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Forthcoming Meetings

22 nd Sept	<i>Woodland Archaeology in West Berkshire</i> by Dick Greenaway.
20 th Oct	<i>Statues & Monuments of Reading</i> by Sidney Gold.
17 th Nov	<i>History of a Purley Railway Carriage</i> by Kevin McCormack.
15 th Dec	<i>Christmas Party at the Gatehouse</i> (members only)
19 th Jan	<i>Members' Meeting: A Family Heirloom</i>



THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL

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Project Purley Publications

- 4 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 Index** (revised Feb 1989)
- 5 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 part 3** (items 39-61) (Reprinted and revised Sept 2005)
- 6 **Index Locorum to The Diary of Reading Corporation** (reprinted September 2005)
- 16 **Monumental Inscriptions at St Mary's Church Part B - Memorials in old churchyard**
- 18 **Beating the Bounds (£0.50)**

Please contact Ann Betts if you would like to purchase copies of the above publications. The costs, unless marked otherwise, are £1 per copy for members and £2 per copy for non-members, plus postage where applicable.

The following are being prepared for re-publication

- 1 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 part 1** (items 1-23) (revised Aug 1988)
- 2 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 part 2** (items 24-38) (Aug 1988)
- 3 **Monumental Inscriptions at St Mary's Church Purley Part C** (Feb 1989)
- 8 **The Early History of Purley C of E School** by Rita Denman (1993)
- 10 **The Place Names of Purley on Thames** by John Chapman (Sept 1990)
- 11 **Project Purley Newsletters 1-11** (Apr 1996)
- 12 **Project Purley Newsletters 12-16** (Apr 1996)
- 13 **Purley on Thames at the Millennium** compiled by John Chapman (Dec 1999)
- 14 **Monumental Inscriptions at St Mary's Church Part C - Memorials in new churchyard**

Other Purley Related Publications

- Tour Guide to Purley Church** (1988)
A History of St Mary's Church Purley by John Chapman (1988)

*Cover: main staircase, Purley Magna
Facing page: detail from the Adam style
fireplace, Purley Magna*

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Murder Most Foul

JOHN CHAPMAN

In 1409 on the feast day of St Paul the Apostle (29th June), William Langespey was murdered in Purley. On the Monday after the feast of the Conversion of St Paul (25th January 1410) the coroner, Thomas Blankpayn held an inquest into his death. The jury was made up of men who in modern terms would have been regarded as the witnesses, they were Adam atte Hache, Thomas Liddard, Roger atte Mulli, William Skynner, William atte Rasshe, John Hoteday, John Cowpere, Geoffrey Mulleward, William Gerard, Thomas Cole, William atte Welle and P...is Lylye (his name is difficult to decipher). They avowed that on this particular Sunday John and Gilbert Percy lay in wait like highwaymen, 'after the setting of the sun' and killed William with two sticks worth two pence. They robbed him of eight pence and then escaped. At the time John Percy had a horse with saddle and bridle worth 12s 4d and a bundle of cloth stockings with blue thread worth 40s and Gilbert Percy had a horse with saddle and bridle worth 10s. The coroner ruled that all these chattels should remain in the custody of the bailiff of the Abbot of Reading.

This information is gathered from a document in the National Archives reference C258/39no9 and was transcribed and translated for us by Dr Steve Clark. It throws some interesting sidelights on the way justice worked in the early 15th century. The severity of the crime appears to be related to the total value of the goods and chattels of the criminals, rather than what they did! In this case it totals £3-2-6 plus the amount stolen, but this 8d has to be doubled as there were two assailants so the final total comes to £3-3-10. It is also interesting to have the names of twelve ordinary local men as documents of the period usually refer only to persons of rank.

Cutting a Dash in Purley

BEN VILJOEN

Early this year John Chapman received an email asking if he knew anything about a Miss Crispe or her family. The email was from Martin Booth who in May of last year bought an Alvis Silver Eagle motor car.

In his email Mr Booth told John that the car had been delivered new by Vincents of Reading to Miss Kathleen M Crispe of Purley Hall in July 1930. Mr Booth asked for any information that we had about Miss Crispe and pointed out that a Silver Eagle was an expensive sporting car and an unusual choice at the time for an unmarried 37 year old lady.

