

Some time ago in this series (Dec 2013) we discussed the life of Ernest Lewis of Bicton, born at Old chool House in 1878. As he grew up, the bicycle was taking on its modern form and thus increasing local mobility, while photography was developing, catering both for amateurs at home and professionals in their studios. Putting these inventions together, Ernest would cycle around the Shrewsbury area taking photographs of people near their own homes, rather than in a conventional studio in town. His main business was actually as a watchmaker, who also needed to cycle around winding important clocks (including Bicton Church after 1822) and he may have met photographic 'subjects' this way.

As a result, many local family archives may have examples of his work, but back at his own home at Milnsbridge, only a few of his glass negatives survived family 'de-cluttering' after his death in 1957. Now, thanks to modern computer technology, it is possible to reproduce them, as shown by four examples here. They date from years around 1910, but it is not always obvious where in the neighbourhood they were taken. Clues in the background may help and any suggestions from readers would be welcome.

Photographs at this time were generally 'staged', avoiding natural movement because of the long exposure necessary. They were also generally associated with special events such as weddings, when all would be in their 'Sunday best' rather than working clothes. Indeed, just to be photographed was a special event in itself.

The examples illustrate aspects of typical pre-1914 fashions: long skirts for grown up women, waists pinched in by hidden corsets, billowing blouses hiding busts pushed up by those corsets, high neckline at one end and 'button-up' boots peeping out at the other. The formal dress for men looked equally uncomfortable with high starched collars (later celluloid). Waistcoats held the slimmer figures tight, and also housed the pocket watch. The 'walrus' or 'soup strainer' moustaches were common, perhaps avoiding navigating a 'cut throat' razor around the nose and lips, before Mr Gillette had improved the design.

Versions of 'sailor suits' with wide collars were popular for both boys and girls.

It would be an interesting exercise to 're-stage' these group scenes in modern dress. Now we tend to be more 'casual' with a wider range of styles and fabrics available, including 'high viz' jackets for cyclists. The female figure can also be better appreciated. The resulting photograph would then be fed straight into the computer!

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1914





