

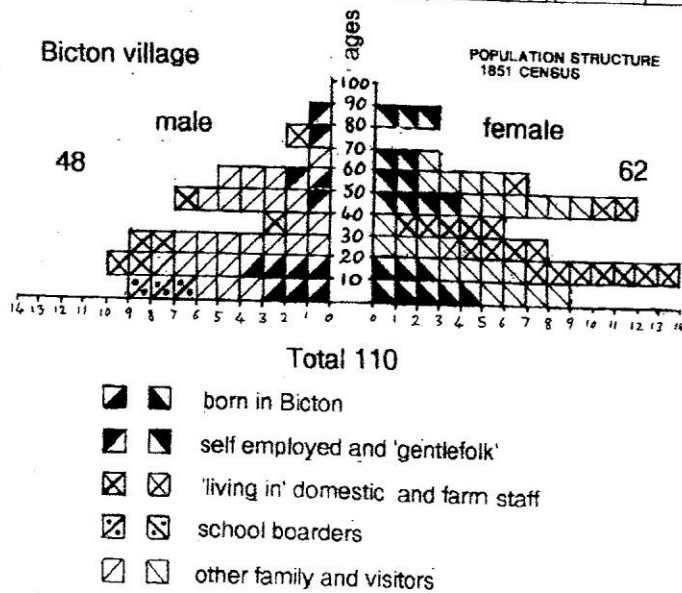
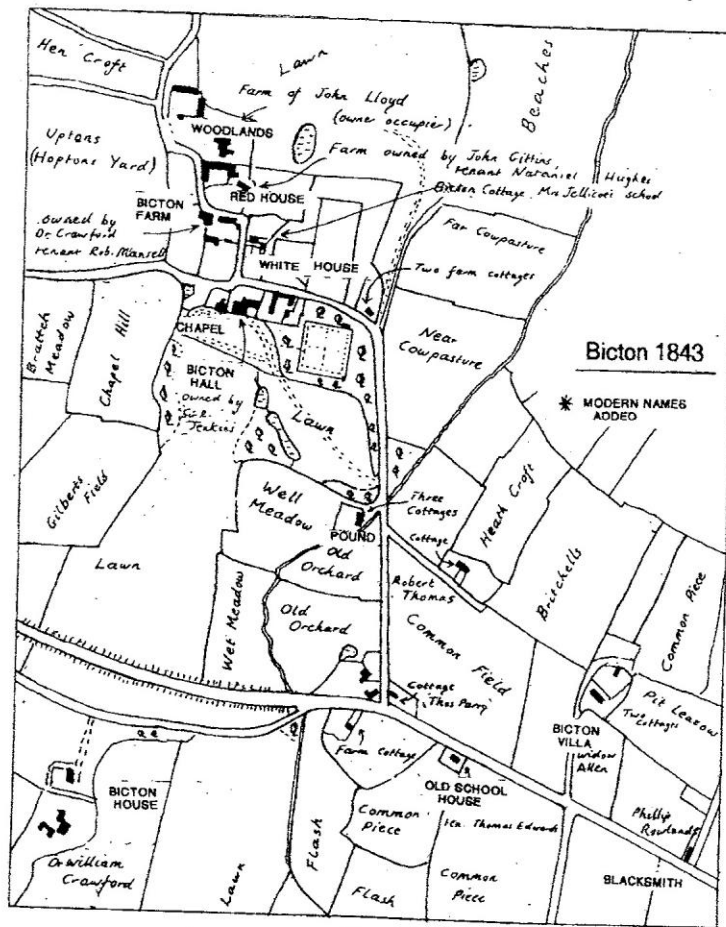
**David Pannetts' history of Bicton - Part 9**  
**Bicton in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century**

In the middle ages Farmers were obliged to give a tenth of their produce to the church or a related institution which had required the right to it. Such "tithes" were an unpopular burden, difficult to administer and therefore parliament eventually passed an act in 1837 changing them to money payments. As these were based upon the extent and value of each property, calculations required accurate maps, which have since become valuable sources for study of our local history. The regular census returns which started in 1801 were now collecting much more information and can add to the knowledge of our local communities and individual families in the same period. The early trade directories also give some information.

The Bicton tithe map of 1843 shows a mixture of properties making up the central village area: two "gentleman" farmers, John Lloyd at The Woodlands and William Crawford at Bicton House; two tenant farmers Nathaniel Hughes at Red House owned by John Gittins and Robert Mansell; Bicton Farm which was also owned by William Crawford, Bicton Hall, owned by the Jenkins family of Charlton, was let to another member of the gentry, whilst its land was worked with Bicton farm. The Whitehouse, in two parts, was owned by Mrs Jellicoe whose daughter ran a school there. The rest of the cottages and smallholdings had originated around the former edge of the heath. Significantly Phillip Rowlands had his Blacksmith shop on the main road.

In trying to match the 1851 census return with this map it soon became clear that there had been a continued turnover of population. The landed proprietors John Lloyd, William Crawford and Mrs Jellicoe remain, but almost all other households had moved on, thanks to their short term farm leases and cottages tied to work. The population structure therefore shows a sharp cut off at the end of normal working life, which also reflects the poor life expectancy of the manual workers at the time.

Significantly, few remaining beyond these years came from the ranks of the self employed and "gentle folk" employing staff, such as the Cotes sisters at Bicton Hall and those named above. The oldest inhabitants were Phillip Rowlands, the Blacksmith (85) and his wife (82). Helped by their grandson.



The population structure also shows a marked female bias, produced largely by the number of domestic servants "living in" the large farms and the Hall. Even the odd cottage had such help! Most were young girls coming from different parts of Shropshire and Wales. "Going into service" and escaping the crowded rural cottages was a typical career option for girls and the "big houses" always needed a large staff to run them. Even so, Bicton Hall must have been crowded with three spinster ladies and 9 servants. Fewer boys appeared to have moved around in this way, staying locally for the available farm work and even living at home while their sisters may have left.

The recorded place of birth also reflect such movements : their parents are quite likely to have met near the workplace (no doubt unofficial liaisons also occurred in this environment; nobody talked about them, but the evidence can turn up in family trees!)

One result is that while the youngest children are listed as Bicton born, only one adult is recorded as Bicton born in the census. As already observed, older children may have moved, leaving a gap in the population structure between these youngsters and their parents generation. Total family size is difficult to judge. Odd extras in the village were the four boarders at Miss Jellicoes school. Frances Bowker also ran the school at what became known as Old School House. Was there a difference in the two schools based on age, sex or social status? Lucy Jellicoe, unmarried at 60 and Frances Bowker a widow aged 54 had both economic necessity and opportunity to follow their careers in a world where the modern type of working wife was unknown. For so many it was either domestic servant or housewife!

There must be many individual stories if we had time to probe; any volunteers?