppice.

They also occur in the very ancient boundary winding westwards from the old church towards Bicton Grange, which separated the grange and

Some hedgerow shrubs in Bicton



demesne land from the open fields (where Telford's new road cuts this line there is a lone Hazel bush incorporated into the new road hedge). Similar old Hazel hedges mark the boundary of Calcott, the old lane to Preston Montford and the further parish boundary with Ford.

Blackthorn - propagated by suckers, was the preferred stockproof hedging plant used for the new enclosures from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Its relatives amongst the Prunus family include Sloe, Wild Plum and the cultivated Damson, an important source of fruit for cottage gardens.

David Pannett's  
**HISTORY  
of BICTON**


Offprint from

August 2023  
No 685

# Bicton Village

## Part 192 **News**

### Walking the Severn Way



Setting off through a gate opposite the Wingfield Arms, the path passes from one field to the next, where the shape of the ground tells the story of the river valley since the last Ice Age, which left a terminal moraine here. The view from the summit towards the Breidden Hills on the skyline includes the broad valley through which that ice poured down from Wales 20,000 years ago.

The remainder of the route includes a variety of green lanes, roadways and paths, whose shapes and hedgerow flora reflect their different origins. Medieval woodland clearance, seventeenth century enclosure of 'open fields', nineteenth century enclosure of Rossall Heath. Thus most stages of our landscape history are represented.

On the way, look over the hedge for the medieval ridges, relics of the 'open fields' surviving near the village and shown up by LIDAR (Mar '18) and in air photographs.

Details of these varied features are still available in 'offprints' of past essays.

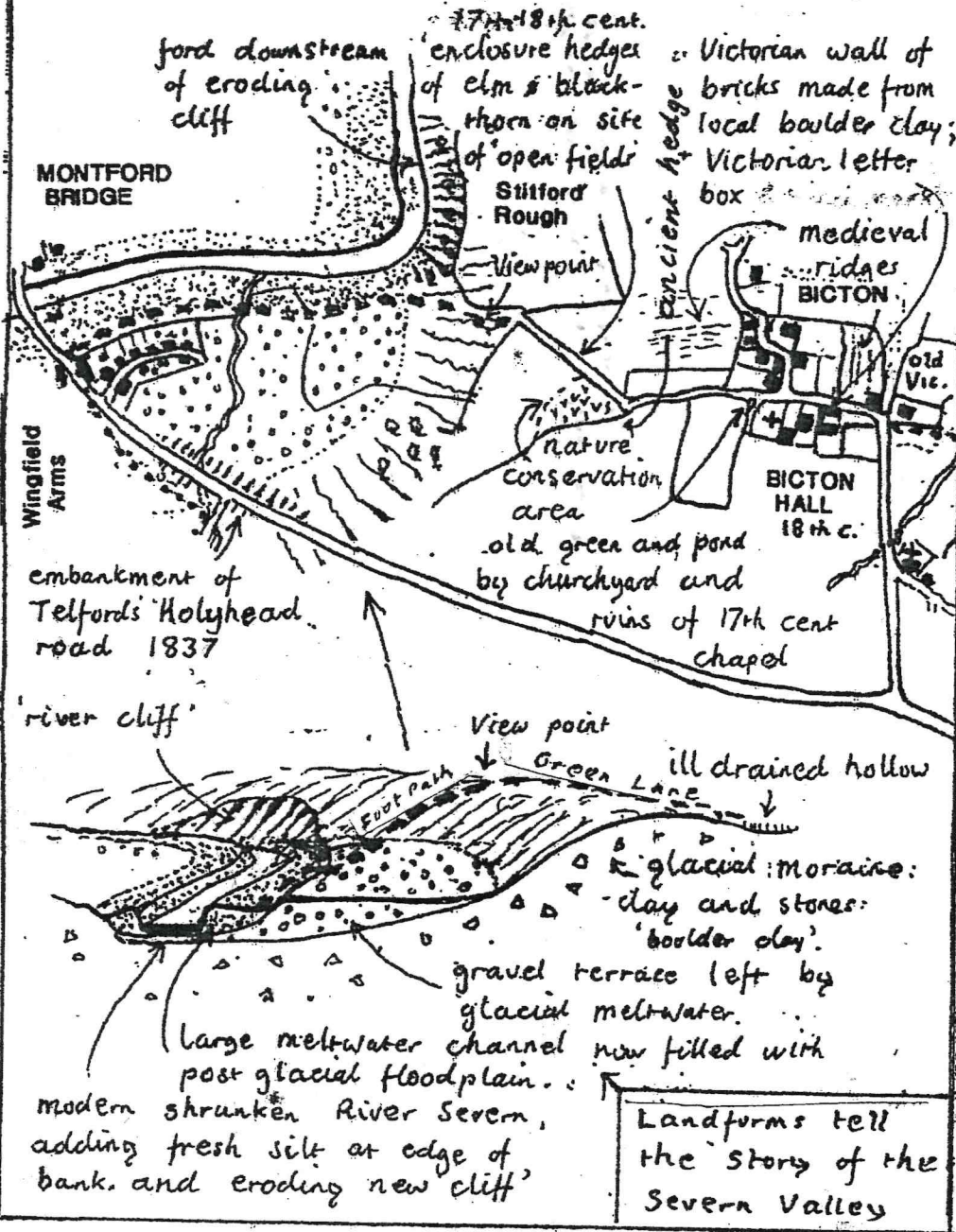
Anyway, do 'put on your boots', and 'open your eyes' and enjoy the exercise.