John in his reply admitted that we knew very little about the Crispe family except that from at least 1930 to 1942 Purley Hall had been rented by James Herbert Crispe, presumably Kathleen's father. I had also found that on the 3rd of July 1942 Miss Crispe had placed an advert in the personal column of The Times seeking a valet for an invalid gentleman.

Further investigations by Mr Booth revealed that James Herbert Crispe, the only male Crispe of his generation, died some months after The Times advertisement was placed and that Kathleen Crispe appears to have had only one brother who died at the age of 14.

With regards to the car Mr Booth has shared the following information: "Alvis made cars in Coventry from 1920 to 1967. The 16.95 HP (RAC rating) 6 cylinder Silver Eagle was introduced in 1929 and this car, from July 1930, was one of the early ones but with a slightly longer and wider chassis. Alvis cars were considered to be excellent sporting vehicles with all their bodies made by outside coachbuilders. The Crispe car is a Clubmans Coupe, with drophead, by Cross and Ellis, and no other example of this bodywork is known.

Perhaps in a nod towards Kathleen Crispe being an owner-driver woman, a vacuum break servo was fitted to ease the brake pedal pressure, an unusual and early manifestation of this technology."

Mr Booth very kindly sent us photographs of the car including one "as it was being eased out of the garage that had been its home for 40 plus years".



And here is a photo of a restored Alvis supplied by David Betts.



*A similar 1929 Alvis SA 16.95 Silver Eagle photographed at an event at Brooklands Museum in September 1999.
(Picture courtesy of Ken Baker's British Motor Manufacturers (1894-1960) web-site: <http://www.britishmm.co.uk>).*

I have thanked Mr Booth for sharing with us the information that he has gathered about Miss Crispe and her liking for state of the art motor cars which adds another dimension to our knowledge of Purley Hall and the people who have lived there.

If anyone does have any information about Miss Crispe and her motor car or about her father please let us know.

Honorary Life Member

At our meeting on 21 April 2006 Jean Debney was made an honorary life member of Project Purley in recognition of her services to the society. Here John Chapman is presenting Jean with the certificate.



Comments on Past Articles

Purley Garage

In September 2001 we printed an article about the Purley Garage which was written by the late Rita Hine. She had spoken to John Edwards, the owner, about the history of the garage.

The garage has since been sold and re-opened early this year as the Purley Tyre Care Specialists. It is after all one of the few remaining commercial businesses in Purley. "Then and now" photos appear below.

Editor



Parish Biers

Following the item about the parish bier in the last issue of the Journal, Rita Denman caught a glimpse of a church bier at the Kill or Cure Museum which was featured in a showing of the programme "Flog it!" She contacted the North Somerset Museum and received the following information:

This bier was purchased by the parish of Congresbury in North Somerset. It was used to take the coffin to and from the church and to the final resting place. The bier comes in two parts, the top piece with the handles, which sits on top of a wheel frame. The top part is made from wood, with iron brackets holding the vertical pieces to the horizontal frame. The wheels are on an iron frame.

The benefit of a bier was that a coffin could be wheeled through the streets to the church to avoid unnecessary lifting. The top piece would be lifted off and carried into the church itself. It was common for parishes to have a bier as it was available to those who could not afford a hearse. In more recent times biers are not used and many have been given to museum collections. We have three examples of biers from other parishes. Essentially they have the same features, though one is a hand carried one only. The date of the bier is 1893 and the others we hold are of a similar period.



Thanks to Liz Neathey of the North Somerset Museum Service for permitting us to reproduce the images they forwarded. Should any members visit North Somerset in the future and wish to look round the museum, it is situated in Burlington Street, Weston-super-Mare.

