

## David Pannett's History of Bicton part 16 Putting Bicton on the Map

Old maps are full of interest for two reasons: firstly, they reveal the story of cartography through progressive improvements in surveying and printing. Secondly, they provide valuable clues to the changes in the landscape and have already been used in previous instalments (February). The enlarged extracts from the most important maps should therefore be of interest to all in the area.

Bicton or 'Bickton' first appeared on the map by Christopher Saxton, who have been commissioned by Queen Elizabeth and chief minister Cecil to produce an atlas of the kingdom in 1575. John Speed, a commercial map publisher, copied much of this work for his own atlas of the English counties in 1610. He made use of uniform symbols for the villages and woodland in a way followed by many later map makers. The printing plates were probably engraved (in reverse!) by Dutch experts and were put to use for further editions through the rest of the century.

While the atlas gave a good impression of the general Geography of the counties, maps showing roads would be more useful to travellers. Other cartographers such as John Ogilby and Emanuel Bowen provided these.

The greatest advances in map making came in the second half of the eighteenth century. Better surveying and printing at larger scales led to more detailed maps of whole counties. Such larger maps could be made up of four or six printed sheets pasted together. One of the most successful map makers at this time was John Rocque, a French immigrant, who produced very accurate plans of several towns, including Shrewsbury, and expanded his work to cover whole counties. The details which he portrayed include both hard facts and very rough estimates. Locally his map shows the older road system at Preston Montford and also a stange symbol at Bicton Grove. Does this represent the actual 'grove of trees' which gave the name, or did Rocque insert a symbolic pattern suggested by the name?

One stimulus to improvement at this time came from the 'society of Arts', which offered prizes for the best county maps at the scale of one inch to one mile. Many fine new maps of Midland counties were produced as a result, but locally one by Robert Baugh in 1808, appears to be still rather 'old fashioned' and simple. His main work had been with surveying new Turnpike Roads, including those planned by Thomas Telford and in view of this, his map can be appreciated as a very practical road map. Other features were reduced to 'conventional signs' rather than true portraits of 'big houses' and churches. The more 'mainstream' trends in cartography are better represented by the work of Christopher Greenwood and his brother. They ran a family business producing such maps of counties. They were very ambitious, but not always commercially successful and some of their long term plans for national coverage and repeated revisions were by then being overtaken by the work of the Ordnance Survey. At the time of their Shropshire map in 1827, such 'government' surveyors had already passed through Bicton. What happened next must wait for another instalment.