While we have long summer days and the school holiday, why not take a country walk exploring our neighbourhood? How about part of the Severn Way which passes through Bicton village on a route avoiding all those bends around the Isle? Although intended for the long-distance walker, it should also be an asset to our own local community.

By using it, locals are in a good position to report any problems to relevant authorities. For instance, the Parish Council has recently organised improvements to the path near the old church and pond. A walk could also include the 'Wingfield Arms' at one end or the 'Priory' at the other, while the X5 bus could help with the round trip.

A guide to the whole route from the Welsh hills to the Severn estuary was published many years ago, giving practical advice in following the path, but gave little explanation of the landscape of the landscape traversed. For our Bicton section, we therefore have an opportunity to correct this using material published in these pages over the years. For instance, the story of Montford Bridge, where the path enters the parish and the hedgerow shrubs to be seen along the way, have only recently been discussed (June & July '23).

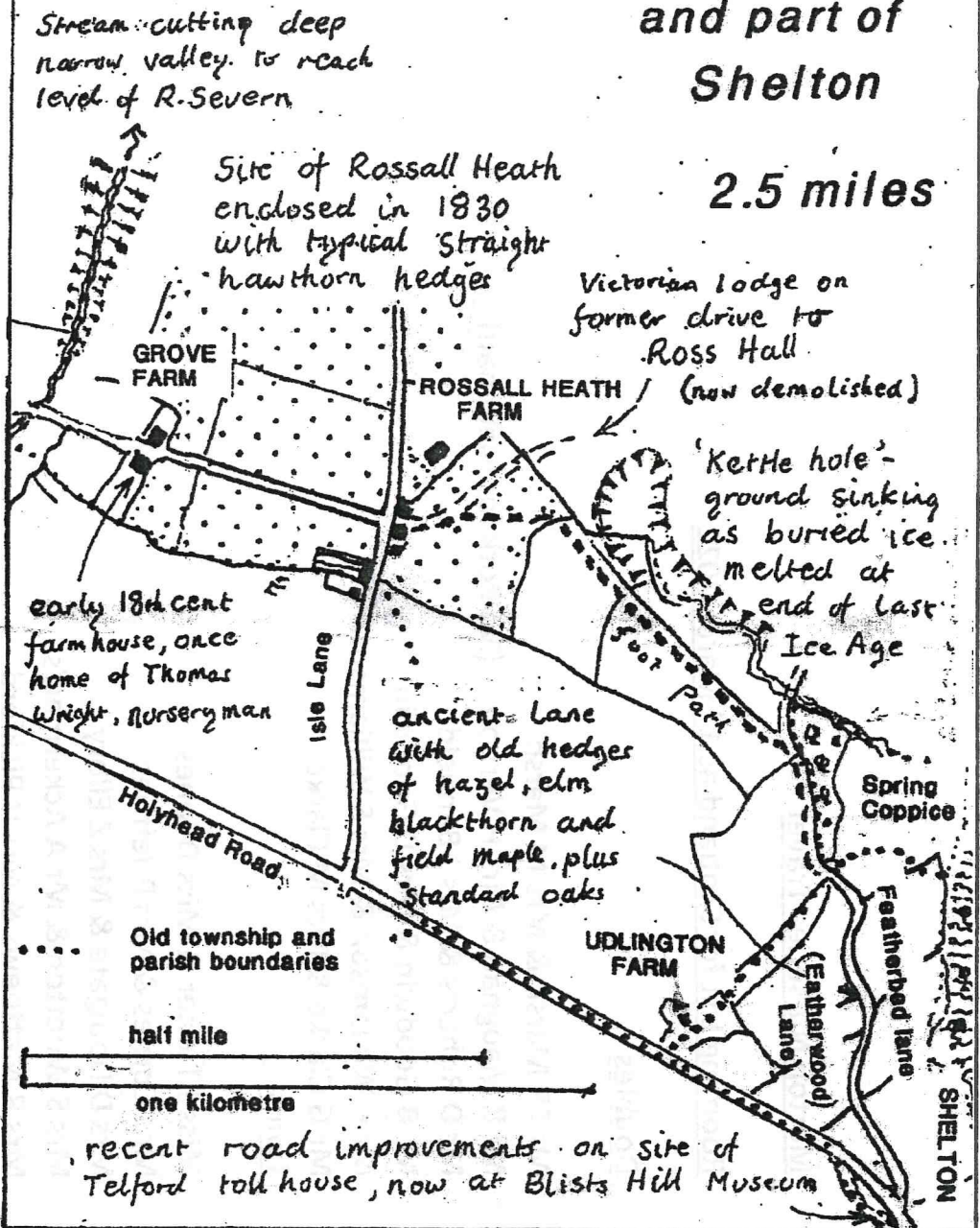
# The Severn Way



# through Bicton

and part of Shelton

2.5 miles





Meanwhile in South Shropshire, the parish of Clungunford had a school so well endowed that it could employ a schoolmaster. In 1841 it was James Bowlker with his wife Frances and their four children. Unfortunately, he died in 1845 aged only 55, so that widow and family had to find a new home making way for a new master. Hence the move to Bicton.

