

David Pannett's History of Bicton part 40

Down Calcott Lane

This area has certainly been in the news recently as residents, led by Roy Bound of 'Haughton', battled with Arriva and authorities over the number 70 bus route along Calcott Lane.

This lane connects the Holyhead Road (B4380, old A5) with the Welshpool road (A458), starting off straight, then bending between the Moss and houses of Lower Calcott, before finishing with another straight section. Such a pattern obviously has some historical significance.

Once this area was open heathland thanks to its heavy soils, poor drainage and peaty hollows left by the Ice Age (Sept. 07). However, from the 17th century onwards several encroachments were taking place for cottages around its edge. Then in the 18th century 'age of improvement' the local landowners agreed to enclose the remainder and allot shares between themselves. In 1768 new hedges and local roads were laid out by a surveyor, including Calcott Lane, which remains a good example of this type of work with its straight lines and regular width of 30 feet between ditches. (good for drainage and trapping passing busses!). Initially maintenance of these new roads was divided between the landowners and in two places at least, Calcott Lane and Isle Lane, stones were set in the hedge to mark boundaries between such sectors of responsibility.

The enclosed land allowed the creation of new small farms, including one with its buildings on the site of the present Haughton bungalow. This location at the junction of lanes was not only convenient for access, but exploited the same patch of sand and gravel already used by the existing cottage encroachments of Lower Calcott.

In 1768 the land had been allotted to Mrs Griffiths, but by 1812 it had passed to Dr. Simpson, an absentee landlord who let the farm to Thomas Botwyle. He was still owner in 1824, but by 1843 it had passed to Mrs Catherine Gittins, perhaps a relation of John Gittins of Red House, Bicton. Her tenant was Thomas Wall, who could work it along with his own farm at Upper Calcott, thus hinting at a change of status for the farmhouse towards being a residence divorced from actual farming. Indeed, from now on, records show it was occupied by

a succession of single ladies, during which it acquired the name 'Calcott House'.

In 1851, part of it may have been occupied by Miss Frances Jenkins, sister of the more famous Sir Richard Jenkins, owner of Bickton Hall. She certainly would have had the means to be its owner, otherwise it was probably occupied by Mary Breeze a governess, running a boarding-school.

At 52 Mary had probably once worked in a 'big house' educating its children, especially daughters who were usually kept at home. Henry Whitling, for instance, a Shrewsbury architect at Uddington in 1841, employed a governess, aged 20, for his four daughters and one son.

In a Victorian Society obsessed with 'class' (as mocked by Gilbert and Sullivan in H. M. S. Pinafore) a governess fell into an ambiguous position in such a household. While being an employee, duties linked her more to the family than with other servants 'downstairs'. Also, at a time when education for girls was so poor, a governess must have had some privileged upbringing in order to take on the work in the first place. At this time it was one of the few professional opportunities offering girls an alternative to marriage and Victorian motherhood (Even the Queen herself found the latter an arduous duty!)

Significantly, her household recorded by the 1851 Census provides some clues to social status. Apart from one female pupil, she had two visitors, a young 'gentlewoman' and her younger brother John, a clergyman. By 1851, he had become Rector of Hanwood and later also chaplain to the Shelton Asylum, while permanently living here.

In 1871, it was a more crowded household here, since John now had a wife and also William Stott, 'gentleman' had become a lodger. Three young servants were needed to help them all.

By 1881, Mary now 82, was on her own caring for William Stott, described now as 'imbecile', but was also helped by neighbours John Wall, and his wife.

This gentleman obviously had sufficient wealth to support his own 'care package', thus avoiding being taken into the asylum. John Breeze's connections may have been significant in all this. The appropriate care of dementia victims is still an ongoing debate.

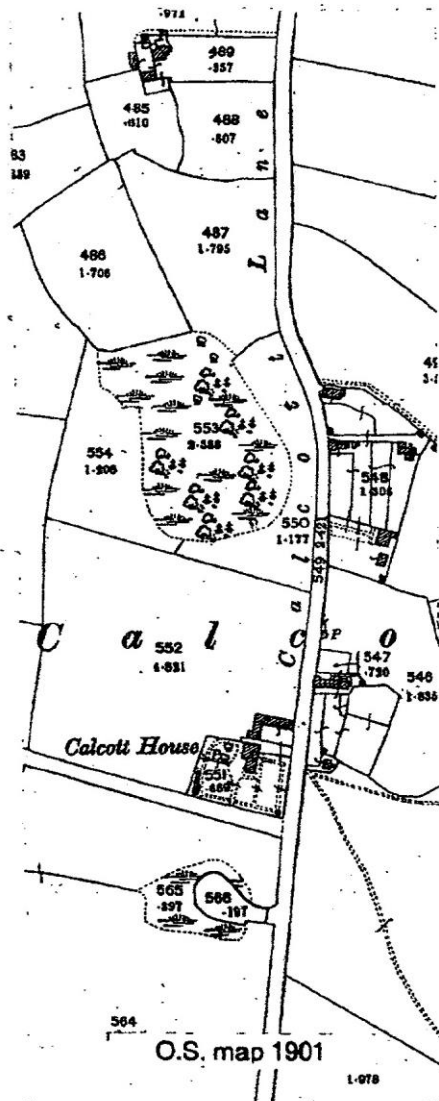
Mary herself did not survive long after 1885[†] and the house was taken over by Miss Jane Jones, complete with William Stott. They were

[†] buried Bickton Oct. 31 1889 aged 91 years

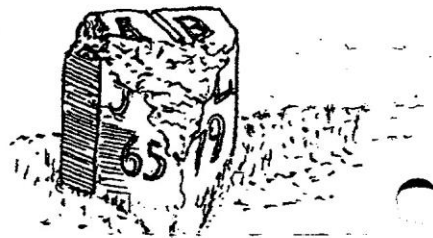
still together, aged 74 and 78 respectively, in 1901, helped by Mr. and Mrs Cartwright and their daughter.

Thereafter, records are lacking, until the two Teece sisters took over during the first World War and occupied it into the next. By this time, by coincidence, the neighbours included the Wallador sisters running their smallholding. In the Victorian period, some wealthy girls, such as the Coates sisters of Bicton Hall, could avoid the economic necessity of

marriage, but one wonders to what extent the loss of men in those wars was now a factor leaving such girls 'on the shelf'. One also wonders whether the persistent absence of a 'man about the house' allowed the buildings to become run down and ripe for redevelopment as 'Haughton'.



BICTON HEATH ENCLOSURE 1768



ROAD CARE BOUNDARY STONE IN ISLE LANE

Similar to one in Calcott lane