

## History of Bicton

### David Pannett's history of Bicton (Part 13) Chapel, Church and Clergy

The present ecclesiastical parish of Bicton only dates from 1855, when it was formed out of several local "townships", which had been only detached parts of Shrewsbury parishes. (Bicton, the Isle and Rossall - St Chads, Preston Montford - St Alkmond) at most, each had been a mere "chapelry" dependant upon the mother church. A chaplain is mentioned in a Bicton deed of 1368.

This was naturally inconvenient to people in these rural hamlets and for this reason William Fisher of Bicton petitioned the Pope, in 1453, to be allowed a Chaplain for his new chapel. He played up the difficulties of the journey, especially for women and even claimed some had been drowned in flood water half way to St Chads. There is no other record of his chapel, dedicated to St Catherine, nor evidence on the ground and indeed the later chapel was dedicated to the Holy Trinity.

This building, which appears from it's brick and stone design, to be late seventeenth century, stands near Bicton Hall, perhaps on land taken from that estate or from the adjacent village green. Significantly, the earliest surviving reference to it is in 1676 when Richard Taylor of Bicton, left money for a teacher at a school in the chapel. Nevertheless, Richard himself was buried at St Chads beside his daughter.

During the eighteenth century this simple building was altered in several ways: repairs were needed in 1741 and then in 1754, a north west side chapel was added over the burial vaults of the Sandford family, owners of the Isle. When, in 1788, old St Chads collapsed (as predicted by Thomas Telford) its beautiful wooden altar piece was moved here, requiring an extension of the East end to accommodate it.

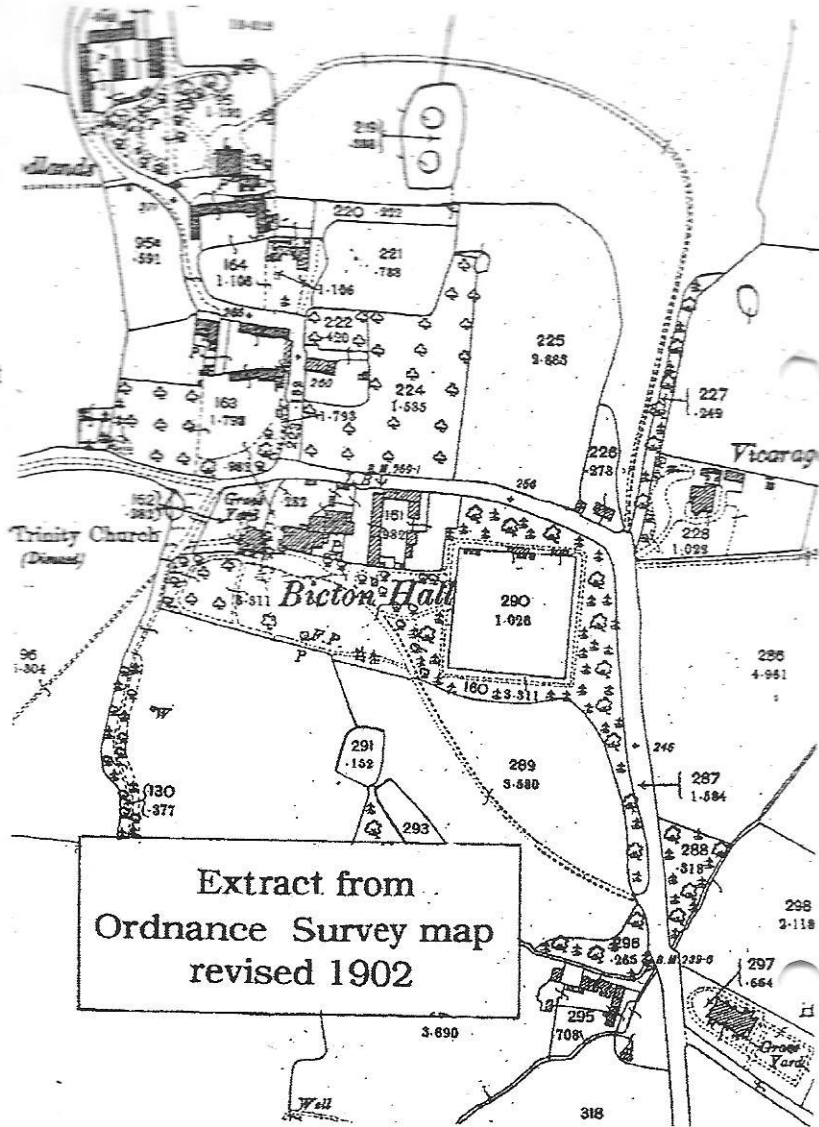
In the nineteenth century, as the Wingfield family of Onslow were extending their land holding in the parish, they built another side chapel on the north east side over their own burial vault. Associated memorial tablets line the walls.

While under the management of St Chads, several chaplains were also masters of Shrewsbury school, whose endowments happen to include the tithes of Bicton. Then, in the years 1816 to 1851, Humphrey Sandford of the Isle was incumbent, followed by his son Edward, 1851-1853 and then another son William, who thus became the first independent vicar of Bicton. As they were already resident local gentry, there was no need for a vicarage.

It was not uncommon for sons of landed gentry to enter the church in this way. According to an old joke, ~~st~~im sons joined the army while clever ones joined the church, each having a career appropriate to his social status and ability. (Trade and commerce were generally looked down upon!)

Eventually a vicarage was needed when George Newton Lloyd was appointed in 1869. He was provided with a spacious "Victorian" villa with room for both family and living in staff. (Cook, maid and gardener/groom in 1881 census). Typical Victorian exotic trees, now quite mature, almost hid the building from view.

With such domestic help and usually only one parish, Victorian clergy often had leisure to follow other interests or put their scholarly education to good use. We have no information about the Rev Lloyd, but around the same time several local clergy were making great contributions to antiquarian research. The Reverends Blakeway, Cranage and Drinkwater transcribed and published many historical documents, which help us study our local history, including that of Bicton. Significantly, the young Charles Darwin turned to "Divinity" at Cambridge when



Extract from  
Ordnance Survey map  
revised 1902

he gave up medical studies at Edinburgh, thinking that life as a country parson would give him more time for natural history.

The Reverend Lloyd died soon after and was therefore one of the first to occupy the new burial ground (more about this church later).

The old church was not totally abandoned straight away, as it still held so many family vaults and was indeed restored for the funeral of Humphrey Sandford in 1907. Now it is but a ruin. Do visit, if you have not seen it already and see the sad state of this corner of the village.