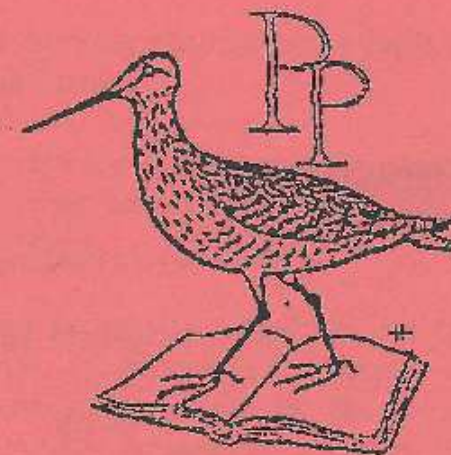


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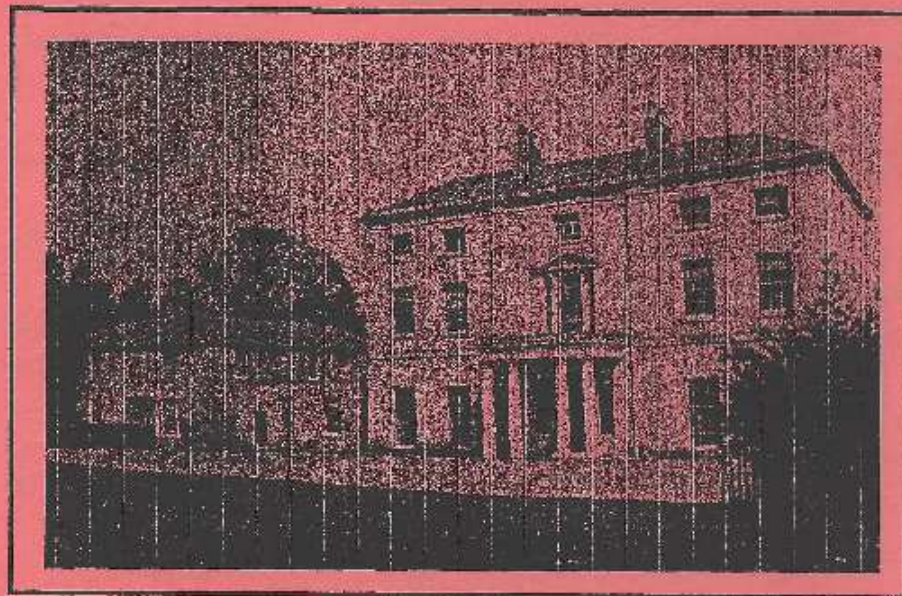


# Project Purley

PURLEY'S LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MAY 1996 NEWSLETTER

No. 41



Purley Park Mansion

### FUTURE MEETINGS

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 17th May 1996        | Walkabout in Reading with Ken Major               |
| 21st June 1996       | Visit to Englefield House                         |
| 19th July 1996       | Summer Barbecue                                   |
| No meeting in August |   |
| 20th September 1996  | The Storer Family - Jean Debney                   |
| 18th October 1996    | An evening with<br>some 'senior Purley residents' |

### REPORT ON THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting was held in the small hall at the Barn on Friday 15th March at 8 p.m.

The indisposition of Jan Jones necessitated a change of venue from The Gatehouse and best wishes to Jan for a speedy recovery were expressed by the members.

Due to family reasons the retiring Chairman, Pat Deane, was unable to attend and the Chair was taken by Cliff Debney who was delighted to present the Chairman's report on her behalf particularly as the meeting was the first public occasion to be held at The Barn.

It had been an excellent year for the Society, the monthly meetings had been varied and very successful, the subjects ranging from Humphry Repton and his connection with The Storer's and Purley Park presented by member Ben Viljoen to Reading Football Club also presented by a member Dave Downs. The annual walkabout at The Holies and Lardon Chase was a great success. The two social occasions had been very enjoyable. The Christmas Evening at The Gatehouse, hosted by Jan and Rick Jones, is always a special occasion and the Society extends thanks to Jan and Rick for their warm hospitality. The barbecue at The Mimosas, was the high summer event held on an evening of beautiful weather, and within the view of the Chilterns and Mapledurham and bird songs all around us. Hosts Rita and Ron Denman were thanked by The Chairman.

The Society was successful in gaining first place in a competition held by the Berkshire Local History Society. The subject was Purley in World War II. Rita Denman prepared the display which was judged at the B.L.H.A. Annual General Meeting in March.

The undoubted highlight of the year was the participation of the Society in the handing over of the barn by Messrs Bryants to the Parish Council. Project Purley members prepared the exhibition which played an important part in the success of the occasion. The display panels were made to be stored and are ready to be put up again whenever required.

