

David Pannett's History of Bickton Part 18

The Ups and Downs of Rossall Heath

The early nineteenth century maps discussed in June and July all showed Rossall Heath, albeit with differing outlines, before its enclosure (inclosure) in 1829-30. As with Bickton Heath (Sept 07), this was carried out by agreement between the principle landowners, in this case Folliot Sandford (The Isle), Henry Wentworth Powys ('Ross Hall'), Lady Boyne (Udlington) and Sir Richard Jenkins (Grove and part of Rossall). Otherwise there were great differences between the two areas. Firstly, the site of Rossall Heath is a fairly flat plateau of 'boulder clay' overlying glacial sand and lacks any 'kettle hole' deformation, which is such a feature of Bickton Heath (Sept 07).

Secondly, its outline was more regular, without the typical cottage encroachments, except those of Messrs Morris and Tipton just inside its southern entrance. Other apparent encroachments seem to have been better planned, as around Grove Farm. Otherwise the river and township boundaries marked other sides. Anciently it may have joined Bickton Heath, but at some stage it became separated by that regular pattern of fields laid out near Bickton Villa.

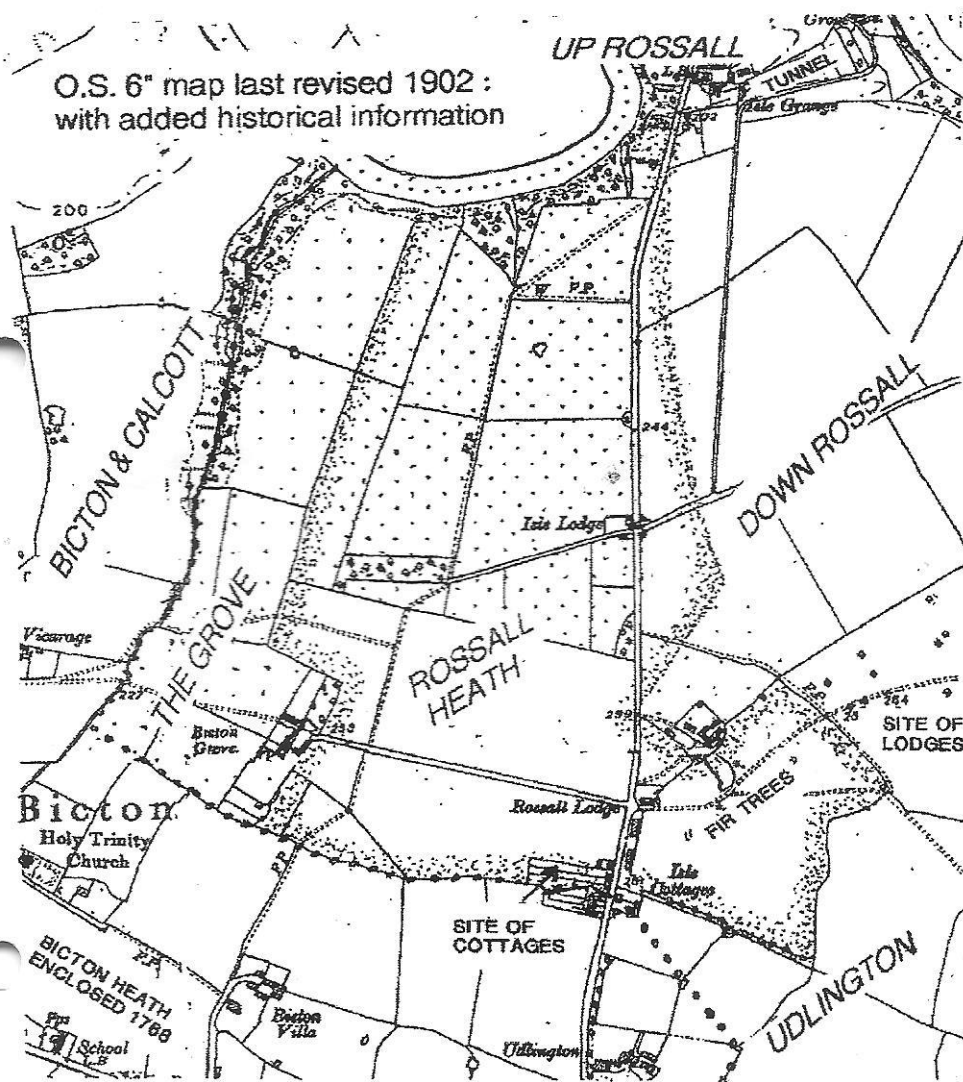
With no obvious problems of soil or drainage, one might well wonder why it had not become normal farmland much earlier. One explanation may be the many disputes between the local estates, each defending a right to use it, especially in the seventeenth century when medieval subsistence farming was giving way to modern forms of commercial management.

