

This summer Bicton area will be welcoming a new vicar and this prompts us to reflect upon some past holders of this post, with the help of Crockfords Clerical Directory, census records and parish registers.

The present independent parish of Bicton was only established in 1853 after being part of St Chads parish, albeit with its own chapel since the 17th century. The first vicar was the newly qualified William Sandford, seventh son of Humphrey Sandford of the Isle, for many years the curate at Bicton chapel as well as Rector of Edgton in South Shropshire. Fourth son Edward also briefly held this chapel post just before William took over.

The link between these people and places was that Edgton was also Sandford property where they had the gift of the 'living' thus illustrating a common connection between Anglican parsons and landowning squires, summed up with the term 'squarson' by some historians. It was also frequently commented that, amongst the sons of such landowners, the eldest would inherit the estate, the dim one would join the army, while the brightest would be educated to join the church. The law was also an alternative, but 'trade' would be looked down upon. Indeed, at that time the resources of an estate would have been needed to finance higher education enabling the Sandfords to have good links with St John's College, Cambridge.

In the landscape we can still see examples of fine Victorian vicarages, fit for the sons of gentry. Locally at Montford, for instance, the Rev. Wingfield preferred to live in Shrewsbury rather than occupy the old parsonage house on offer. Its impressive replacement later housed a member of the Clive family, owners of the estate. The Bicton story has some similarities....

A new vicarage was duly built at Bicton and William moved in, joined later by new wife Emma Cantrow from Bury, with whom he started his own family. Then, in 1868, William's younger sister Charlotte married Charles Ingram Roberts, curate of St Chads, upon which there were some domestic changes.

Charles became 'curate in charge' at Bicton and occupied the vicarage, allowing William to move to Shelton Hall. Sadly, while there, in 1871, his eldest son died aged 8 (old churchyard) so the improved accommodation did not protect him from the usual Victorian health risks.

At William's own death in 1875 aged only 48 Charles moved on to a proper 'living' near Rochester in Kent. Meanwhile numbers of the wider Sandford family continued as lawyers as well as churchmen. One died while a missionary in India, (brass plaque in church), while in the following century, another Humphrey Sandford spent 40 years as Bicton's church warden.

The new vicar was George Newton Lloyd, who incidentally was being ordained about the same time as Charles and William in the 1850s. He came from a long line of professional churchmen, rather than country squires and was a graduate of Durham rather than Oxford or Cambridge. Grandfather, father and uncle between them had been rectors of Selattyn and Whittington over the years while his mother was also the daughter of a parson. George himself travelled further afield first as a curate at Shrawardine then as rector of Killesk in county Waterford, Ireland before coming to Bicton.

During his time here it was realised that the original old chapel building was proving too small to be a proper parish church when population was rising and C of E was facing competition from non-conformists. George would have been actively involved in the plans for a new church building and

associated graveyard, but did not live long enough to enjoy the benefits of them, except for becoming one of the early occupants of that new graveyard. Sadly, his heavy granite and sandstone monument is now listing like a ship and sinking to the ground as ivy covers its top! Towards the end he may have been suffering ill health requiring help from neighbouring clergy at times.

His successor, after 1888, was Frederick Stephen Edwards, who was said to have been a solicitor. However, since he was ordained at Lichfield Theological College in 1864 at the age of 27, one wonders what time he had actually spent in that career.

For the next twenty years he held a succession of short term curate's posts in the Midlands, (where he was born) and in Lancashire and never found time to find a wife. Perhaps for this reason, his younger sister, Mary Ellen, also unmarried, joined him at the vicarage in Bicton. Like their predecessors, they also employed a succession of young domestic staff, normally two at a time, which included, at different times, the sisters Adelaide and Gertrude Rosier from West Bromwich, who subsequently married into the local Glover and Lewis families. Mary Ellen, being a kind lady, also gave a home to an orphan, John Allen, from Stafford. It was said that this irritated her brother who had offended one local family by banning a child from the choir because he had been born out of wedlock. As an old bachelor he did not suffer the children to come unto him.

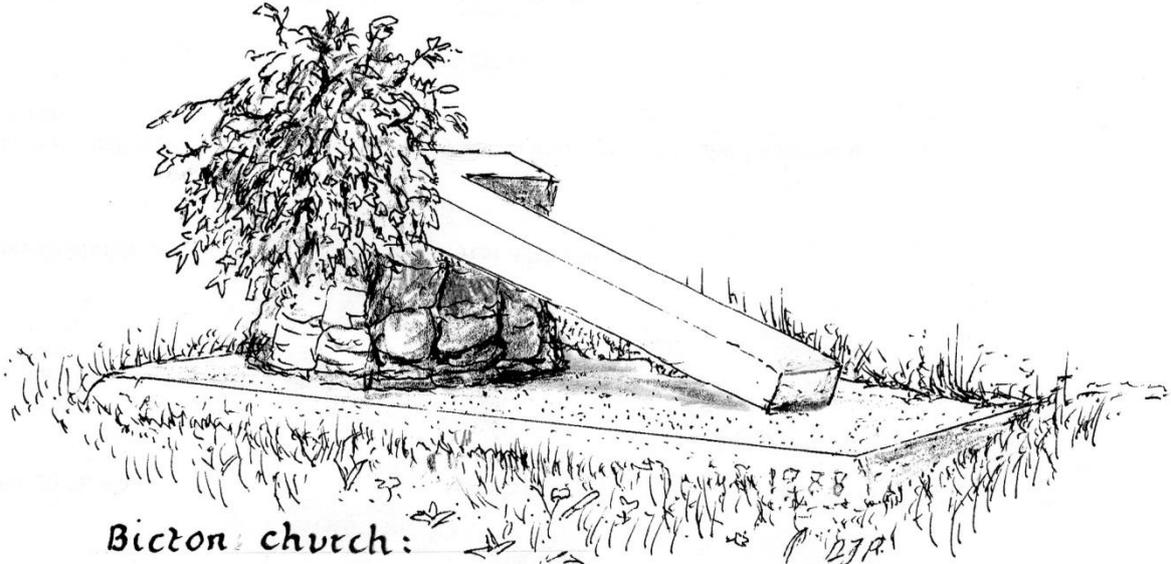
In his later years, Edwards employed a succession of curates to share the load, before he retired in 1918 and eventually died in 1924.

During a brief hiatus, before the next appointment, various local colleagues filled in, while there was also the unfortunate episode of another Rev. Roberts trying to move in. He had a petty dispute with the furniture removers, which was well reported in the Shrewsbury Chronicle, so it was no surprise that he did not stop. Bicton had a lucky escape! (June '10)

Meanwhile, John William Purser had been working for the church Missionary Society in Uganda, before taking a degree at Durham. There followed the usual succession of curate's posts, first in the Warwick area and then for several years at Wem, making him well placed to move to his first permanent post at Bicton.

His successor in 1926 was Anthony Lawson, whom we have already discussed in the series (Jan '14). The story of his successors we must continue later.

By this time, women had won the right to vote, bringing fairness to political life. However, church life long remained male dominated like those Oxbridge colleges, but all this is slowly changing....



Bicton church:
Grave of George Newton Lloyd 1831-1888,
vicar of Bicton