The innovation of a summer outing was another Society success. Led by Dave Roscoe a happy party of members and their families and friends made their way to Arlesford and the preserved railway, The Watercress line, for a nostalgic trip into the past.

Pat Deane expressed her thanks to Henry Bordiss as Treasurer and Rita Denman as Secretary and all the committee members for their support during her year of office.

Treasurer Henry Bordiss presented the accounts which he was pleased to report as being in a healthy state.. Although there would be no increase in subscription this year, the Treasurer recommended that this matter be reviewed for 1997/8. Thanks were expressed to Mr Francis for auditing the Society accounts, at no cost to the Society.

Due to the Pat Deane's retirement as Chairman Ben Viljeon agreed to stand and was elected unanimously. In taking office he thanked Pat Deane for all that she had done on the Society's behalf in what had been a very busy year, and this was endorsed by those present. After 5 years as Hon. Secretary to the Society Rita Denman stood down. In view of the increasing duties of a Society secretary it had been decided to split the duties. The members welcomed Ann Betts who was elected Minute Secretary, and Rita Denman was elected Meetings Secretary. The meeting thanked Rita Denman for her work as Society Secretary for the past 5 years and presented her with a pot hydrangea.

The new committee is listed in detail on the inside back cover.

## REVIEW OF MEETINGS

On January 19th an expectant group gathered at 8, Huckleberry Close to hear Member Ben Viljoen's talk on Humphry Repton - Landscape Gardener and Water Colourist. Humphry Repton came to the profession of landscape gardener mid-way through his life. After a number of failed attempts at a career, he decided to be a landscape gardener and notified his friends and acquaintances of this decision. He was in fact the first person to use the term "landscape gardener". He had a talent for water colour painting and applied himself to the study of architecture. At last he had found his niche in life and became very successful eventually following in the footsteps of the great Capability Brown. It was at this time that the Grand Tour of The Continent was the vogue and successful traders had money to spend. What better way to flaunt ones money and knowledge of the French and Italian styles than to surround oneself with a few well chosen Greek and Roman Gods, and maybe a miniature Pantheon. Repton is famed for the so-called Red Books which he prepared for prospective clients, setting forth in words and paintings his ideas for their requirements. He took into consideration the natural elements of the area, water, trees, farm animals, and in Purley's case, the turnpike road. These were manipulated to provide what in Repton's view was the best possible vista for the client.

Anthony Morris Storer bought the Manor of Purley Magna around 1793 and wished to replace the old manor house with something more fitting and commissioned Humphry Repton to design a new mansion within a park. In the Purley Red Book we have a wonderful insight into what the original Manor House and environs of Purley Magna were like recorded by Humphry Repton in his water colour paintings. Storer and Repton disagreed on a site for the new mansion and the plans that Repton prepared were never completely carried out. Purley

does have the distinction of being the place where Repton suddenly realised the importance of the direction of light to a scene, and he mentions this fact in his book "The Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening". He discovered what those of us who love the river and Purley know, that everything changes with the light and time of day. The talk was accompanied by some stunning slides. We are looking forward with keen anticipation to Ben Viljoen's next talk.

On 19th April 1996 we were delighted to welcome Lock-keeper George Fielder for his third visit to Project Purley. Each of George's talks about the River Thames have had a different slant and each time he has brought slides which are new to us. George told us that his first employment was as an electricians apprentice but his recreation was to go boating on The Thames. Aided and abetted by the Lock-keeper at Day's Lock where one of his boating trips foundered, he fell in love with the river. George was soon collecting postcards and memorabilia and finding out all he could about its history, eventually succumbing completely to the romance of the river and becoming a Lock-keeper himself. Since time immemorial the river has been influenced by the activities of man and used in many ways from a heavy goods highway to leisure pursuits. Many water mills were built to take advantage of the river flow to power the mills and for the easy access for transport. Millers gained a bad reputation for blocking and controlling the free access on the river, interfering with navigation and holding landowners and bargemen to ransom. The millers became very prosperous and created the river as we know it today.

A review of John Chapman's talk of the 15th March on "Ephemera" and the Society visit to The Museum of Rural History on April 19th will appear in the next issue.

Rita Denman  
Meetings Secretary.

## MOMENTS OF GLORY

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### The story of football in Reading

"Moments of Glory" is a book about local history, the like of which has never been seen before. It tells the story of football in the town of Reading, at all levels and ages, from street games to professional and international standard. As such, it is a fascinating and, in many instances, amusing read, and therefore a worthwhile addition to any local historian's bookshelf.

The idea for the book was conceived by Alison Haymonds, a freelance writer and editor at Corridor Press in the Arts Centre at 21, South Street. Corridor Press had previously published 'Bricks and Mortals' the highly successful account by local residents of their favourite buildings in Reading, and has now followed that sell-out edition with another book which looks certain to be equally popular.