The 1851 Census recorded Frances 54 here as schoolmistress with her son James 18 and Emily Howel 17, a niece. Thomas Edwards, road surveyor who had been living in 'Old School House' in 1843 was now at Myrtle Cottage in Bicton Lane. How and when this was organised is unrecorded.

At some stage son James obtained a bookkeeping job at a newspaper office in Liverpool where he was joined by elder sister to keep house for him. Mother must have joined them when she became ill and died in 1859. This was just when the new school was being prepared, which would have made her redundant anyway.

Once again the next census in 1851 offered several names which could have been new tenants, most of them linked to farm work. The census did however reveal Harriet Shuker, daughter of a farming family at Hyssington as the first teacher at the new school. Aged 21, it must have been her first post, but it turned out to be last as well when she married John Davies from Bicton Farm in 1866 and moved with him to Liverpool too. With two other brothers at home his contribution to the farm work would not have been missed!

Meanwhile, William Lewis from Montford Bridge married Mary Birch from Broomfields across the river. At first they lived at Mary's home where first son Walter was born in 1865. Soon after, however, Old School House became vacant so they could move in, filling it with six more children and even taking in Mary's sister's child, produced in a broken relationship.

Looking at the building, as it was before a 1970s extension, one wonders how they could all be fitted in. No wonder Walter emigrated and was last heard of in Chicago!

In the end the family were to be tenants for over sixty years, longer than any others... but that is all another story.

