



David Pannett's History of Bickton part 39

A long line of Humphreys

To many people the name Humphrey may only be associated with Humphrey Littleton, a cat at 10 Downing Street or the civil servant in 'Yes Minister'. Here in Bickton, however, thanks to the Sandford family, the name has been around for 400 years, from Elizabeth 1 to Elizabeth 2nd.

The local story started during the troubled times of the reformation, when Richard Sandford came to the Isle in 1580 as tenant of Sir Francis Englefield, who was then living abroad. As a catholic, Sir Francis had been obliged to leave the country when Queen Elizabeth inherited the throne in 1558 and continued the protestant reforms (which provoked Philip of Spain to send his 'armada') He also forfeited his estates, which included The Isle, Rossall and Uddington.

Richard already held land in South Shropshire where he married the daughter of Humphrey Plowden, after whom he named his son. While Sir Francis was in exile, this Humphrey no. 1 helped with keeping in contact and acting as a sort of agent and therefore was upset that he did not obtain a better share of the Englefield estate when the Queen granted it to other loyal subjects. Humphrey held some on lease by 1606 and only obtained some freehold before he died in 1611.

Son Humphrey II, as a catholic, was naturally a Royalist during the Civil War and Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell. He even married Jane Gifford of White Ladies, Staffordshire, where King Charles II had hidden in an oak tree whilst escaping the Battle of Worcester. Politically, times were difficult for him as he faced fines because of his views. Locally in Bickton he got into dispute with his neighbours over the Pool and Rossall Heath (Oct '08). Perhaps all this introduced the family into practising law.

After his death in 1654, the estate passed briefly to son Richard and grandson, also Richard. By this time religious tensions were calming down but not going away, so that it was politic for the new generation

to be C of E. Nationally, there was an increasing appreciation of a good education for the sons of the upper classes (i.e not their daughters). However, as Charles Darwin found out, the typical public school curriculum was more likely to produce lawyers and churchmen rather than natural scientists.

When the estate passed to second grandson Humphrey III, he was already a fellow of St John's College Cambridge, where life prevented the production of an heir! The estate therefore passed on to his cousin Humphrey IV on his death in 1712. His son Humphrey V then married Rebecca Walker, granddaughter of the Irish aristocrat Lord Folliot and thereby introduced another name to the family collection. Now affairs at the Isle began to change, as this Humphrey and his son Humphrey VI bought up all the other properties on the peninsula, bringing it once again under unified ownership. Humphrey VI, who at one time was Sheriff of Shropshire, had married a local heiress and perhaps her money helped. He also raised a mortgage with his neighbour Thomas Wright the nurseryman. Finally, in 1749 the couple took over and remodelled the house clearly making it their main residence. To emphasise this, he also built the family vault under the old Bickton Chapel and was the first to occupy this in 1791. Earlier Sandfords had been buried in various places including Fitz, St Chad's and Lydbury.

By this time, Humphrey VII had already died, leaving brother Folliot to takeover and continue improving the estate. Towards the end of his long life, in 1810, he and his wife Phoebe moved to Bath, which at the time was a growing resort attracting many rich clients, both to 'take the waters' and enjoy the varied social life, not available at the Isle. For this period, the house was let to James Parry, while other members of the family lived elsewhere with their professional lives in law and the church. Humphrey VIII was both Rector of Edgton and curate of Bickton, (each are linked to the Sandford estate); Brother Folliot practised as a solicitor in Shrewsbury. In the next generation, Humphrey IX became barrister in Shrewsbury, while brothers Edward, originally a solicitor and William joined the church. William was the first Vicar of the new independent parish of Bickton 1853 —1875. It was not uncommon at

this time for landowning families to supply incumbents for their own parishes, thus keeping local affairs very much 'in house'. Brothers Edward and Humphrey married sisters from Milnsbridge House in Huddersfield. Later when Humphrey's daughter Annette Armine owned a cottage in Shepherds Lane she called it Milnsbridge in the family tradition of recycling names gained through marriage.

In 1902, Humphrey IX was the last to be interred in the family vault under the old church, since by then the new graveyard was already available. Son Humphrey X with his wife Phoebe was buried there in 1952, after a varied life as a soldier, sportsman, local JP and Churchwarden. Described as a perfect English gentleman, he broke from the Sandford legal and clerical tradition, leaving that to brother Richard at Uddington. Son Humphrey XI was in a similar mould with varied experiences related to farming. He died aged 100 in 1988. He was affectionately known as 'young Humphrey', since the younger Humphrey XII his son was out of sight pursuing a varied agricultural career in different parts of the world. Thus 'young Humphrey' lived on his own for many years after the war, in a caravan, while the house was let as a hotel. In 1979 it finally returned to the family.



The Isle