"Moments of Glory" is divided into sections which follow a natural progression, though at the same time it is easy to dip into each chapter and find something of interest. It begins at grass roots level with descriptions of street, schools' and cubs' football, then devotes two long and informative chapters carefully researched by Duncan Mitchell about local clubs such as West Reading, Rabsons Rovers, Thames Vale, Reading YMCA, Ibis, Reading Town, SEB (Reading) and Maiwand Lions. The book then moves on to detail the careers of local celebrities, some of whom became international stars, like Neil Webb, Johnny Brooks and Adrian Williams, and some of whom achieved star status at park level, such as Danny Webb, Dave Burbidge, Dave Chard and Bill Cam.

Naturally a considerable section is devoted to the history and background of Reading Football Club, the only Football League team in Berkshire, but even that aspect of the book concentrates on people behind the scenes such as Gordon Neate, the long-serving groundsman, and his wife Viv Neate, who washes the club's kit.

Supporters tell their stories about their fanaticism for their team in a highly digressive and entertaining manner, and there are even chapters devoted to the development of fanzines, the role of women in football and the administrators of the game.

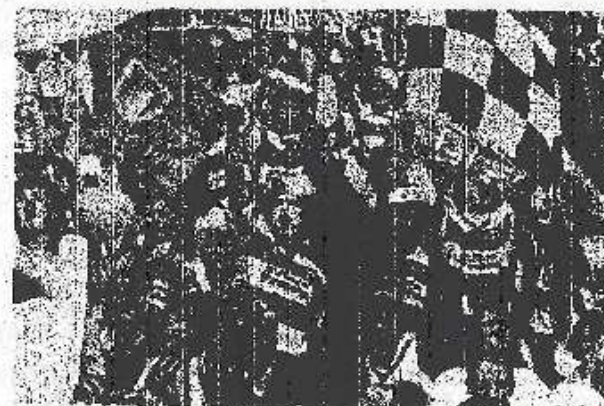
Perhaps the most interesting chapter of all is the last one, entitled 'Throw-ins and Offsides' which contains many unusual and light-hearted anecdotes about local supporters' and players' experiences in football. Here you can read about the man who stood up a famous film star for a football match, the fan who rang the Samaritans in a panic to find out a football result, the goalkeeper with a wooden leg who played at Elm Park, and the snake which stopped a game at Berkeley Avenue.

One of the beauties of the book is that it is written in its entirety by local people with a love of football, all of whom have given their services free of charge as a genuine community enterprise. Neil Webb, an England International who went to school in Tilehurst, has written the introduction, and other locals who have contributed at length include soccer historian Bryan Horsnell, Evening Post sports writer Clive Baskerville, Reading FC fanzine editor Simon Blackburn and children from Geoffrey Field, Ranikhet and Westwood Farm Junior Schools.

"Moments of Glory" also contains numerous photographs and cartoons which, together with so many personal anecdotes and memories, have resulted in a beautiful book about a beautiful game.

David Downs.

# THE HOMES OF FOOTBALL



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## MEMORIES OF PURLEY PARK

There are people in Purley who can remember when the home for mentally retarded men was first opened in Purley Park in 1948, but there can be few if any who were involved closely enough with its activities to say what things were like in the earliest days. In 1988 Project Purley was lucky enough to record an interview with Elisabeth Duncan, who came to Purley Park in 1958 as the second wife of Hugh Duncan the founder of the home, and it is from her vivid and often entertaining account that we know something of the early history of what is now the Purley Park Trust. Even she of course had no direct experience of the first ten years.

The story begins when Colonel Hugh Duncan, freshly demobbed from the army after the war, joined a colleague, Tom Parry, who had set up a home in North Wales for mentally disturbed and retarded boys. Even then Government Regulations required that the two categories should not be housed together, so Hugh resolved to branch out on his own and began a long search in the south of England for a suitable place to found a home for the retarded category. Eventually he came upon Purley Park which was up for sale after having been the wartime office of a paint firm. He judged that in Purley, still completely rural, he would be unlikely to meet much opposition to such a project, as was the case in many places, and that with the good communications and proximity of fairly large centres of population finding staff and suppliers should not be too difficult. So he bought it and came with six young Downs Syndrome sufferers in 1948.

At first the Duncans were the only full time staff but, as he had hoped, local part time help was readily obtained. Six inmates were hardly a viable proposition however, and he was fortunately able before long to gain the patronage of the Oxford Health Authority who reserved 20 places with him. This was an essential step in ensuring that the venture could continue. Numbers increased steadily and he eventually built them up to about fifty. Then, about six years later, the first Mrs Duncan died.

