

Bidford-on-Avon in 1861

a window on our Victorian past

The 1861 census gives us a window onto the mid-Victorian age.

The Industrial Revolution had transformed Britain, and yet much of the country was still rural with a high dependency on agriculture for employment.

You may be surprised to learn that this was also the case in Bidford even though it was situated right on the edge of the Industrial Revolution heartlands.

How astonished the Bidford inhabitants of 1861 would be if they saw the way of life of today's villagers!

Their world was essentially local - they were all employed in or around the village, mainly in agricultural occupations, and they rarely left Bidford as the railway had yet to reach the area.

Travel back with us to the Bidford of 1861 through the census of that year which captures an era long gone...

THE STRATFORD HERALD

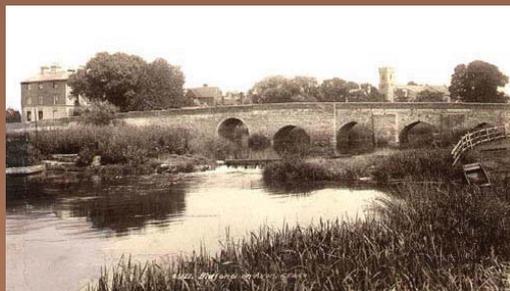
The census - March 1861

Amongst the numerous results of our advanced civilisation, we may notice the wonderful machinery by which our taxes are levied and paid; the public expenses of the different counties supported and the manner in which our increase in population is sustained. All these minute and complicated works are the necessary consequence of what would be termed in our day the increasing unification of our nation. It would have been equally impossible in ages past to have arrived at any approximate calculation of the population of this country... but now there can be no more important work done than a correct registering of the inhabitants of our land for almost every end of government.

The direct and simple copy of the results...will supply us with the population of the whole country and each county, town and village. This will not be without interest to the political economist, especially when viewed in relation to the extensive emigration which has taken place within the last 10 years. A manifestly important result would be to ascertain the number of tradesmen and artisans above the age of 21 years and a similar classification of men occupied in the profession of law and physic.



Turning hay in Marriage Meadows



Bridge over the Avon, with the White Lion pub.



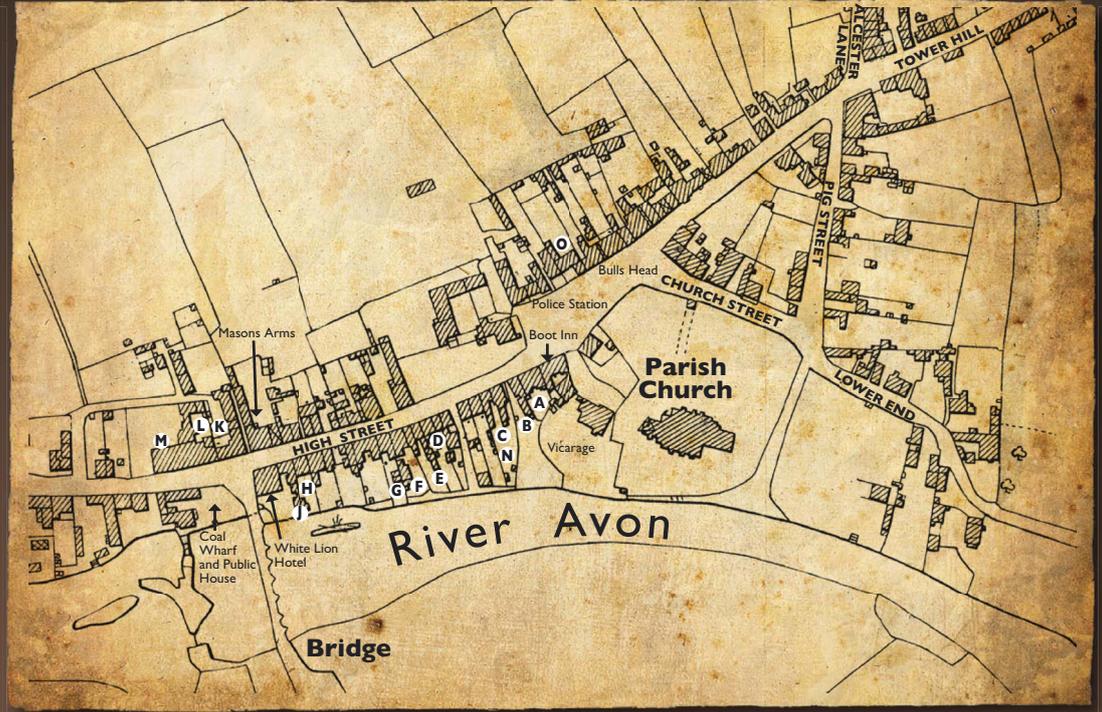
Old Icknield Street

Bidford then and now

Pig Street, Lower End & Alcester Lane - forever gone?

