

**Part 3 of David Pannett's HISTORY OF BICTON**

**Amongst anniversaries to be celebrated in 2007 are three which involve Bicton Parish, especially that part comprising Preston Montford and Montford Bridge:**

- 1. Samuel Adderton died on 22nd May 1707—300 years ago and was buried in Shrewsbury Abbey (slab near communion rail)**
- 2. Thomas Telford the great civil engineer was born in 1757—250 years ago.**
- 3. The Field Studies Council, pioneers of outdoor education, opened their Shropshire Centre in the Spring of 1957, 50 years ago.**

**For explanation of the connections read on:-**

**Although Preston Montford is now part of the parish of Bicton it originally formed, together with Dinthill, a detached township of the parish of St. Almond, Shrewsbury.. It also formed part of that church's endowments and indeed the name suggests ownership by priests. The suffix 'Montford' distinguishes it from all the other Prestons). Although smaller in scale its history and landscape shows many parallels with those of Bicton itself.**

**It was mentioned in Domesday Book, had the usual open fields, meadows, woodland and common pasture. In 1145 it was likewise granted to a new monastery, Lilleshall Abbey, but was not worked as a grange, but continued as a normal village, albeit small.**

**A rare deed of 1308 refers to land in the open fields and in 1327 there were eleven taxpayers before the population crash at the Black Death. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, after the reformation, it was owned and occupied by the Calcot family. At the same time the Borough of Shrewsbury became 'Lords of the Manor' and through their records we learn of the first craftsmen occupying roadside waste near Montford Bridge. At what stage the open field system was enclosed is not clear.**

**Meanwhile, the reformation also united Abbey Foregate with the borough of Shrewsbury, after a life of separate control under the Abbey, so that its citizens could participate in the trade and politics of the whole town. One such family were the Addertons who built up their fortunes as tailors and drapers through successive generations and involved themselves in public duties, such as being Church Wardens. Eventually one Samuel Adderton even became Mayor of Shrewsbury in 1694. In 1696 he would have witnessed the building of Newport House (later the Guildhall) which introduced the very latest fashion of brick building which we know as the Queen Anne style. Indeed quite a sensation in such a 'timber frame' town. Could this have been the stimulus for him to purchase land at Preston Montford and build one for himself; sort of 'keeping up with the Joneses?'**

He built it on farmland beside the old settlement and laid out a small park. And in doing so ensured the survival of some older ploughing patterns under the grass. For greater privacy the old road from Montford Bridge to Ford was later Closed and replaced by the present lane and no doubt at the same time further cottage settlement was encouraged by the main road, well away from the house. His enjoyment of the new 'Hall' was however short lived as he died in 1707. His son Samuel, now a landed gentleman, married into another local landed family and his children did likewise. The downside of all this however was that various marriage settlements transferred some interest in this property to those families, so that the grandchildren found themselves with less. In this way the Hill, Chambre and Vernon families took over the house and used it as a spare home, 'dower house' or rented it out to other gentry. The significance of this story is that it escaped major alteration, preserving many original features to this day. The wider estate was however improved, including the enclosure of Onslow Hill. The service wing at the rear burnt down in the 1890s, but the replacement was carefully blended with the old. By this time the whole estate had passed to the Wingfields who were expanding their estate in Bickton and they continued to use the house in the same way, before setting it on while retaining surrounding farmland. To cut a long story short, in 1947 (is this another anniversary?) it was given to a charity which ran it as a probation home for boys who carried out small scale farming as part of their education/treatment. This closed down just when the Field Studies Council were seeking to expand their activities in response to the rising demand from schools and colleges for environmental education out of doors. Since then the new 'Field Centre' has gone from strength to strength providing a wide variety of weekly and weekend courses for 'students of all ages from eight to eighty'. Over the years thousands have experienced the natural history and landscape of this area and many more distant locations in the county. In various ways the centre has also contributed to the local economy.

The original Hall was soon too small for the various activities so that several extra buildings have arisen around the site. At one time an old Land Army hostel near the main road was also used and this helped to prolong the life of a wartime relic with its own contribution to recent local history.

The remaining anniversary concerns Thomas Telford. Countless places in Britain (and even Sweden) were touched by the work of this great engineer, Bickton, on his 'Holyhead Road' but one of them. The details we must leave for a further instalment.

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**Preston Montford Hall c.1705,  
also rebuilt kitchen wing 1890  
and classroom 1957**

