

## Memories of the old A5

The first Bank Holiday weekend of the year has just passed, with others to follow, together with many summer weekends, when many city dwellers are attracted to the hills and coasts of North Wales. Telford's old Holyhead Road route, the A5, was a particular favourite and this, of course, involved driving through Bicton.

The first Shrewsbury bypass was built in the 1920s to cope with this traffic and a new one was opened in 1991 to meet the increasing demand. Since then, our local road, now B4380, has been much quieter, although there are still worries about speed limits!

Long established residents will remember the old days along the road but newcomers need to be reminded of them:-

The numerous junctions on the old Shrewsbury bypass and the narrow state of Montford Bridge regularly caused congestion at the beginning and end of those summer weekends and Bank Holidays, during which the tail-backs often reached as far as Bicton. One such in the early 1960s was photographed from the air by the Shropshire Star by way of illustration. This photograph incidentally shows the original Four Crosses garage in the outbuildings of the Inn, while opposite, Merton Nurseries was just beginning to develop. Such traffic congestions was not always good for normal business but the proprietors sometimes sold cut flowers to the stationary drivers outside their gate instead.

About this time, the severe winter of 1963-4 caused damage to Telford's Montford Bridge, when some ice built up in the joints. Repairs were obviously necessary, but the need to close the busy road completely while these were carried out was a particular challenge. The answer lay in quickly replacing the deck with prefabricated beams held together with new 'high-alumina' quick drying concrete. The beams could also project over the side, accommodating walkways, thus freeing up more road space for traffic.

Those busy days on the road also produced regular accidents, especially around the Four Crosses, where the junctions and services posed greater risk to locals and strangers alike. Some of us needed A&E while many a car was written off, shunted from behind when slowing to enter the Garage or Nursery. Many a new gap was punched through the hedge as a result! Excessive speed on the straight is no new problem.

Near Villa Lane a wooden fence marks the spot where, twenty five years ago, a skidding lorry full of nails demolished the original hedge (and nearly demolished the writer too!). More tales could be told of other events around Bicton Lane. Sadly, shortly before the new road opened, the family at the Wingfield Arms were devastated by the loss of their daughter just outside in a road accident.

By this time, alarm bells were ringing in the construction industry about the behaviour of that 'high-alumina' cement, which over time was just turning to powder. All that 1960s work on Montford

Bridge had therefore become a liability! If a lorry had crashed through the railings it could have taken the deck with it!

Now, with the new route open, the opportunity was taken to do a 'proper job', with a new reinforced concrete deck cast 'in situ', using well tried conventional techniques, which of course needed much more time. The road was therefore closed for many weeks leaving only limited pedestrian access. The Wingfield Arms and the Garage on the Montford side (now closed) found themselves on dead ends, deprived of passing trade. In a public spirited gesture however, the new proprietor of the Inn cut a hole in his hedge so that some neighbours could sneak off the new road and use his land to reach Bicton without a long diversion. Though popular with locals, he obviously upset officialdom!

This closure, together with the design of the junction beyond Montford Bridge, (criticised by the Coroner), encouraged more use of the route in and out of Shrewsbury via Bicton Heath. Businesses in Bicton began losing passing trade and needed to adapt or close down. Bicton Cafe is now a foot clinic, Merton Nurseries has gone, while both Garage and Inns have diversified their activities beyond just petrol and beer!

Meanwhile, the new A5 can sometimes still suffer congestion at those peak holiday 'rush hours' and accidents still occur along it from time to time so do take care!



Homeward bound by the Four Crosses Inn on a Bank Holiday c.1961



Homeward bound opposite the Four Crosses Inn, Easter 1991 – the last Bank Holiday on the old road