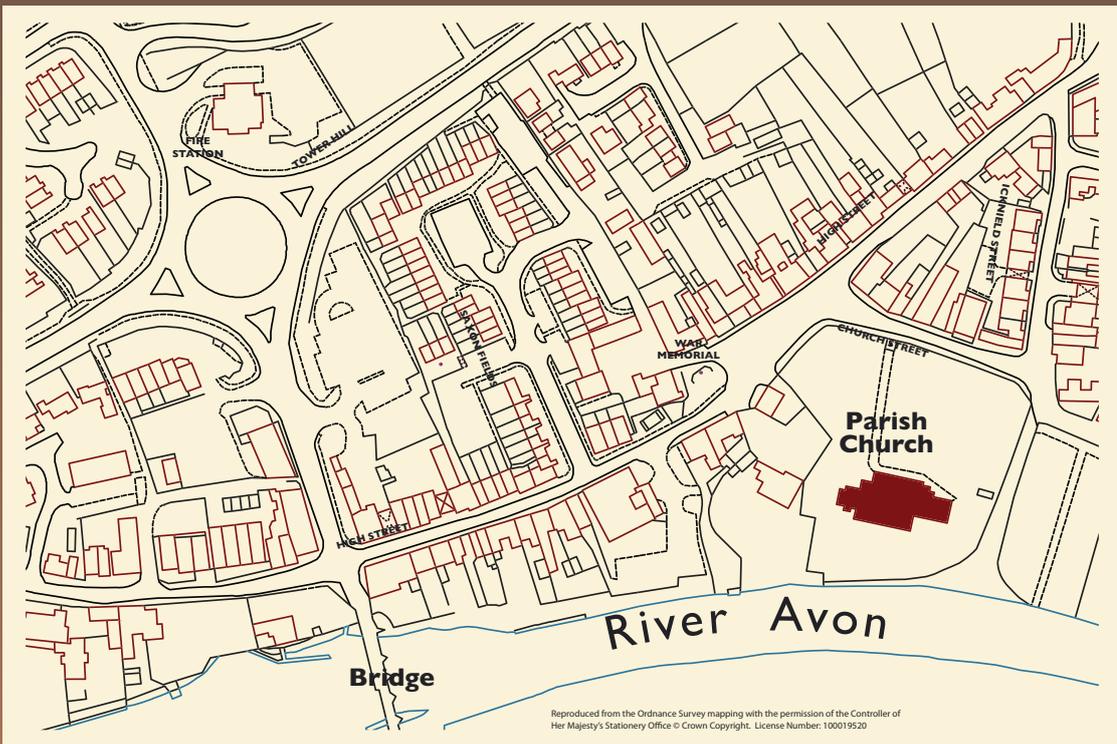
Key

- A** Draper, Frederick Hemming
- B** Plumber, Jonah Pearce
- C** Toyshop, John James
- D** Butchers, Thomas Sale
- E** Confectioner, Richard Mason
- F** Barber, Henry Cowper
- G** Confectioner, Alfred Hale
- H** Butcher, John Holland
- I** Eating House, Richard Bennett
- K** Butchers, Stephen Faulkner
- L** Drapers, Silvester Hill Snr
- M** Grocer, William Bennett
- N** Grocer, Silvester Hill Jnr
- O** Grocer, Joshua Barber



Research shows that there were around 240 properties in Tower Hill, High Street, The Pleck, Church Street, Pig Street (now believed to be Icknield Street), Church Street, Lower End (now believed to be Grange Road) and Alcester Lane (now Waterloo Road).

Of the residents living in the village it appears that there were 112 children in receipt of some education, the schoolmaster being Mr John Fluck and his sister, Miss Elizabeth Fluck, as the schoolmistress. Research shows that over half the population had been born within the village.



A significant number of houses have been built since 1861, but this is not unexpected as there are now well over four times as many people living here. Additional roads (such as Saxon Fields and the by-pass) have been built for these houses and to limit the numbers of cars driving through the High Street. Perhaps most surprising is that although there are now more residents in the village there are fewer shops and pubs.

Butcher, Baker & Glove Maker - Bidford in 1861

Bidford in 1861 was a thriving village with a bustling High Street. Here 950 residents could find everything they needed for everyday life including food, fabrics, sweets and toys.