Editor

Nature Notes

MICHAEL KING

April

The first week of this month gave us strong winds and showers. Cherry trees blossomed and bumble bees and butterflies were evident on the sunny days namely orange tips, common blue. Watched a pair of hares gambolling in the fields below the allotments. Magnolia trees opened during the second week even though the mornings were still cold and chilly. I believe spring has arrived when the larch shows its cloth of green. Temperatures began to rise with some sunny days bringing out more butterflies, insects and hornets emerging from their winter hibernation. Some rain fell but not a great deal. Whilst sitting in the garden one warm afternoon, I saw four buzzards leisurely circling and falling overhead. Were they parents and two young from 2005? On reflection I felt that combination of birds would be too late in the year, as the young would have been seen off by the parents. Were they just a migrating group? Heard a Cuckoo calling across the valley. A Bittern had been reported as being heard at Theale gravel pits and the following day at Dinton Pastures - not officially confirmed. Saw dead badger on the kerbside near the water tower in Park Lane, Tilehurst which made me question were was its sett!! A family member had observed terrapins the size of a small plate in the Thames whilst canoeing between Whitchurch Bridge and Beale Park. Escapees?

May

The start of May was warm and sunny but soon changed to being a very wet month with heavy rain, cold and windy. Butterflies were observed at the beginning of the month but no life later due to the poor conditions. Watched plenty of Swifts and Martins catching highflying insects on the clearer days. Most trees now in three-quarter leaf. Fine display of hawthorn blossom in the hedgerows.

Saw a fine specimen of horse chestnut blossom on the A329, carpets of bluebells in woodland and also the first young rabbits.

Gardens increasing in colour from flowers and shrubs. Most birds busy sitting on eggs, or feeding young. Magnificent display of the emerging Mayfly on the River Pang in Sulham meadows. A friend had a family of foxes with four cubs living under her garden shed and found them a bit of a nuisance. Unfortunately frogs did not return to our pond after the severe cold weather earlier in the year, therefore no spawn or tadpoles. Had two walks on the Downs. Grassland dotted with many cowslips and fields yellow with oilseed rape.

June

Just as the growing season was getting into top gear, temperatures rising and weather dry, a hosepipe ban was imposed! The first half of the month was recorded as being the hottest days for 80 years - only to be topped by the temperatures in July. Rain on 13th June brought some relief. Spring flowers had finished and the first of the summer blooms began to show colour. Observed a pair of Kestrels performing quick, acrobatic moves high in the sky probably taking large flying insects. Red Kites swooping over the meadows below the allotments looking for small mammals as the grass was being cut. Bees very busy gathering nectar and the first stag beetles seen flying at dusk. A committee member was told of a sighting of a large black "cat-like" creature seen very early in the morning from the new properties in Purley Magna. Reports of a yellow chemical cloud descending over the east coast turned out to be birch pollen blowing in from Scandinavia.

July

Temperatures continued to be high, with humid conditions and some thunderstorms. A quiet time for birds and insects. Many plants and trees suffering in the heat and dry conditions showing leaf fall and stress, with local instances of mature oak trees shedding large boughs. On a lazy afternoon watching the bumble bees on lavender I noticed a considerable difference in size. Intrigued I discovered there are 16 species, the largest being approximately 1"

long and one called a cuckoo bee, which has a lifestyle like the cuckoo, namely that it does not feed or care for its young. Apparently it takes over an established colony by killing the queen, lays its own eggs, which are then cared for by the worker bees. 29th July was the first cool day for sometime.

Any unusual natural history sightings of interest to add to this column would be welcome.

BOOK REVIEWS

Wilson School, 100 Years of Memories, comp. By Liz WOODHOUSE, editors David Downs, Irene Witts, Gill Brown (2006); A4, red illustrated flexiback; ISBN 1-897715-21-8; Price £6.50 plus p&p.

Those of you lucky enough to have heard the presentation by some of those involved in creating this book at the meeting last November as well as those of us interested in local history, will be pleased to know that this impressive publication is now available.

The school was opened in 1905 and named after Joseph Wilson (1821-1896), a former Chairman of the Reading School Board. During both World Wars the premises were requisitioned as a War Hospital. From 1915 to 1920 the whole school was used and had 300 beds, but between 1939 and 1946 the Infants remained in the North Block with a barrier dividing them from the hospital area occupied by American troops. During both wars school continued in alternative premises.

There are lots of photographs, some of which are from newspapers, and the cover is illustrated with some of the current pupils' art work. But the highlights of this publication, for me at any rate, have to be the memories of our member, David Downs, a copy of his school report, some biographical notes and a couple of photos of a very young David.