The next few years were difficult, as Hugh was not only bereaved but had to run the place largely on his own. However he was fortunate to marry again and Elisabeth arrived on the scene in 1958. In her own words "I first came to Purley when I married... I was a speech therapist at the Royal Berkshire Hospital and all I could do when I came was boil an egg, then I was launched into Purley Park to run a home for sixty four people, so I had to learn to cook." Her first impressions of Purley were of a large park, floods by the river, fogs on the Oxford Road, a little village outside the gates among its tree lined roads, the ramshackle river estate, and a large herd of pigs which were always escaping. One of their favourite ways of getting out was through a narrow tunnel leading under the main road, to emerge by the gate lodges which were on the opposite side of the road. The reasons for this extremely odd arrangement remain obscure. But above all Elisabeth found it a life of continuous hard work.

Keeping the "Purley boys", as they soon became known, occupied, amused, and up to a point taught or trained in useful work was a constant challenge, limited both by the available staff skills and by the mental capacity of the boys themselves, which varied considerably. Many were strong and fit for physical work so that agriculture and gardening were staple activities; indeed Purley Park became self-supporting in vegetables, and a field near the house was regularly sown with barley and harvested for a number of years.

At other times Hugh might take a working party to repair the long flint and brick wall along the Oxford Road, which was always being damaged by traffic accidents. Opportunities for using their strength pulling, pushing and lifting always gave much enjoyment to the boys capable of it. For example in bad winters, Mr Kirton would sometimes deliver his milk to parts of the village on a sledge, and it might require a team to haul it up to Purley Park. Parties were often taken for walks, and on occasions they might go to Mapledurham Lock and be allowed to wind the paddles on the weir.

James Heslop

(To be continued)

## HUMPHRY REPTON AND COOMBE LODGE

In my recent talk to Project Purley, I dealt with Humphry Repton and the Red Book that he prepared for Purley Park in 1793. A few years later he was again at work in our area, this time preparing a Red Book for Coombe Lodge, built 1794-5 for Samuel Gardener Esq.

The Coombe Park Red Book is lost, but fortunately Repton referred to it in his book, *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* published in 1803. All my quotations in the following text are from this book

The next time you drive towards Beale Park, or better still take a walk along the footpath to Beale Park, look across the river and consider Repton's analysis of the position of the house and his solution to increase its prominence.

Repton conceded that the situation and shape of the newly built house was determined with judgement but goes on to say that although 'the house derives importance from it's extended front', this does not distract from 'the bad opinion conceived of the place' when it is viewed from the turnpike road across the river (now the A329).

The reason for this disappointing view is because 'the front (of the house) towards the road faces the south, and is therefore lighted by the sun during the greatest part of the day; but being backed by lawn and arable land, and not relieved by wood, the effect of sunshine is equally strong on the background as on the house'.

Here Repton is once again drawing on the differing effects of light on what he classified as natural objects such as woods, trees, lawn and water, and artificial objects such as houses, bridges, roads, boats, arable fields and distant towns or villages; an analysis that he started in the Purley Red Book.

His recommendation for Coombe Lodge was to back the house with trees, not by 'one large wood' which would look good from all viewpoints but would sacrifice too much land, but instead the planting should be done so that the trees 'seem to climb the hills by such connecting lines as may neither appear meagre nor artificial, but, following the natural shapes of the ground, produce an apparent continuity of wood falling from the hills in various directions.'

To ensure that his planting recommendations looked good from various vantage points, he did 'many drawings ... most of them were taken from the public road between Reading and Wallingford'. Unfortunately none of these were included in Repton's published works and were presumably part of the lost Red Book of Coombe Park. Perhaps the book or at least some of these drawings may someday turn up.

Today the house that was described in a gazetteer of 1852 as a 'majestic building in Ionic style with corresponding wings' still seems to disappoint. However, if we compare the 1986 Ordnance Survey map with that of 1912, we see that much of the house has been demolished, reducing the frontage by about a half.

Ben Viljoen  
March 1996

## EDITOR'S NOTES

As part of the Project Purley display for the Barn Opening last June, there were shown laser copies of the delightful paintings from the Repton Red Book produced for Purley Park by Humphry Repton in 1793.

Interest was shown in these and requests for copies were received.

Mr Peter Fullerton has kindly given permission for Project Purley to make further copies from the already photo copied Red Book held by the Society, and we can now supply the laser copies as requested.

Laser copying is expensive and the charges for copies are as follows:-

A4 size - £2.50 per copy and

A3 size - £3.00 per copy

Although the reproduction is excellent it must be pointed out that there can be a very slight loss of colour from the original.

In September, when we resume indoor meetings, Jean Debney will bring along her copy of the Repton Red Book for members to look through, and if they wish, order laser copies.

We still have some of the "Ivy Wedding" notelets for sale at £1.00 per packet of five. Again, in the Autumn at our meetings, the packets will be available to buy.

## COMMITTEE

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