

## David Pannett's History of Bicton. – No 26

### Focus on Four Crosses

The Four Crosses Inn and adjacent garage are familiar landmarks to both residents and passersby, although somewhat detached from the rest of the village. They form an important service centre for the local area and have also been the scene of many traffic accidents thanks to the road pattern which accounts for the name.

The story of this site started in the eighteenth century when a Mr. Paddock enclosed a small patch of the heath for his cottage. At the 'inclosure' in 1768, along with many similar encroachments it was granted to John Mytton of Halston as 'Lord of the Manor.' (Dec 07). The new road pattern was laid out by the surveyors in a regular manner typical of such situations.

Such an important crossroads site clearly lent itself to commercial development and it is no surprise to find the cottage enlarged to an inn by 1812, when it was occupied by William Parrock, together with 8 acres of land. This was similar to the story of the Nags Head in Montford Bridge (Feb. 09) and in 1824 it was likewise sold to settle the debts of 'Mad Jack' Mytton. The tenant at the time was John Parrock, probably William's son. In this way it was added to the adjacent property of the Smith family, which also included the blacksmiths shop and land across the road from the inn. For the next hundred years at least, the inn was to remain linked to this land, so that part-time farming could also take place, not unlike the situation the Wingfield Arms.

Further tenants came and went over the years, including Richard Srtinger, S. Roberts, John Davies and Richard Light. At some stage, probably by the 1860s, the original inn was replaced by a new building right on the corner of the road. The Ordnance survey first recorded it on the 1881 map, while a sale catalogue of 1887 shows it in greater detail. Its symmetrical facade with central gable over the front door can still be recognised, although the interior layout has been greatly modified since.

Perhaps by this sale, it was acquired by Southams Brewery of

Shrewsbury and, from then on, for almost the next hundred years, it was to be some sort of 'tied house' run by successive managers and tenants under different companies. Their tenants included William Cookson, Thomas Sandbrook, Thomas Baker and Edwin Powell.

Official reports on licensed houses in 1896 and 1901 listed it as having 2 kitchens, 1 bar, 1 smokeroom, 5 bedrooms, a back kitchen and cellar. Outside there was stabling for 5 horses. It was 'good and clean' and free of any convictions for licensing offences.

During this period, as already noted at Monford Bridge (Feb 09), road traffic had been in decline, but the business remained an important 'local' for the surrounding scattered agricultural community. As the twentieth century progressed, however, road traffic steadily increased, not only for business, but also for pleasure. One symptom in Bicton was the appearance of 'tea rooms' in various houses from 1905 onwards. William Proctor at Lyndhurst and John Radcliffe at Rose Cottage, who also offered B&B. Significantly, by 1929, The Peoples Refreshment House Association had taken over both the Wingfield Arms and the Four Crosses. Perhaps at this time the building was extended and bay windows inserted all around so that the new work would blend with the old. In addition a spacious tea room was built of wood in the space behind which could open out of normal hours. For many years this acted as a sort of village hall, where local events, including WI meetings took place. It finally lost this role to the Village Hall in the 1950s.

After the P.R.H.A. was wound up, the property passed first to Carringtons and then Mitchells and Butlers, during which time the Howells family were managers and tenants for some thirty years. Land was also sold off and the fields across the road later became the site of Merton Nurseries. One echo of the P.R.H.A. remained in their deeds, however, forbidding the establishment of a rival tea shop!

As road traffic continued to increase, a garage developed in the inn yard which in the 60s evolved into the enterprise we see now. Then the status of the road changed forcing the inn to adapt.

Do support our local services and, while there, look around at their history, but also watch the traffic. The eighteenth century road design can still be dangerous!