David  
Pannett's

**HISTORY  
of BICTON**

Offprint from

**September 2023**

No 686

**Bicton Village**

Part 193

**News**

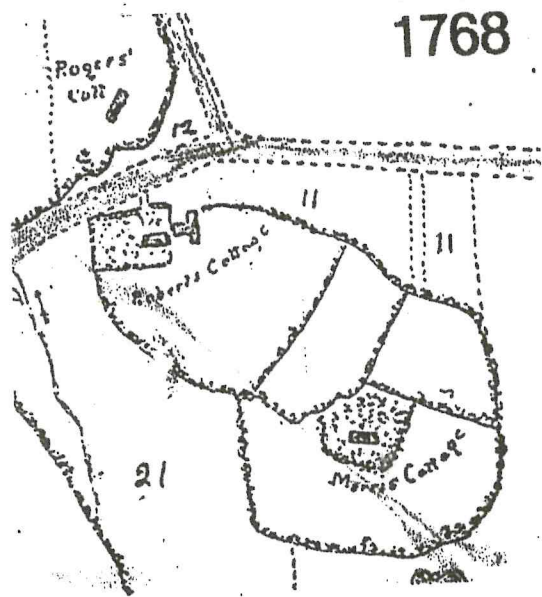
Old School  
House

Each September marks the start of the new school year and perhaps prompts us to reflect on past years. Here in Bicton, since 2007, we have had a new school building in a very 'modern' style, replacing the 1860 'Victorian' building on the main road which nevertheless remains in educational use. Opposite stands an even earlier cottage known as 'Old School House', once the home of the late Mary Fowles, whose life we discussed 2 years ago (July '21). What had been its contribution to local education?

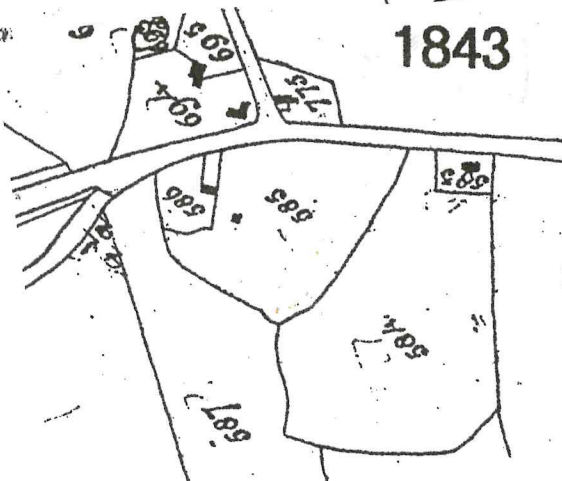
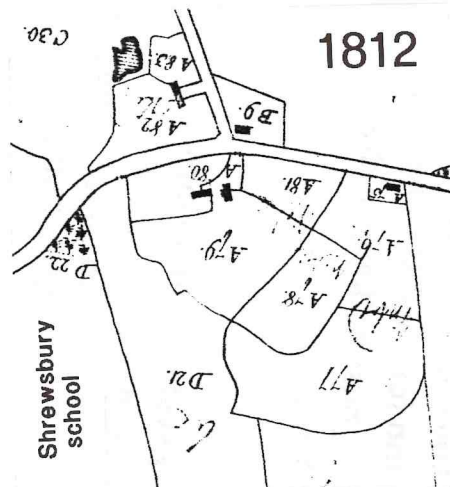
The small group of cottages and fields on this side of the road started as 'encroachments' around the heath, which once stretched from here to the Welshpool Road. When it was 'enclosed' in 1768, John Mytton of Halston claimed 'lordship of the manor' and was thereby 'allotted' all such encroachments and the cottages which they contained. By now, they must have been quite old and unfit for habitation, so many were rebuilt on better sites.

John Saxton's map of 1812 (Shrewsbury School) recorded the new layout, which now included a 'charity school' run by Sarah Boot.

Before the modern educational system got underway in the late nineteenth century, local children were often served by what were then termed 'Dame Schools'. They would have been run by single women, usually widows with some education, using their own homes.



Shropshire  
archives



The Bicton example would fit this general mould, with Sarah being supported by small fees and charitable donations.

Landlord John Mytton, after his death, was succeeded by 'Jack', who became famous for his wayward life squandering the wealth of the estate. As a result some land had to be sold to raise funds.

The sale catalogue of 1824 now listed Mary Boot as tenant, but we can only guess at her relationship with Sarah. Other local landowners, including John Gittins of Bicton (Red House Farm) were now able to add pieces to their existing estates. Thus the 'Old School' became attached to 'Red House' with which it would remain associated into modern times. However, the actual sale document in 1825 made no mention of school, only Mary Boot as tenant.

This situation was confirmed by the parish survey on 1830 (Shropshire Archives) in which Richard Rogers appeared as a new tenant. Then, when John died in 1833, even 'Red House' was let to tenants, administered by Richard Gittins of Shrawardine. The 1845 Census recorded Nathaniel Hughes at the farm, but the tenants of 'Old School House' cannot be clearly identified, since there were several farm labourers in that part of the enumeration perambulation. Thomas Gittin 58 and wife Martha 54, 'living on own means' are a possibility through their family connection with the landlord.

