

The pattern of fields in the ancient 'township' of Bicton and Calcott developed during the course of several centuries, but has experienced rapid change in recent decades. This is not a unique situation, but one which is common to many parts of Britain as illustrated in last month's 'I Spy' exercise.

The original pattern, as shown by 19th century maps, consisted of mainly medium sized fields of about 10-15 acres. Those around the village were created on the site of the three medieval 'Open Fields', probably in the late 17th century. However, many lines of hedges still reflect the earlier layout of 'furlongs', the groups of ridges and strips in those old fields. Also, in spite of these changes, the farmsteads remained in the old village, although enlarged and improved, so that a radiating network of lanes was necessary to connect them with their outlying land.

The south-eastern third of the township appears to be quite different, as it was once mainly open heathland until 1768 and had become a scatter of cottage smallholdings between which the new roads and straight hedges were then fitted.

The south-west corner is in many ways rather a mystery. It includes land of a former 'grange' belonging to Buildwas Abbey, as well as a separate estate at Calcott belonging to St John's Hospital, Frankwell. How much of an old pattern did the new, post-reformation owners inherit and how much did they establish a new one is just guesswork.

The whole pattern survived more or less intact into the 20th century, partly thanks to periods of economic depression and the local emphasis on dairy farming. In the post-war years, however, the combined effects of bigger machinery and support policies encouraging greater production required the enlargement of fields. Also some of the old permanent pastures came under the plough. Here and there a lone oak tree can still record the loss of an old hedge.

Farm amalgamations also took place as tenancies expired or owner-occupiers retired. Some specialised production units require bigger buildings. Some farmland was now being taken over by 'suburban' type housing, while the spaces between small-holder cottages are being filled in. Further development is threatened in the south-east corner.

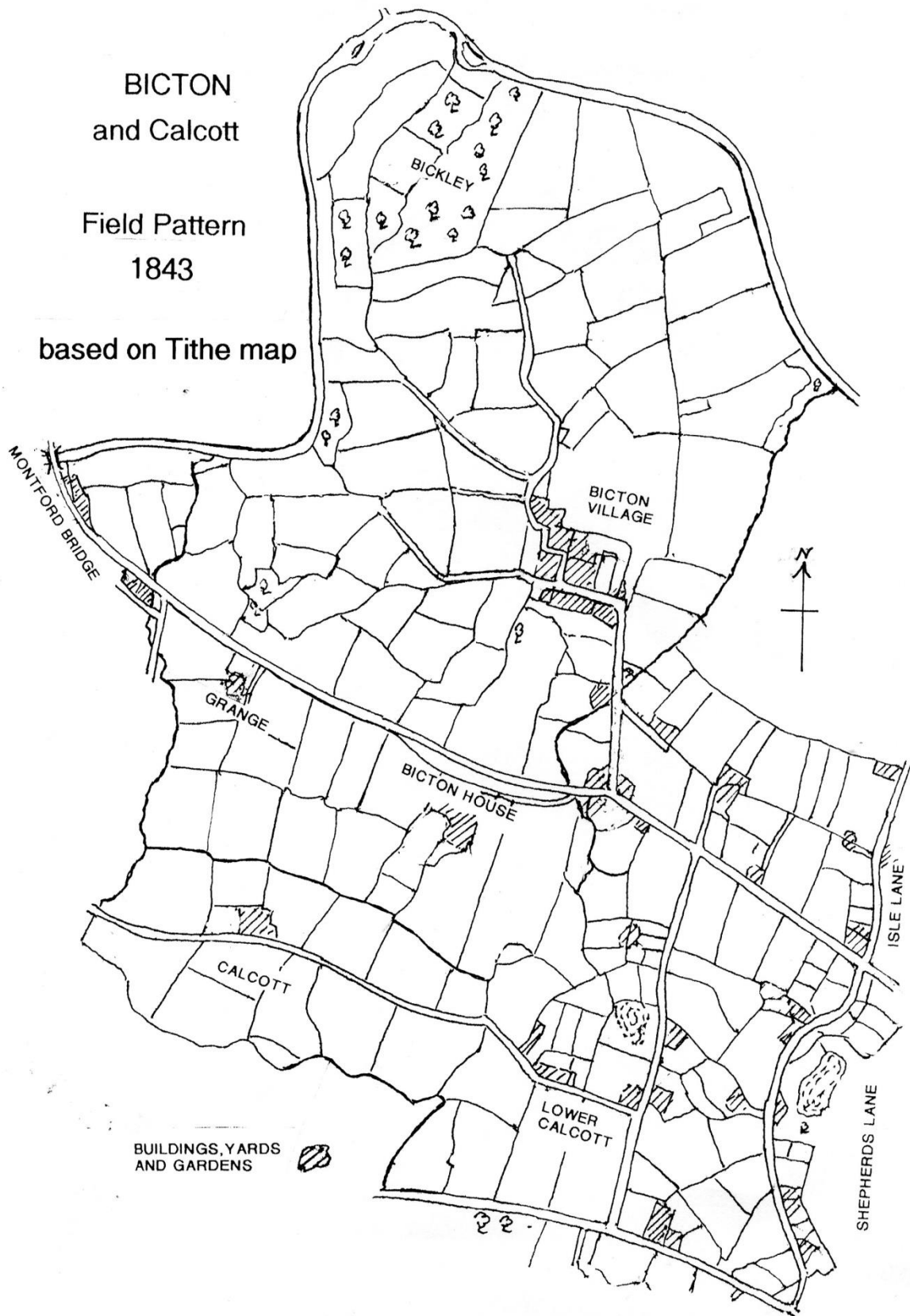
The new A5 has cut right across the field pattern and the NW Relief Road is still on plans for the future.

