

Apart from Europe and the weather, topics frequently discussed in political circles include welfare benefits, voluntary work, housing, education, apprenticeships and social mobility. Looking back we can find the very same issues arising in the life and times of John Paddock of Bicton, 1851-1939.

He was born in the village, the second son of Thomas Paddock, farm labourer and wife Jane (nee Mathews). They had a typical 'Victorian' family of nine children, the eldest of which had to leave home early in order to make room for younger siblings. Supporting such a large family was an obvious financial burden, without the resources enjoyed by Victoria and Albert, so mother Jane was also a laundress. The elder boys were also apprenticed to trades which might allow them to escape from low paid agricultural work. Elder brother Edward became a carriage builder, while younger brother Alfred became a carpenter.

John himself was apprenticed to John Edwards, carpenter and wheelwright, at Forton Bank, just across the river, where he also lodged. By this time the elderly widowed tradesman was being helped at home and in the workshop by his widowed daughter and her own family. The 1871 census revealed another crowded household of seven including another lad of John's age.

By 1881 John had married Sarah Ann and set up home and business back here in Bicton. From now on his life followed an unusual path, in that they had no children, at a time when those large families were the norm. One wonders if his experience with the strains which they could bring may have been a factor. Thus free of such extra responsibility he now devoted his life to various aspects of service to the wider community, while at the same time following his trade.

In a way he had already become involved in such voluntary work while still a school boy. Thanks to his education he had been able to help his father become a very successful secretary to the local branch of the 'Ancient Order of Foresters' Friendly Society. It was no surprise that John actually then took on the role himself.

Before 'National Insurance' and related state benefits, which we now take for granted, such 'mutual' societies provided a valuable safety net for the working man struck down by illness. Their subscriptions were usually invested in order to yield an income from which benefits could be paid out as and when needed. Government enquiries in 1873 and subsequent regulations revealed that our local branches or 'courts' were, in fact, managed very well and could be a model for others.

Such 'courts' could also be the focus of social contact, which included an annual service at Bicton, followed by a meal at their 'home base', the Wingfield Arms. At such events best suits, bowler hats and colourful sashes were proudly worn, not unlike those Orange Men in Northern Ireland. Other 'Friendly Societies' such as the 'Oddfellows' and the 'Ancient Order of Buffaloes' operated in a similar fashion elsewhere.

Thanks to such an early start, John eventually served a total of sixty one years with the organisation. As a by-product of this he also became involved as a trustee to both St Chad's and Shrewsbury Municipal Charities, which also embraced Bicton.

This same early start with his administrative experience enabled John to also take on the role of Parish Clerk by 1880, in fact not long after such modern civil parishes had been created. He was to hold this post for over thirty years and only handed over to John Barlow when he became chairman of the parish council instead. In recognition of such work he was also appointed a JP at a time when

this role was more often associated with landed gentry or professions rather than the 'working man'.

As in most rural villages local carpenters would usually produce coffins as and when needed and generally act as undertakers. As sexton to Bicton Church John also undertook such duties with help from fellow carpenter brother Alfred, now doing small scale farming at the Pound.

Meanwhile, John's other relatives and their families were also striving to improve themselves, mainly by finding work beyond the village. Those who stayed here were working their way up the farming ladder to eventually take on the tenancies of larger village farms.. As John's energy waned in the thirties, nephew James was able to take over his role in the Foresters.

Wife Sarah died in 1933, after which John moved in with one of his employees, John Whittingham, at Mayfield House which they had built themselves. By strange coincidence, or just by sharing an infection, both died in July 1939, aged 57 and 87 respectively. With no immediate family to organise such things, John lacks a clear memorial in the churchyard. However, all around the village are 'monuments' to his work as a builder: Mayfield, Roselea in Church Lane, New Cottages on Shepherds Lane and cottages on the Holyhead Road where he once lived. There may be other items of carpentry in local properties. In this way, we can be reminded of his contribution to the life and landscape of the village as we pass by.



JOHN PADDOCK
1851-1939

A.O.F. Juvenile Society. 1929

No	NAMES	Quarterly Subscriptions.		Arrears.	Week ending Sat.	Week ending Sat.	Week ending Sat.	Week ending Sat.
		s.	d.		July	aug	Sept	
	H. W. Clarke	1	0		"	"	1/0	
	Thos W. Allen	1	0		"	"	2/0	
	Edith M. Allen	1	0		"	"	2/0	
	Peter Butler	1	0		"	"	1/0	
	Kenneth Butler	1	0		"	"	1/0	
Endow	Alfred Deweyla	3	0		"	"	3/0	
Endow	Ricki Daries	3	0		"	"	3/0	
Endow	William Daries	3	0		"	"	3/0	
	Norman Noon	"	6		"	"		
	Lester Gwilt	1	0		4	4	4	
Endow	Hansley Gwilt	3	0		1/0	1/0	1/0	
Endow	Edw. J. Whittingham		0		"	"	5/0	
	Francis Lee	1	0		"	"	1/0	
					"	"	"	
					"	"	"	
					"	"	"	
					1/4	1/4	24/4	

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