## 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 1886. I like the tower - the monkey puzzle tree was cut down years ago. However, one must agree with the writer that the visitor would find Bicton a rather dull village without an old church, a picturesque house or even a central focus like a green. On the other hand this 'ordinary' village illustrates very well some typical features of the Shropshire rural landscape and by studying it we can learn more about the ways in which this developed.

Historically Bicton lies in the ancient township of Bicton and Calcot which was an outlying part of the parish of St. Chad, Shrewsbury. It did not therefore have its own parish church in the Middle Ages, although a chapel was referred to in the fourteenth century and another was built here in the sixteenth century and rebuilt in the eighteenth. Bicton did not become an Independent parish until the present church was built in 1886. This story is, of course, not unusual in this county where most of the medieval parishes embraced wide areas containing many separate townships of other small farms and hamlets. (The name 'Ruyton-XI-Towns' is a well-known example of this). The adjacent township of Preston Montford, since joined to Bicton Parish, similarly belonged to St. Alkmunds, Shrewsbury.

### The Ice Age and after

The township area embraces some distinctive landforms produced by the glacial and post-glacial history of the Shropshire plain and these have greatly influenced the development of the man-made landscape. The actual village site, for instance, stands on a north-south ridge of sand, clay and stones, built up as a 'terminal moraine' by the Severn Valley Glacier over 20,000 years ago. At its maximum this ice had previously reached as far east as Shrewsbury where it had met other ice from the Irish Sea resulting in many detached ice blocks becoming buried in each other's deposits.

## HISTORY OF BICTON contd....

As the ice front melted back to the Bicton line, those blocks of ice also slowly melted resulting in a surface deeply pitted with hollows termed 'kettle holes' some of which became filled with water to form Oxon Pool and Calcott Moss.

Bore holes for the new road and an old well at the Four Crosses Inn show the deposits to be over 100 feet thick in places especially in a deep trench in the underlying solid rock running from west to east towards Shrewsbury along which the deepest 'kettle holes' can now be seen

As the ice front finally melted back even further, its waters fed the new River Severn, which cut a narrow winding valley through the moraine, leaving crescent shaped cliffs on the outside of its bends and level terraces of gravel on the inside. The last 10,000 years have brought warmer and drier climates which have caused the river to shrink and fill parts of the old channel with silt to form the flood plain. The stream flowing through the village also incised its lower valley to keep pace.

The Bicton soils and natural drainage therefore present a complex mixture of stiff 'boulder-clay' and sands laid down by the glaciers and melt waters and together they really constitute an 'arctic landscape covered with grass'. To understand it further we must arrange a visit to Iceland or Spitzbergen!

The link between history and these landforms lies in their varied suitability to early cultivation. The sloping sides of the moraine, especially around the river valley, provided the best natural drainage and helped determine the site of the village and its medieval arable fields. The uneven and ill-drained zone of kettle holes on the other hand was left as wasteland, only suitable for rough grazing and some peat cutting and therefore became known as Bicton Heath. The 'Calcott' part of the township likewise followed this same pattern but on a small scale with Upper Calcott Farm atop the ridge and Lower Calcott on the edge of the heathland.

Almost by accident, the long-distance route of the Shrewsbury-Oswestry Road, later the Holyhead Road, also crosses the township, experiencing its own problems with the relief and contributing its own influence on settlement patterns, all of which will be discussed in later instalments.
*David Pannett*

*David Pannett has kindly agreed to re-write our local history . Editor.*

This map refers to article "History Of Bicton"



**BICTON & CALCOTT**

THE PATTERN OF PARISHES AND TOWN-SHIPS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

N

MYTTON

200

Bickley

FORTON

ROSSALL HEATH

Montford Bridge

250

BICTON

ROSSALL

MONTFORD

R. SEVERN

PRESTON MONTFORD

The Grange

CALCOTT

BICTON HEATH

OXON

ONSLOW

SHELTON

one kilometre

Contours ○ Pools ........ Township boundaries
Steep slopes Medieval heathland
Floodplain Medieval woodland
Gravel terrace Main roads