Watch this space!

BICTON
and Calcott

Field Pattern
1843

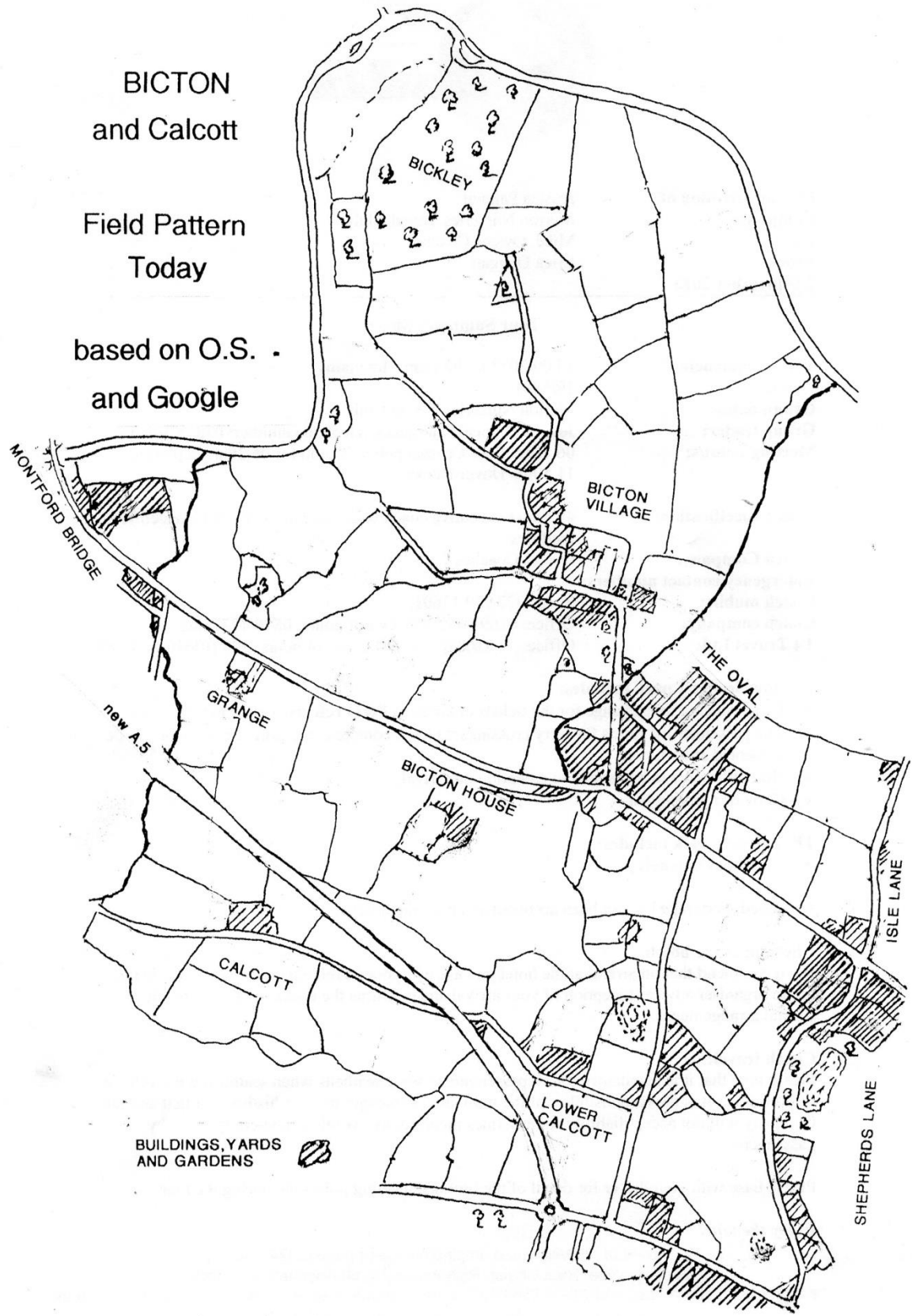
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BICTON
and Calcott

Field Pattern
Today

based on O.S. .
and Google



BUILDINGS, YARDS
AND GARDENS

