

## David Pannett's History of Bicton part 35 'The Isle Court'

One recent development in Bicton has been the opening of the ISLE COURT Nursing Home by Morris Care.

Over the years Morris and Company have shrewdly adapted to changing market opportunities (candles and oil Jan,10) and involvement in care for the elderly reflects the demand posed by our aging population.

In Shrewsbury the company has earned a good reputation for the quality of its buildings, respecting the old while adding the new and Isle Court is within this tradition. It is a tasteful adaptation of an existing site with its own interesting history.

At the enclosure of Bicton Heath in 1768, Richard Crowther was allotted a small patch adjacent to his property here. The pattern of 'old enclosures' also suggests that they may have originally been taken out of the heath at some earlier unknown date. They include uneven ground, a 'peat' moss and are even crossed by the Bicton - Uddington township boundary, all of which are appropriate to this background.

The first clear map in 1812 shows this small farm with house and barn owned and occupied by Thomas Hitchen. Other documents suggests he was still here in 1824, but by 1843 John Strange had taken over and the tithe map shows a new replacement house nearer the lane.

About this time it was not clear in the records who was actually living here, since references to Uddington could have also refer to the adjacent estate and more often no separate name was given. As the century progressed, however, it acquired the name of 'Uddington Villa' when occupied by the Pritchards and the picture became much clearer. +

By 1828, Daniel Pritchard had <sup>taken over his father's</sup> started a grocery and drug business in Dogpole. Sometime before about 1850 he married Lucentia with whom he had two children, Edward in 1851 and Jane in 1852. This was a small

+ Trade directories and census records

family by Victorian standards, perhaps because of Lucentia's age, 37 in 1850.

No doubt they first lived over the shop, but by 1861 they moved here to Uddington. This was part of the trend during the nineteenth century for town centre business people to live in such 'villas' in the outer suburbs, enjoying some of the pleasures of country life. Soon after, however, in 1863 Daniel died aged 54, leaving Lucentia to run the business. Then by 1881 Edward was old enough to take over, while his mother looked after their little farm at the 'villa' with the help of two servant girls.

One feature of the shop trade, much discussed in the nineteenth century, was the curse of very long hours. Even the getting an agreed half day closing on Thursday afternoon was eventually only helped by the need to allow workers to attend the military drill, when there was fear of a French invasion. So many customers also worked long hours and only had time and cash in the evenings, forcing the shops to stay open even longer. The impact on the health of shop workers was obvious and it is no surprise that Edward had closed the business by 1885 and was dead by 1890 at the young age of 38, by which time his aged mother had probably died.

By co-incidence, while all this was going on, James Morris was starting up his own grocery business in Shrewsbury which led to the creation of Morris Company (Jan '10)

Uddington Villa now had a succession of new occupants starting with a Mrs Rigby; later Edward Pugh, a farmer, perhaps a tenant of the Oxon Estate, who named it 'Uddington Lodge'.

Meanwhile, the next chapter in the story was developing nearby at the Isle, where Richard Sandford younger son of Humphrey Sandford, was gaining qualifications as a solicitor, very much in the family tradition. In 1901 he was still single and living at home at the age of 37, but soon after, it was all change at the Sandford household. Humphrey died in 1902 and was the last family member to be buried in the old family vault in

the old disused Bicton church at the top of Bicton Lane. Then as elder brother Folliot took over, Richard married and moved to 'Udlington Lodge', now to be known as plain Udlington.

Richard, by now a successful solicitor in Shrewsbury, with offices in College Hill, had the resources to modernise the house, more by adding on than knocking down. The old villa with its rougher local bricks still peeps out between the additions with the smoother factory made bricks and fine lime joints. Typical Edwardian stained glass windows boldly display the Sandford boars head crest.

The stable block and grounds were also improved. The new driveway swept around the wide lawn, the scene of many a summer fete for the local community. (Related by Dorothy Lewis) They were the highlight of the year for the village children. His wife Amy Constance Louise was an All England Archery champion, and the lawn was again used for tournaments.

As was typical of the times the household required several staff which in the 1920's included two Edwards sisters from Shrawardine, Edith and Olive who married local farmer James Paddock becoming mother of Mary Fowles Old School House and Jim Paddock of the White House. This was a typical situation of many local families at the time. (cf. Lewis Dec '08) Jean Jones of Horton Lodge Cruckton was similar. Her grandfather was gardener at Udlington and met her grandmother headmistress of Bicton School.

With a comfortable style of living and 'long life' genes Richard survived a lot longer than the Pritchards, dying in his eighties. His wife survived him and continued to be involved in the local community. After the Sandfords the house 'Udlington' appeared to have suffered some neglect with a succession tenants. Morris Care has now brought it back to life and renamed it Isle Court.