The 1841 Census also recorded other forms of education still going on in the parish. In particular, widow, Mrs Jellico, and her daughter were running a private boarding school for boys at the 'Cottage', now the 'White House', up in the old village. Fifteen small boys aged 6-10 were recorded that year.

The wider Jellicoe family, originally from Shifnal, included land surveyors so were not without knowledge and skills for such work. Many members of the family lie in our old churchyard revealing some early deaths. Did those little boys bring disease with them?

Charles Dickens in his novel Nicholas Nickleby tried to expose the horrors of such schools illustrated by 'Dotheboys Hall'. We hope that the ladies of Bicton ran a more humane institution. His hero Nicholas also did some home tutoring, which was more suited to girls. Locally, Henry Whitly, a Shrewsbury architect living at Udlington, employed Ann Cooper, 20 as governess for his four daughters and one son under 10.

Meanwhile, George was also busy with voluntary work including being treasurer of the CofE Missionary Society, secretary to the National Union of Teachers and active member of Oddfellows Friendly Society. Church activity appears to have been more at St George's, Frankwell rather than in Bicton, so that he could have enjoyed a more private life away from his professional community.

In 1916, after 38 years in Bicton, George and the family moved to Frankwell, while Mrs Chidley replaced him at the school. Was this more just coincidence or directly related to the tragedy unfolding on the 'Western Front' involving son Denis? As we have already discussed in these pages (Nov. '15), he became the only soldier from Shropshire to be 'shot at dawn' for repeated desertion in 1916 and 17. Had that good home life left him unable to cope with the stresses of war?

George, however, was not yet of retirement age and did a few more years at Chirk Bank council school - until 1923, after which he spent a busy retirement with the St George's Church community. He died in 1928, while Sophie followed in 1931, both now lie in the general cemetery. By coincidence successor Emily Chidley had already died in 1923 and lies at Oxon.

Emily, born 1869, had been the daughter of David and Emily Williams in Bicton Heath. However, at the early death of David, an asylum attendant, mother had to support the family by taking on the Bicton Heath Post Office.

Here, the 1891 census recorded her with daughter Emily, a student at a 'School Mistress training college'. Then, instead of pursuing this career, Emily married Richard Chidley, a farmer from Smethcote. By 1901 their new home was another farm at Hurdley in Edgton, where first child Constance was born.

The 1911 census then revealed an unusual situation whereby Emily, now 42, was headteacher at Bromlow, complete with husband and two children. They all moved to Bicton in 1916 where Emily was later to 'die in harness'. What became of the rest of the family is another story, which still involved Bicton, since Constance became the headteacher.

**HISTORY  
of BICTON**  
by David Pannett

Offprint from

**October 2023**

No.687

# Bicton

Part 194

Bicton School

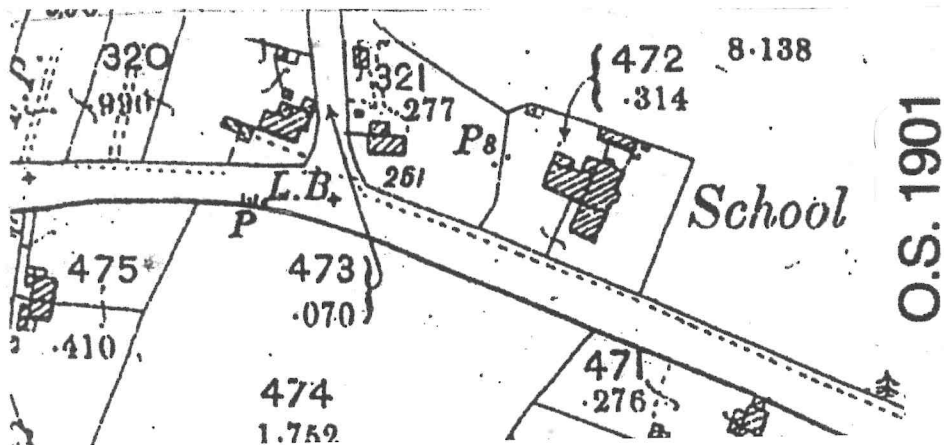
The First

60 Years

# Village News

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

Bicton School - The first 60 years



Last month we told the story of the Old School House, so now it is the turn of the new one built in 1860, where Harriet Shuker became the first mistress.

