

David Pannett's history of Bicton no 23
Montford Bridge at our service (part 2)

Although the inn trade in Montford Bridge contracted during the late nineteenth century as railways reduced road traffic, local tradesmen continued to serve the local community: two Blacksmiths, two shoemakers, a tailor and a Carpenter. On the Bicton side, the Thomas family opened a shop and Post Office, which William, in particular, ran for over forty years before his death in 1922, when Elizabeth carried on the business for a few more years. Their shop, like the 'Nags Head', has since been adapted to purely residential use after the post office moved to the Montford side with Walter Griffiths.

By this time, after the 'Great War', many aspects of country life were changing. On the roads, smooth 'tarmacadam' was steadily replacing the traditional dusty gravel and the number of private cars, buses and bicycles increased to make contact with town much easier for everyone. By 1926, for instance, 'Midland Red' were running a daily service from Shrewsbury, allowing local people to access the shops there and bypass local tradesmen. Morris & Co could even deliver groceries to order (Vaggs later took over the bus routes).

In the other direction, new motorists and cyclists could enjoy the delights of our river or ride on further to Wales. Nationally many city dwellers were discovering the countryside for the first ever time, a situation illustrated by the covers on colourful 'Popular' maps of the Ordnance Survey.

Such activities along the road obviously needed servicing and it is significant that by 1929 the peoples refreshment room association had taken over the Wingfield Arms occupied by Reginald Deacin and then Alfred Hinksman. Meanwhile, on the Montford side, SJ Hayward and Co, who had originally set up as a steam haulage business, now developed it as 'Montford Bridge Garage'. Its property also included 'Severn House', the late 'Powys Arms' which it ran briefly as a private hotel.

Some traditional tradesmen remained throughout this period, notably Henry Kynaston, who combined the duties of Blacksmith, Carpenter and Undertaker in a way typical of many rural areas. Also, Francis Welford continued to repair boots for many years.

Montford Bridge was now also gaining more residents, after the sale of the Powys Estate had opened up land development at a time when planning regulations were still rather weak. 'Ribbon development' thus spread towards Forton. On the Bicton side, by contrast, following the 1919 'Local Authority Housing Act' Atcham R.D.C built its new 'Rural Cottages' on the new crescent. Nationally, the thirties saw great expansion of such house and road building



and it is no surprise that the company of E&E Rogers first exploited the local glacial sand (behind PO) and then found Montford Bridge to be a good site for a depot and focus its distribution network between scattered pits.

Fast forward to modern times, we have the growth of traffic on the A5 becoming so great that a new bypass became necessary. Now, within the settlement many of the commercial services and activities have been replaced with yet more houses. On the plus side, it is now better for

campers and caravanners to enjoy the peace of the countryside as it might have been in the thirties.

Throughout these times, one local function has been quietly expanding, the telephone. The '850' automatic exchange once occupied a little 'hut' by Drury Lane, but as demand increased, it moved to a bigger 'shed' by the Crescent. Now electronics have replaced the bulky 'Snowger' switches, it has been able to move back leaving the 'shed' to be converted to yet more housing. With broadband it carries a lot more traffic, some of which has been undermining traditional work of a Post Office! In addition, mobile masts now appear on the local skyline. Local tradesmen for instance can be contacted wherever they are and do not need an obvious 'shop' in Montford Bridge.