Jean Debney

Review of Meetings & Events

Burial Grounds of London

By one of those happy coincidences which often seem to involve Project Purley, the guest speaker at the meeting on Friday, April 21st was Leslie Grout. Besides being a former “Mastermind” Champion, Mr.Grout is also a Blue Badge Guide at Windsor and his talk to society members came on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth II's 80th birthday, which she celebrated with a walkabout in the Royal Borough where Mr.Grout lives.

In a brief introduction to his topic, Mr.Grout explained that originally all burials took place in churchyards in the area where the deceased had lived. By the 1830s however space had become so limited that bodies were being piled on top of one another and the smell emanating from some graves had become so nauseous that visitors were forced to hold their noses as they made their way to church.

So the whole business of burials and burial grounds had to be undertaken by private companies and burial land found on the outskirts of London. Even then, there was still no facility in these locations for the burial of Jews or non-conformists, as they could not be interred in consecrated ground. In many of these large public cemeteries gravestones have had to be repaired and moved as a result of bomb damage during World War II.

It is impossible in a written narrative to do justice to the excellent illustrations our speaker had provided of so many gravestones and mausoleums. It is more appropriate therefore to detail the burial grounds he described and reflect on some of the better known people who lie at rest therein.

Kensal Green, described by Mr.Grout as “one of the magnificent seven” of London's burial grounds, holds the remains of the Duke of Sussex, one of Queen Victoria's sons. Princess Sophia was also buried there, and with two members of Royalty already in their graves, commoners were literally queuing up to have their names put down for a burial plot there. Also buried at Kensal Green are

Blondin the tightrope walker; Dr.James Barry who had pretended to be a man, but was found by undertakers to be a woman; the Brunel family; literary figures such as Anthony Trollope and W.M.Thackeray; W.H.Smith, the founder of the bookshop empire who was a role model for the character of Sir Joseph Porter K.C.B. in Gilbert & Sullivan's “HMS Pinafore” and sadly, Marigold, the three year old daughter of Winston and Clementine Churchill. Jane Francesca, the mother of Oscar Wilde, is also buried at Kensal Green, but had no monument erected to record the fact until one hundred years after her death. The Catholic cemetery of Saint Mary's is next door to Kensal Green, and contains the last resting place of the entertainer Gilbert Harding and the conductor, Sir John Barbirolli.

Nunhead, the sister cemetery of Highgate, is where graves are sold in perpetuity. It was originally administered by the London Cemetery Company, but once they had withdrawn, nature took over and graves became overgrown. It does contain a grave marking the Leysdown tragedy of 1912 when eight Boy Scouts, including an ancestor of the current England footballer, David Beckham, were drowned in a sailing accident.

Other burial grounds referred to by Mr.Grout, and some of the people who lie there, were Abney Park Cemetery (last resting place of William and Catherine Booth founders of the Salvation Army and whose headstone is, of course, engraved “Promoted to Glory”); Saint Marylebone and East Finchley; The City of London Cemetery (which contains the remains of the actress Anna Neagle and the monument to David Vigland R.N. whose memorial is covered in winter to prevent it from becoming stained and grubby); Richmond; Hampstead (where the musician Dennis Brain was buried in 1957 after a car accident and where the funeral of music hall star Marie Lloyd attracted a crowd of 20,000); Tower Hamlets and the Great Northern Cemetery.

The Jewish community had their own burial grounds, the most upmarket of these being at Willesden where Lord and Lady Rothschild are interred. The Jewish faith dictates that only one person may be buried in a grave, that burial should take place within

twenty-four hours of death and that any tatty hymn books should not be destroyed but buried in the coffin of a well known Jew. This happened at the funeral of the singer Frankie Vaughan. Golders Green Cemetery contains the remains of Lord Hore-Belisha, Jaqueline du Pre and Rufus Isaacs, Marquis of Reading. It was one of the first cemeteries to adopt the practice of horizontal gravestones. Golders Green Crematorium has memorial tablets to many well known entertainers including Bud Flanagan, Hughie Green, Ivor Novello, Norman Vaughan and Bernie Winters, as well as Sigmund Freud and Bram Stoker, the creator of Dracula.