Starting here at the age of only twenty, she was obviously very much at a marriageable age and therefore did not stay long! John Davies, one of three brothers at Bicton Farm, married her in 1866 and together they started a new life in Liverpool.

Her replacement was Emily Painter, aged 21, from a blacksmith family at Wyken in Worfield. In the 1861 census she was already a 'pupil teacher', while still at home and by 1871 occupied the new school house at Bicton. Here there was room to spare for her to take in a farm working couple as lodgers. Meanwhile in the little old school house across the road every spare space was being filled with Lewis children.

How and why Emily left is a mystery, since searches through relevant records have drawn a blank. Emigration could even be an explanation, since shipping lines at Liverpool were now advertising in Shropshire newspapers. At least two Lewis sons sailed to New York a few years later to escape that crowded cottage. Emily's parents had both died, 1869 and 1874, so perhaps she may have felt free of family responsibilities.

George Blakemore had been born in 1858, eldest son of six children of William and Emma Blakemore of Shrewsbury, where William was a clerk to a cabinet manufactory. While in Shrewsbury, George met Sophie Henley, who was then an apprentice dressmaker with Walter Davies. They married in 1879 and set up home in the Bicton School house, which they then started filling with children, eventually eight altogether.

Sophie herself had experienced a broken childhood, during which she spent more time with grand-parents in Llandrinio from whom she took the name Jetson.

Census 1871

House No.	Occupant	Relationship	Age	Occupation
75	Thomas Pannett	Head	46	Tanner
	John Garbett	Wife	46	Wife
	John D.	Son	13	School
76	Emily Painter	Head	26	School mistress
	Thomas Griffiths	Wife	39	Wife
	Martha Lewis	Son	18	Wife
77	William Lewis	Head	36	Blacksmith
	Mary Lewis	Wife	33	Wife
	Walter Lewis	Son	6	
	Frederick Lewis	Son	5	
	Mary Lewis	Daughter	2	
	Anna Lewis	Daughter	1	
78	William Boycher	Head	57	Tanner
	Barrett	Wife	57	Wife
	Emma	Daughter	11	

While many such girls might have gone on into domestic service in some 'big house', Sophie was instead sent to Shrewsbury to learn a proper trade. In this way she brought to the school both a professional skill and a strong desire to build a normal family life.

As the children grew up they were slow to leave home, while eldest daughters Florence and Alice were even employed as sewing mistresses along with mother. The school was almost becoming a 'family business'. Expanding activity also led to the enlargement of the building to the size we see now.

The boys did, however, pursue other careers, starting with apprenticeships while younger daughter Gertrude took a clerical job. As a result of this work being in Shrewsbury, 'just down the road', the 1911 census records six of the children still living at home.



Left to right:

**Back Row:**

Billy Broughall, George Pope, Victor Buckley, John Matthews, Geoffrey Williams, Arthur Evans, Miss Catterill

**2<sup>nd</sup> Row: (from back)**

Dorothy Lewis, ? Reeves, Alice Powell, Edna Edge, Margaret Bailey, Gwen Evans, Joyce Higgs, Ivy (or Joyce) Price.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Row:**

Joyce Edwards, Phyllis Edwards, ? Asterley ? Ivy Powell, Unknown, Unknown, Joan Edwards, Unknown

**4<sup>th</sup> Row:**

Margaret Cassels, ? Ivy Powell, Phyllis Morris, Brian Warner, Denis Brown, Teddy Davies

**Front Row:**

Katherine Bailey, ? Cassels, Unknown, ? Roberts

# Village News

## David Pannett's History of Bicton part 195 Bicton School - The 1920s

As we discuss the history of Bicton School it is appropriate to repeat the memories of Dorothy Lewis who died in 2020, aged 100.

The following essay was first published in the Bicton Village News in September, 2008.

Dorothy Lewis was born at Milnsbridge, Shepherd's Lane in 1920. She is almost certainly the oldest Bicton resident who attended Bicton School, as recognised by the plaque which was unveiled when the new school was formally opened in 2007. Recently she reminisced about her time at the old school which she entered in 1925.