The High Street:

- Three grocers' shops,
- Three butcher's shops
- Three draper's shops
(selling fabrics and sewing materials)
- A plumber's shop
- A toyshop
- Two confectioners
(who would have sold sweets)
- A barber
- A provisions shop
(selling food, necessary supplies)



The people who visited these shops were employed in and around Bidford. In 1861 few residents had to commute to work, unlike today.



In 1861, the 27-year-old Sarah Nason was employed as a house servant at Vicarage House (22 High Street) by Thomas Boulton, the Vicar of Bidford and head of the household. Thomas' children Eliza, Maria and James resided at the house, along with James' wife Marion. Assisting Sarah in her domestic duties was the 16-year-old Theresa Hatton, herself a house servant.



In 1861 Thomas Hancock was 38 and working as an agricultural labourer. He lived in a house on the High Street with his wife Sarah and children Thos, Jane, William and Mary. Their oldest son Thos, aged 11, was also employed as a ploughboy.

Many of the male residents (who were not at school) worked on the land as agricultural labourers and farmers. Supporting these people were blacksmiths, farmers, bricklayers and ironmongers, who again would live in the village.

But what about the Bidford women? Some woman worked on the land but many remained at home as wives and mothers. Those that did work took employment as servants or worked from home as seamstresses and glove makers.

When not at work Bidford residents had the choice of seven public houses and inns, including The Bulls Head and The Plough Inn which are still open in the village today.

Read all about it

What the papers were saying in 1861

THE STRATFORD HERALD

February 1st 1861

An inquest was held at St George's Hospital, London on the body of Miss Anne Fridgeley, a dressmaker. The deceased, it appeared, who wore the fashionable garment – a crinoline – was standing with her back to the fire when she discovered that her clothes had ignited. Her screams brought a lodger and tradesman to her assistance but in consequence of the steel hoops of the crinoline they were unable to turn it over to smother the fire and she was burnt in a shocking manner and died soon after admission to hospital. Verdict – accidental death.

Evesham Journal & General Advertiser

26 October

ACCIDENT WITH LOSE OF LIFE - On Saturday last the elder son of Mr Thomas Sheaf, a young man about 18 years of age, was returning with a horse and cart from some gardens near the village, when the horse, either from fright or some other cause, suddenly ran away. Whether the unfortunate deceased was riding on the shafts, or attempting to get into the cart is not clearly known. However, as it appears, he made an attempt to stop the animal, and in the act of doing so, fell, and the wheel passed over his body. Medical aid was immediately procured, and he was put into another vehicle to be conveyed home, but expired before reaching it. The horse ran down the village at full speed, and caused two other horses linked to a cart to take fright also, and follow. The scene was fearful, but as the street was clear, no further damage was done. A younger brother who was in the cart with the deceased, while the horses were going at full speed got out, in doing which he received a slight injury on the head, but otherwise escaped unhurt.

THE STRATFORD HERALD

January 1861

The frost this week showed symptoms of going, there was a decided thaw on Saturday, rain during the night, and a heavy snow-fall on Sunday. The thermometer, however, was soon below 32o, and the weather has since been cold and winterly as ever. Snow covered the ground, whilst the persistence of frost dims seriously the prospects of a long hunting season, and renders travelling impossible without constant "roughing", which has now been repeated so often that roadsters' feet are generally in bad state.

For severity and continuance the winter bids fair to rival that of 1813-14, when the frost extended over thirteen weeks... Of late years we have been rather inclined to lament the degeneracy of our winters, and to quarrel with the genial mildness of our Christmas weather; and now that we have a regular old-fashioned sharp winter again, let us hope that, with its apparent evils, it may also bring much good.... it will diminish the fevers, diphtherias, and other such lowering complaints, which have of late been on the increase.

17, & 18, HIGH STREET,
STRATFORD-ON-AVON

FREDERICK WINTER

IS now showing a large assortment of DRESSES suitable for Ball, Dinner, and Evening wear – comprising Black and White LACE, Embroidered Tinselled and Puffed TARLATANS, SILKS, and BAREGES.

He has also received a choice selection of FLOWERS, HEAD-DRESSES, CORONETS, WREATHS, BOUQUETS and SASH RIBBONS. LADIES' AND GENTLEMEN'S WHITE KID GLOVES

Court News

30TH MARCH CHARLES MOORE, an old offender, charged with being drunk, fined 5s and costs 13s 6d.

4TH MAY THOMAS JONES PC charged with assaulting Job Houghton, fined 1s and costs.

6TH JULY " BENJAMIN BRITTON was charged by his master, Mr Milward of Bidford, with absconding from his service. Discharged from his service and ordered to pay the costs 10s."