

The recent wartime story involving the Yewbery family of 'Grange Cottages' drew attention to the fact that this history series has so far neglected this part of Bicton, even though so many readers must pass by it daily. In doing so, they may have noticed a tightly packed cluster of varied properties, partially hidden by trees and which display a mixture of older elements and modern extensions cleverly done to blend them together. Judging their history can therefore be confusing, so we must try to sort out their stories with the aid of records.

Along with other cottage 'clusters' in Bicton, settlement started here as encroachments around the edge of the heath, which once stretched from here to the Welshpool road and beyond. They had probably started in the seventeenth century when the population was rising just at a time when the original small 'village' farms were being amalgamated. Then, in 1768, during the 'Age of Improvement' the local landowners agreed to 'inclose' it and received portions allotted to them. Since John Mytton of Halston claimed to be the 'lord of the manor', he also took over these scattered cottages and encroachments.

Here, 'under new management', the 'Morris' cottage, which was probably of poor construction anyway, was replaced by one nearer the road, which now housed a charity school. Meanwhile Richard Jenkins of Bicton Hall built another new cottage on his allotment across the road ('Hollyhurst'), where Thomas Parry became his tenant. The resulting pattern can be seen on the 1812 parish survey.

Between this and the Tithe Map of 1843 further major changes took place, starting with the sale of Mytton property to pay 'Mad Jack's' debts. In this way, Richard Gittins, owner of 'Red House' farm acquired two 'Roberts' cottages and the school house whose land has remained part of that property ever since. Soon after, this school appears to have closed as the house was then let to Richard Rogers instead. At the sale, Mr Hanmer of Bicton House took part of the original 'Rogers' plot on Bicton Lane, but this was sold on again separately in 1830, when the main farm was sold to John Morris.

While all this was going on here, the 'Westminster' and 'Dublin' parliaments were united, causing the Irish MPs to demand improved communications between these cities. The eventual result was the Government project to create a new 'Holyhead Road', employing Thomas Telford, who, as County Surveyor, had already rebuilt Montford Bridge in 1792. His new route then included the road through Bicton, where in 1837 it was found necessary to rebuild it across 'Grange Bank' with cuttings and embankments to ease the gradients. One section of old road was however left as part of the drive to Bicton House.

All these changes show up on the Tithe Map of 1843. Was it just coincidence that the new tenant of the old school house was now Thomas Edwards, 'Road Surveyor'? The other 'Gittins' cottages next door were used for farm workers. Across the road there was already a hint that Lyndhurst was being built as a replacement for the original 'Rogers' cottage, now occupied by John Stokes. All these old cottages built before the inclusion must have been ripe for replacement by now!

Between the Tithe Map and the first editions of the large scale Ordnance Survey maps change continued with clues also coming from the census records, although these could not always be related to particular properties with certainty.

Elizabeth Garbet, who was Thomas Parry's married, but widowed, daughter, now continued at 'Hollyhurst', renting extra land for small-scale farming as livelihood. Across the road, the charity school returned with Francis Boulker in charge until the new school was built in the 1860s, when newly-wed William Lewis, 'bricklayer', moved into the old school house.

About the same time, 'Rose Cottage' and its neighbours were built on the site of the original cottage here and new plots were laid out for more. Similar old cottages across the road were likewise replaced by 'Grange Cottages'. Though still small, they represented the improved standards now expected.

Residents now consisted of a mixture of tradesmen, farm workers and Mary Pritchard, a 'gentlewoman's companion'. Then, in the 1880s a builder retired here and built 'The Firs'. In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Brookside cottages were added for workers at Bicton House. 'Mayfield' came later to complete the pattern.

After the last war typical 'suburban' housing came to Bicton Lane and later Church Close thus uniting this cluster of cottages with the rest of Bicton. Such development also included a shop and warehouse to support a mobile service. The shop has long gone but the warehouse is now the home of Dairy-scope.

Extensions and improvements have continued all around here and more recently a new school has appeared adding a 'modern' flavour to the mixture of historical elements nearby.

We wonder what will be added next!