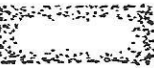


'Lordship of the Manor' and therefore ownership of the 'soil' was then claimed by the owners of Rossall (Down Rossall), especially the long established Sturry family. The attempts of their tenants to plough the heath were challenged by the owners of the Isle (up Rossall) including the Sandfords, who claimed that their own tenants had always grazed their cattle and pigs there, as well as cut 'furze' or gorse (one of the best fuels for preheating traditional bread ovens, thanks to the wax coating on its spiny leaves).

To complicate matters, the Borough Corporation also claimed jurisdiction, as it was waste ground within the 'Liberties of Shrewsbury' and ordered the heath to be 'thrown open' in 1667. Just at this time, the Sturry family were running out of male heirs to continue their control and it may be significant that, soon after, a surviving map shows 50 acres taken out of the heath for the use of Humphrey Sandford and William Emerton. Then, in 1679, the Borough gave the inhabitants of "UP ROSSALL" permission to plough the heath, by which time DOWN ROSSALL was under new ownership, which also continued some litigation.

With all this going on, it is no surprise later map makers confused by the actual area of the heath.

O.S. 6" map last revised 1902 :
with added historical information



- Township Boundary
-  Heath enclosed 1829-30
-  1669 enclosure
-  Earlier encroachments

Perhaps, private surveyors marked what they saw, or copied from others, while the Ordnance Survey took greater care with its legal definition. That map of Humphrey Sandford's 50 acres incidentally show adjacent buildings on the site of Grove Farm and Rossall Heath Farm (business park), suggesting some of Sturry's encroachments had become permanent.

The eighteenth century saw the UP ROSSALL Sandford Estate absorbing the other properties on the peninsula, while shedding Uddington. DOWN ROSSALL saw the amalgamation of farms and the dominance of the "Ross Hall" estate. In this way, fewer interested parties were now involved in the heath and it became much easier to reach an agreement for formal enclosure and division of its 112 acres. (In the case of that 50 acres it was remarked that it was being enclosed for the second time).

The resulting pattern of "allotments" and roads now stand out with their typical straight hawthorne hedges, contrasting with the surrounding "old enclosures" with less straight hedges of elm and blackthorn (Oct 07). Sheep were banned from new fields for eight years to allow the "quick" to become established. Against the old Rossall Estate, exchanges of land and subsequent improvements have since blurred the distinction between the old and new field patterns, however.

At the entrance to the heath the two encroachments of Morris and Tipton were "tidied up" to become the present terrace of cottages and their long gardens. Nearby, the lodges that once stood at the entrance to "Ross Hall" drive were likewise replaced by new ones on the Isle Lane. "Fir Trees", already lining that drive, were mentioned in the agreement, but have since disappeared with age. They were probably Scotts Pine, like those nearby at Uddington. Another curious feature mentioned in the agreement was the tunnel across the neck of the Isle. (Feb 08) to which Sir Richard Jenkins was to be allowed access for maintenance, since his "ancestor" (father?) had built it. By this time he was living at Bicton Hall after returning from eventful service in India between 1807 and 1826. He continued his busy life as MP for Shrewsbury and when he died in 1853 was buried in the old church. His memorial tablet was later transferred to the new church where the words "Buried under the floor of this church" are now misleading. Towards the end of his life responsibility for the tunnel was transferred to the Isle Estate, after which tunnel and mill do not appear to have survived much longer. There is a story here which needs further investigation; likewise there is more to be discussed about his property at Bicton Grove. Watch this space.