"My eldest sister, Mary, three years older, was already a pupil there as had been my brothers Walter, Herbert and Alan. I have very fond memories of my first teacher, Miss Helen Davies who was a very young teacher indeed. Miss Dutton was Headteacher but I don't have such fond memories of her! She used to cane 'naughty' children across the hand. She lived in the Headteacher's house and had a maid. If children were feeling unwell, they'd be sent to the maid for a spoonful of ginger in hot water!

I also remember Miss Bradfield who used to cycle from Shrewsbury. Every morning we had to recite the Catechism and there were regular visits from the Vicar, Mr Lawson who had a large family - but they didn't attend the village school. Miss Davies taught us to read and luckily, I was quick to learn to read. We were given beads to thread and there was a sand tray for us to play with. We learned to knit and to sew with coloured wools and coarse hessian.

We used to go home for dinner, and I remember on one occasion we were asked to see who could bring back the biggest spray of blackberries. I was very proud when mine was adjudged the biggest and I was very flattered when Miss Davies asked if I minded if she took charge of the blackberries - I'd never been asked before if I minded about anything.

We used to have milk from bottles with a real piece of straw, not a plastic one. It was 1/3rd pint and cost a penny (an old one that is)! The milk was delivered by the farmer, Mr Alf Clarke, who also had the job of collecting and returning children from Isle Park, for which he was paid £2 a week by the council - big money in those days.

I can remember too, my big disappointment at Christmas when we were lined up to be given an orange each by Miss Dutton. When she got to me, last in the line, the box was empty and she said, "I'm sorry, they've all gone"! One was found for me subsequently. The classmates I can remember were Margaret Bailey, Phyllis Morris and Denis Brown (who, poor man, was drowned when HMS Hood was sunk by the German battleship Bismarck in 1941) In 1927.

I was placed in Standard One. We started every piece of work with the date, and I still start my letters as I was taught. We wrote with scratch pens with ink which was made with water on powder ink wells. It was the job of the ink monitor to fill the ink wells. We had to moisten the pen nibs and we got mucky hands. We had PT, drill and we played rounders.

The boys sometimes went up to Mr Buckley at the blacksmiths' shop for some tuition. One memorable occasion was when a student teacher, Miss Turner, took two of us to the West Midlands Show and my mother made me a dress of Green voile for a special occasion.

Some years ago, Miss Turner, aged 90, returned to the school for a special occasion. She was now Mrs Garside and had become headteacher. After Mrs Dutton left, Miss Chidley became headteacher and I didn't like her! I remember still when she said to me, "You'll never be a lady like your mother", which was very hurtful.

There were special days e.g. Empire Day and there was a Sunday School party on Holy Innocents Day when we had bread and butter, a piece of plain slab cake and a cracker. We also received a present from Miss Millbank of Bicton Hall. The school was used for whist drives (organised by the Sandfords of Uddington) and any sandwiches that were left over were eaten by the children the next day.

Traffic was light in those days, of course, and we used to play 'whips and tops' on the main road. My whip and top used to be hidden in the hedge because I might have been told off if my parents knew!

There were visits from the Medical Officer which was quite something because we couldn't afford to have a doctor at home (hurrah for the National Health Service!); and twice a year a dentist came to school and carried out treatment at the school, including extractions. He was nice man and I used to enjoy his visits because of the attention I received. Other visitors included Mrs Davey to inspect PT and drill, the Attendance Officer and Mr Richard Sandford who was, I think, a Governor.

The other 'medical event' I can vividly remember has nothing to do with school apart from the fact I was away for a time. I was admitted to the Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital in 1927 to have my tonsils out. My mother took me on the 3 o'clock bus from the Four Crosses armed with a towel and a slab of carbolic soap. This was on the Wednesday. The operation was on the Thursday and on Friday morning my mother and sister came to collect me, still seeping a little blood. They brought a little drop of milk for me to sip in a whiskey bottle of granny's. We went home on the bus because we couldn't afford a taxi.

I failed the scholarship for the Priory where my sister went (Mathematics let me down) and I went to the Lancasterian School which has no fond memories for me. I envied the Priory girls in their uniform and with their longer holidays. To this day I feel bitter about the separation of children into sheep and goats at eleven. I felt a sense of shame because I didn't go to the Priory.

After I left school in 1934, I stayed at home for a time helping my mother, but in 1937 I started training at the Royal Salop Infirmary to become a nurse.....but that's another story."