

## Nurserymen of Bickton

### David Pannett's History of Bickton Part 19

In 1719 'The Orders of the Borough of Shrewsbury' stated that walks to be planted in the Quarry in such a manner as Mr Mayer shall think fit.

In this way the authorities began changing the common pasture, bleaching grounds and drying space for the local washerwomen into the public park we know today.

One may wonder how 400 lime trees could be obtained at that time. Fortunately a nurseryman Thomas Wright was close at hand at Shelton to supply them. Around the same time other big gardens from Hawkstone to Castle Bromwich were also buying trees from him.

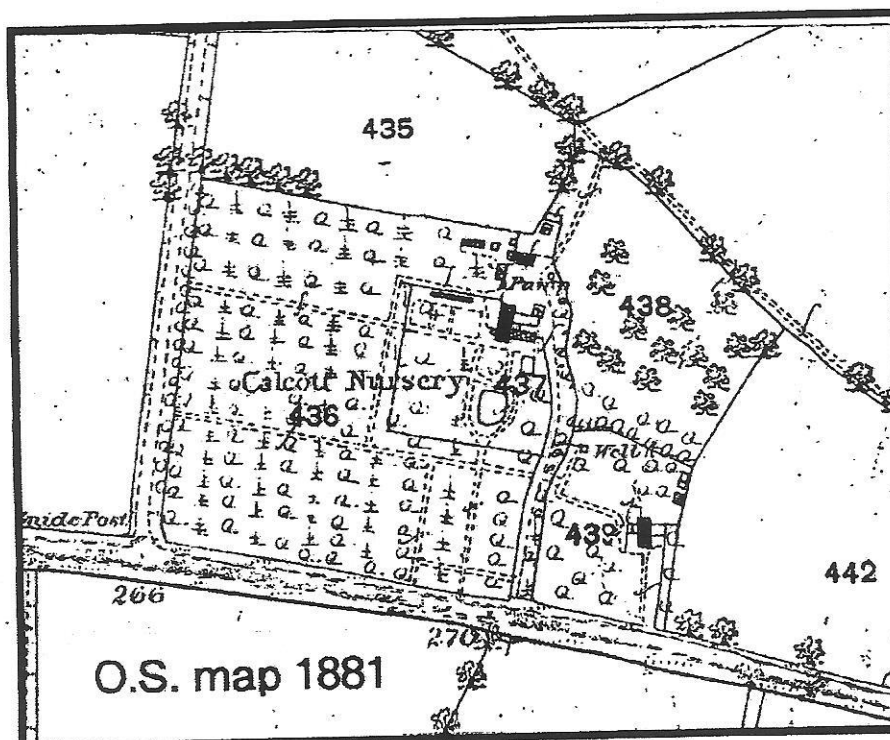
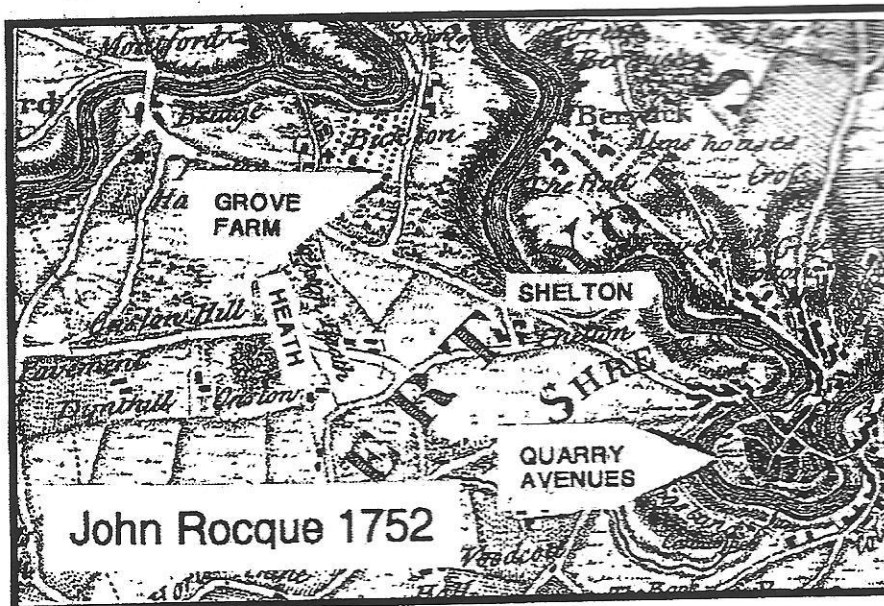
Little is known of his base, except that it may have been at his father's house, the largest in Shelton when taxed for hearths in 1672. As Presbyterian dissenter his birth records have not survived so well, but the St Chad's register records his marriage in 1720 to Abigail Griffiths (probably from Dinthill).