Mr. Grout was moving towards the end of his tour of burial grounds now and mentioned people from such heroic backgrounds as Rex Warneford, awarded the Victoria Cross for shooting down a Zeppelin in World War I and Emmeline Pankhurst, who led the campaign for votes for women. They are both buried in Brompton Cemetery, while Putney Vale holds the remains of the Egyptologist, Howard Carter and Desert Island Discs' Roy Plomley. The South Metropolitan has a number of elaborate and expensive coffins resting in underground catacombs, whilst Norwood has a cemetery within a cemetery for the Greek community.

But the final reference was to perhaps the best known of all the London burial grounds, Highgate Cemetery. When the London Cemetery Company abandoned it, it was maintained by Friends of Highgate. It contains the graves of Tom Sayers, a prizefighter whose chief mourner was his faithful dog, the television chef Philip Harben, actor Sir Ralph Richardson, who had often appeared in horror films set in graveyards and probably the most visited of all graves in London, that of the founder of modern communist thought, Karl Marx.

Leslie Grout received warm applause at the end of his hour long talk. It was well deserved, as he is a fluent, humorous speaker who does not need notes and he had brought an apparently sombre topic to life in a most entertaining manner.

David Downs

Walkabout

It was an intrepid band of twenty Project Purley members who braved the incessant drizzle to gather under the bandstand in the Forbury Gardens on May 19th for our annual walkabout. This was not to be an outing for the fainthearted, for not only did we have to contend with the miserable weather, there was also the danger posed by the busy late rush-hour traffic as we criss-crossed the road in the centre of Reading, the cyclists and hurrying pedestrians on the pavements. Also, in some ways most bemusing of all, the fact that we were to be bombarded with information about no fewer than 54 buildings and monuments which are to be found in the centre of the town.

It was fortunate that our guides, Sidney Gold, a National Trust member and well respected expert on local monuments, and John Dearing, Chairman of the History of Reading Society, were sufficiently knowledgeable and enthusiastic to retain our attention for most of the evening. They had obviously prepared their scripts with great care and took it in turns to tell us about so many interesting and beautiful parts of Reading which, in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, we take for granted and are too busy to appreciate.

It is possible to select only a few highlights from the many places we visited and the stops we made. The evening began with a look at the Maiwand Lion, an iconic statue in the Forbury which commemorates a famous battle of the Afghan War and where, on July 27th 1880, 328 soldiers of the Royal Berkshire Regiment were massacred by native tribesmen. The sculptor was George Simonds, a member of the well-known local brewery family, who took five years to complete the work, and Sidney was quick to dispel the myth that the sculptor committed suicide when it was pointed out to him that the lion's stride pattern is unrealistic. Simonds had in fact studied for some time at the Zoological Gardens in London to ensure he effected an accurate representation.

The Forbury Gardens themselves, recently renovated and upgraded, were originally laid out in 1855 on the site of an old rubbish dump owned by the Council. Besides the grotto, fountain and rustic arch, they also contain the Henry I cross, unveiled in 1909 to commemorate King Henry I who founded Reading Abbey in 1121 and

was buried there in January 1136.

Surprisingly we did not visit the Abbey Ruins, which many would consider to be the most significant part of Reading's heritage, but walked briskly past the Abbey Gate and the four surviving terraced houses of Abbots' Walk, near where there is a bronze plaque showing where Jane Austen, author of "Pride & Prejudice," attended school from 1785 to 1786.

John spoke briefly about Reading Prison which dates from the 1840s and which is best known as the temporary home of Oscar Wilde. It became the inspiration for his enduring poem, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," and replaced an earlier gaol built in the late 1790s on the same site. There was a quick reference to St. James Roman Catholic Church, built in 1837 but extended in 1925 and 1962, and then we made our way into St. Laurence's Churchyard. The churchyard, as our guides explained, is notable for the grave and wooden headboard in memory of Henry West, killed by a sudden whirlwind whilst working at the Great Western Railway Station in 1840, and also the remains of the massive church window which was damaged during a German Luftwaffe bombing raid in February 1943.

We saw the War Memorial between the Forbury and St. Laurences, commissioned in 1919 but not completed until 1931, and then at a much reduced cost of £1,000, by local builders, Collier & Catley. After World War Two, the letter "s" was added to the inscription so that it now remembered citizens of Reading who fell in both Great Wars. The architect was Leslie Gunston, a cousin of the war poet, Wilfred Owen.

