

HISTORY OF BICTON by David Pannett- Part 4.

THE AGE OF IMPROVEMENT

As already discussed in a previous instalment, the field and farm pattern developed by a process of numerous exchanges of land which first eliminated the medieval open fields but then continued into the nineteenth century in order to simplify the irregular boundaries produced. Throughout, the farmsteads continued to occupy the medieval sites. However the farm houses themselves are no longer medieval but all reflect the investment in new building made during the prosperous years of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. New methods and high wartime prices thereby made Georgian architecture a very common feature of the Shropshire countryside. Otherwise, each reflects the individual history of the estate to which it belonged. For instance, Bicton Hall Passed from the Muckeston to the Jenkins family by marriage around 1730 and thereafter "Junior" members of that family lived here in Bicton while the senior branch used Charlton Hall near Wroxeter. It therefore remained a modest mansion even experiencing decline in status, rather than expansion, as a result of the new ownership. The land was often let to adjacent farms. The farm, later known as 'The Woodlands' was bought by John Lloyd, a gentleman farmer, in 1811 and no doubt he rebuilt around this date. Its fine portico and separate carriage drive are good symbols of a small country mansion. The other two farms, by contrast, are always held by tenants and lack such pretentious architecture. Bicton Farm appears to be an early 18 century building, while Red House looks as if it could have been rebuilt following a change of ownership in 1800. Similar Rebuilding also took place at the outlying farms judging by their architecture. Meanwhile, the heathland had also changed. Once it must have formed part of a continuous open waste of several hundred acres stretching from Bowbrook to Rossall, but by the seventeenth century at least, encroachments were being made. Those at Rossall Heath led to the building of Bicton Grove Farm while in Bicton they probably included a planned set of narrow fields between Bicton Villa and the Isle Lane. Otherwise, encroachments were made by 'squatters', here and there, all over the heath, wherever the land was suitably dry between the pools. They included cottages at the end of Bicton Lane as well as larger-holdings such as 'The Moss'. Squatters generally paid a 'fine' or ground rent to the Lords of the Manor who, in the eighteenth century, were the well known Mytton family.

HISTORY OF BICTON contd.....

In 1768 owners with an interest in the heath formally agreed to enclose it and a pattern of new straight field boundaries and roads including part of the main road, were laid out between the irregular outlines of the existing smallholdings. Thereafter many marshy pools were also drained and land sales added their own contribution to a very complex and distinctive boundary pattern. For instance, the former Mytton property, acquired at the enclosure in recognition of their manorial rights, was bought by Morris Eyton of Oxon Hall in the nineteenth century. This estate later passed to the county council who managed it as smallholdings. Other new holdings developing after enclosure, included the Four Crosses Inn and the Blacksmith's Shop, both conveniently located on the main road, which was becoming busier in the 'Turnpike Age' This long straight section of road so typical of those on former heathlands is a daily reminder of this story as speeding modern traffic proves more dangerous than stage coaches. In similar way, encroachments on roadside waste had already been taking place at Montford Bridge, forming a new community of craftsmen, traders and inn-keepers deserves a special study of its own as another instalment of this history. In 1835 the road across Grange Bank then known to travellers as 'Montford Hill' was rebuilt with a better gradient for the fast mail coaches along Telford's new Holyhead Road. Its embankments were probably built up from sand dug from a pit behind Bicton House and from the cutting at the summit. Houses lining the old road near Montford Bridge were then bypassed and left as Drury Lane while another section of old road survives as the drive to Bicton House. One result of all these stories was the expansion of population away from the original medieval village whereby in the nineteenth century most people lived elsewhere in the township. Significantly the new church and school built in the 1880s were built nearer to the main road and therefore more centrally placed for this population.

By this time the Tithe Maps and Census Returns give us a clearer picture of the population and its activities which will be discussed in a further instalment.

(see diagram on next page)

Based on Tithe Map