No doubt he then started looking for a suitable family home of his own and in 1729 bought Grove Farm from Edward Gosnell owner of Down Rossall. He did some improvements to the existing house, giving it the general appearance it has today. One reason why this then survived so well was the sad loss of his three sons (2 in military service) so that after his own death in 1777, it was occupied by tenants and not further developed.

The new property offered more space for nursery enterprise and records show him supplying more trees to Castle Bromwich Hall in 1740. We can therefore understand the 'grove' symbol on John Rocques map of 1752 and the name it now acquired (June 08). Significantly, a detailed map made around the time of his death shows no clues to the business and merely conventional farmland. Clearly Thomas was a 'one off' enthusiast and his business died with him.

Thomas Wright's daughter-in-law Eleanor, twice widowed, lived here until 1822 and was buried in Bickton old churchyard. The remaining in-laws then sold the property to Sir Richard Jenkins on his return from India in 1827 (Oct 08). At first he lived at Bickton Hall, letting the farmland to the Peters family, but when his mother died he moved to London so the Hall was also let. For many years this was to be to Cotes sisters (Nov 07). He died in 1853 leaving no male heirs so the properties were also auctioned off and acquired by the expanding Wingfield Estate.

Meanwhile as this nursery was fading from their memory another one was developing in Bickton, which also involved the name Wright. The historian might be tempted to see a link, but there is no evidence of this. (Please delete my comments in Dec 07 instalment!)



The holding in question was originally a cottage encroachment on the heath near the Welshpool Road, occupied by Mr Wright\*, which at the enclosure of the heath in 1768 became part of the Mytton estate, (the Lord of the manor) and its boundaries improved. In 1812 it was worked by Isaac Mullock, although Margaret Wright still lived there. In 1817 the Shrewsbury Chronicle advertised a 'sale of nursery stock' perhaps suggesting the closure of Mullock's business. Significantly at the great auction of the Mytton property in 1825 (to pay of Jack's debts), John Tudor was now running the nursery while 'Widow Wright' still lived in the cottage there. As a result of this sale, the holding was added to the Wingfield Estate under whom a succession of only three tenants ran the nursery for the rest of the century: John Millman, John Wilson and his grandson John Davidson.

The ordnance survey of 1881 well illustrates the nursery with a version of that 'grove' symbol.

There must have been a good business for such a local nursery at this time, as more and more suburban villas were built around Shrewsbury, such as along The Mount and also Bicton Vicarage. New exotic plants were becoming available to fill fashionable shrubberies and flower beds. There was correspondingly a demand for 'gardeners'. Census returns record 3 living in cottages around the 'heath' area in 1851 and this number had doubled around 1881.

By 1900, however, the maps show only normal farmland on this holding and the word 'nurseryman' disappeared from the local 'trade directories', nevertheless the name remained as Calcott Nursery for this address.

Just think, in modern times it might have been a good site for a retail nursery and garden centre. This role was later to be taken over by Merton Nurseries on the old A5 - but that is another story.

(I must thank Roger Ratcliffe for sharing results of research he had commissioned Ernie Jenkins for browsing the old Shrewsbury Chronicles and Paul Stamper for his study of Shropshire Gardens).

\* John Wright  
buried 1809