There was a brief pause by the statue of Queen Victoria, erected in 1887 to mark her Golden Jubilee. Simonds, following the success of his Maiwand Lion, was the obvious choice as designer and sculptor, but he and his assistants had to work for 15 hours a day for five months to ensure that it was completed in time for its unveiling by the Duke of Cambridge in June 1887. Another local myth was refuted when we were told that the statue is not facing away from the town centre due to the Queen's dislike of the town, because she never actually visited Reading. The statue has become the object of unofficial adornment from time to time, especially on University Rag

days, but most recently with blue and white scarves and banners as town centre football fans celebrated Reading F.C.'s promotion to the Premiership.

The Town Hall complex was built in several stages between 1786 and 1897, though the main building stands on the original site of Reading School, which was founded in 1120 but relocated to Erleigh Road in 1870. From there we moved on to the Market Place and looked at the Simeon Obelisk, paid for by Edward Simeon, a Reading man and director of the Bank of England. He commissioned his friend, St. John Soane to make the original design in 1804, to improve the appearance of a rather dull and gloomy part of the town. The obelisk is triangular in outline to correspond with the shape of the Market Place.

The majority of buildings in the Market Place, King's Street, Broad Street and Minster Street have changed their appearance as well as their function over the decades, so there is a not completely pleasant contrast of styles in the town centre. Some are timber framed, some have Ionic columns, Attic arches, one or two are in Art Nouveau style, some have glazed tiled and terra cotta fronts and Barclays Bank is built in the Italian Palazzo style. Minster Street Telephone Exchange was designed by Leonard Stokes around 1901, in the rather plain and functional English style, but the fact that Stokes married Edith Gaine, the daughter of the General Manager of the National Telephone Company, ensured that he received the commission to design a further twenty telephone exchanges throughout the country.

We were nearing the end of our tour now and gained brief respite from the inclement weather as we sheltered in St. Mary's Churchyard to be told that this was Reading's oldest church, having celebrated its millennium in 1979. Apart from the tower which dates from 1550, much of the rest of St. Mary's dates from the Victorian restorers. The Harrinson memorial of Portland Stone in the churchyard is not a war memorial, but was erected in 1887 to recognise the munificence of Dr. Isaac Harrinson, a wealthy medical practitioner whose generosity enabled a series of old, dilapidated cottages to be cleared and thereby alleviate traffic problems. He also paid for a new aisle and organ at St. Mary's and for the Jubilee Fountain in St. Mary's Butts. The

fountain has 29 water jets plus an overflow for dogs and, like Harrinson's memorial, is built from Portland stone.

The final stage of the two and half hour long journey saw us cross the Butts and begin the steady climb up Castle Street past Lydford House (formerly the Castle Brewery), the Congregational Chapel which has been transformed in turn into a furniture store, nightclub and public house, and The Sun pub. The latter dates from the early 17th century and was a minor coaching inn which also served the important carrier trades which passed through Reading on their way to surrounding villages.

And then at last we were granted sanctuary, at least from the heavy rain, as John Dearing opened the door to St.Mary's Episcopal Chapel in Castle Street and allowed us to sit for a while in the pews of the church where he is a regular worshipper. He explained that he is a member of the congregation of the Church of England (Continuing) and the opportunity to look around the beautiful building with its raised pulpit and high vaulted ceiling in relative comfort made an enjoyable ending to our lengthy walkabout.

Although better weather would have made for a more pleasant outing, those members who completed the journey - and a few did fall



St.Mary's Episcopal Chapel, Castle Street

by the wayside during the evening - all agreed that we had learned much about Reading town centre. For that we are indebted to our two indefatigable guides, Sidney Gold and John Dearing. We should be grateful for their expertise.

David Downs

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Thank you to everyone who supported "A Midsummer Night's Dream" performed by the Rain or Shine Theatre Company at The Barn on Friday, June 9th. Project Purley, who organised the event, has

handed over a cheque for £500 to the Dogs for the Disabled charity as a result of the evening.

The theatre company had provided a matinee performance in The Barn for an audience from Kendrick Girls' School, who are studying Shakespeare's comedy for their exams. The evening performance was attended by a sell out crowd, who clearly enjoyed the occasion and which



included a reviewer from The Stage newspaper. An extract from her review is as follows:

"For its only indoor date on a three month tour of open air theatre locations, Rain or Shine Theatre Company staged A Midsummer Night's Dream in the delightful Old Barn in Purley on Thames near Reading.

Small-scale with relatively low budget yet practical and effective set design and costumes, this production takes its strength and success from its tight-knit cast of ten highly talented actors who double and even treble on some roles that are not normally twinned. They also all play various members of the fairy world leaving none of the cast with an opportunity to relax offstage for any length of time. It is therefore an incredibly demanding production involving some clever re-scripting that works with charming originality."

David Downs

Outing to Milestones Museum

Ignoring the counter-attractions of World Cup football, Trooping the Colour and hopeful scrutiny of the Queen's Birthday Honours List, a dedicated twelve strong band of Project Purley members motored across to Milestones Museum on the outskirts of Basingstoke for the society's traditional summer outing.

This was in fact a return visit for some of us, as Milestones had been the venue for an outing five years previously. On that occasion the rain had lashed down, but Saturday, June 17th 2006 was a beautifully warm day, without a cloud in the sky. It was in some ways a shame to be indoors, but after a welcoming cup of coffee, our party began the serious business of exploring every corner of this fascinating museum.

Milestones is a town within a town and each shop, house and yard a museum within a museum. It recreates old buildings from in and around Basingstoke through the Victorian and Edwardian eras to 1945 and the end of World War Two. Although many of the original exhibits and artefacts are so fragile that there are plenty of "keep off" and "do not touch" signs, the museum experience is designed to be user-friendly, so visitors have optional access to audio guides, explanatory videos, informative but not overpowering labelling, and actor-attendants dressed in period costume. The latter group we were to meet later during the museum's "Happy Hour." For school groups there is ample opportunity for Key Stage Two history, science and technology curriculum work, much of it hands-on and including facilitator-led workshops, trails and activities.

For most of our group the tour of the reconstructed buildings began with a visit to the Waterloo Foundry, where a notice to employees stated that wages in 1910 were a mere £1 per week. At Wallis & Stevens, the working week lasted for 54 hours, including Saturdays and workers were warned, "Any employee not cheerfully carrying out the instructions of his foreman shall be liable to a fine of 1 shilling (5p) or instant dismissal." Harsh conditions indeed and which led to the rise of the trades union movement in the twentieth century. The Post Office had handwritten telegraph notices in its shop window entitled "Official War News," with details of the Allies' battlefield successes as the Great War moved towards its end in 1918.

We were able to inspect from the outside a Portsmouth Corporation tram, and parked on the village green, an authentic gypsy caravan. Next came an array of shop fronts, including Willis & Son, Silversmith & Optician, where a superb silver fruit bowl was advertised for just £3. Opposite the shops is a row of cramped,

terraced houses. It is possible to look through the front and back windows and view the crowded living conditions of an ordinary working-class family, but be warned - anyone who goes into the tiny back garden of No.11 Jubilee Street and opens the door of the outside toilet could be in for a nasty surprise!

At about 12.30 p.m., Ben, Dorothy, David, Ann and I went into the Baverstock Arms, a pub faithfully decorated in Victorian style for lunchtime drinks. Unfortunately these were sold at modern, not Victorian, prices and we had barely enough time to empty our glasses before, rather like Doctor Who, we entered another timewarp. Now it was an ARP Warden, ringing his bell to tell us that a Luftwaffe air-raid had ended and that we were all invited to a "Happy Hour" in front of the town bandstand in Victoria Place.

Three actors, who apparently double up as the museum's fire marshals, reminded us of World War Two austerity. Mrs Cox explained how to make mock milk chocolate balls using cocoa and potato mash, plus a little of her.

rationed sugar. Mrs.Prewett, also mindful of 1942 rationing which meant that 60 clothing coupons had to last for fourteen months, explained the principles of "make do and mend." She told us that parachute silk could be used to make underwear, that lipstick leftovers could be mixed with Vaseline to make more lipstick and that gravy browning painted on ladies' legs was an ideal substitute for stockings. Rather intriguingly, she persuaded Mrs.Cox to stand on a chair and raise her skirt so that she could give a practical demonstration, also using a piece of burnt cork to draw the seam. The



burnt cork, Mrs.Prewett told us, could also be used to draw false eyebrows. "The Happy Hour" concluded with the ARP Warden, Mr.Fichett, who had poked fun at the two ladies during their demonstrations, handing out songsheets so that the audience could join in the choruses of wartime favourites such as "Run, Rabbit Run" and "There'll Always be an England." Although the acting of Cox, Prewett and Fitchett had been totally over the top, their contribution was amusing as well as informative and the highlight of the visit for many of us.

There was just time to look at the exhibition featuring the history of the Hampshire Fire Brigade and the incredible collection of cameras and photographic equipment inside the shop of Charles Dales Photographic Supplies before moving into the part of the building dedicated to Thornycroft, once the major employer in Basingstoke. A video presentation detailed the firm's move to the town in 1898 and how it supplied steam, then internal combustion powered vehicles to the Forces during the Boer and both World Wars, as well as being a major supplier of commercial road vehicles until its merger with AEC in the late 1960s. The factory closed in 1995, when the site was purchased by Safeways. The supermarket firm removed the huge Thornycroft clock and arranged for its repositioning at Milestones.

My only disappointment at the museum was to find, right at the end of my visit, that the Automobile Association exhibition, and especially the cartoon section, had disappeared. However, there was ample compensation as the space occupied by the A.A. in 2001 is now devoted to the work of Abram Games. Games, who died in 1996, was one of the twentieth century's most important and influential graphic designers, as well as being the country's "Official War Poster Artist" during the Second World War, designing over one hundred posters for the army. Throughout his life he was responsible for so many of Britain's iconic images, including the logo for the Queen's Award to Industry and the emblem for the 1951 Festival of Britain. An opportunity to appreciate his skill provided the perfect ending to a most enjoyable three-hour visit to what is surely one of the most informative museums in the south of England.

David Downs

The Project Purley Barbecue

The Society's annual barbecue took place on the evening of Friday, 14th July in the garden of Ann and John Chapman's house. This was a new venue for us and proved to be an ideal place to enjoy our sausages, beef burgers and chicken together with the excellent salads and desserts provided by our members.

As usual (with the exception of one m e m o r a b l e occasion a few years ago when the heavens opened and Edna Bint led us in a chorus of Singing in the Rain), we were blessed with a warm and dry evening. However, we did feel rather



sorry for the chefs (John Chapman and Ben Viljoen) who sweltered over the "hot stoves."

All in all the evening was a great success with everyone going home well fed and contented. Our thanks were conveyed to Ann and John for the use of their garden and to John and Ben for the expertly cooked food.

Ann Betts

Purley Magna Visit

The visit to Purley Magna was spread over two days, the 14th and 15th of June as the majority of Project Purley members were anxious to participate.

We gathered in one of the new houses in the courtyard for coffee and a briefing by a representative of T A Fisher. The briefing gave an overview of the history of the building and how the main building was renovated and adapted for its new purpose.

One of the main challenges was the replacing of the rotten wall plates, the timber members laid longitudinally on the top of each wall. This was done by lifting each section of the roof.

It was agreed with English Heritage to restore the original profile of the house by lowering the link to the services wing thus reinstating the proper distinction between the main house and the service wing.

The external brickwork on the new houses in the courtyard and their height and roofing has been designed to blend with the service wing and the donkey ring has been preserved.

Initially it was planned to convert the main house into five rather than three apartments. Luckily this was resisted enabling each of the three apartments to have their own entrances (the portico, the main stairs and the service stairs) which preserved the integrity of the house.



I am sure that each member of Project Purley had a favourite amongst the three apartments in the main house; mine was the one on the first floor with its splendid stairway, beautiful sky-lit hall and breathtaking views. My only objection was the visual dominance

of the tennis courts which distracts from the wonderful views from the upper windows and could easily be screened by a yew hedge.

Our thanks must go to T A Fisher for their hospitality and the time that they devoted to our visits and for the splendid job that they have done preserving this important piece of Purley's history and bringing it back to its former glory.

Ben Viljoen

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