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## *Forthcoming Meetings & Events*

Mapledurham Mill <i>Corrie Starling</i>	15 <sup>th</sup> Feb
AGM followed by Purley Cricket Club <i>Martin Bishop</i>	14 <sup>th</sup> Mar

*Please note that this meeting will be held on the second Friday of the month and that the AGM will commence at 7.30pm followed by the speaker at 8 o'clock*

Daughter of the Regiment <i>Catherine Butcher</i>	18 <sup>th</sup> Apr
Walkabout - still to be arranged	16 <sup>th</sup> May



# 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: The old lock cottage*

*Frontispiece: The lock keeper's office and the mileage sign*

## THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL



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by  
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*Chairman's New Year Message*

JOHN CHAPMAN

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Designer Ben Viljoen*

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It seems only a while ago that I was writing last year's message - my how time does fly!! This has been a good year for Project Purley - most of our talks have been repeats of our 2000 Millennium programme, but all seem to have improved with age. And even for those that had heard them before, there was plenty of new material while our newer members got an insight into the history of Purley that is not immediately obvious.

We have made considerable progress in capturing documents and images in electronic form so they can be made more widely available. So far we have 269 articles, 356 press cuttings, 1134 images and 1429 documents registered and lots more waiting to be registered. We showed off the electronic archive at the BLHA AGM and played a major role in staging an exhibition at Newbury Museum.

The social side has been badly affected by rain; the BBQ was a great success but our hostess, Dorothy Viljoen, was stranded in Wantage and missed out. We had a great walkabout in Wallingford, spoiled only by a greenfinch which insisted on interrupting the speaker and distracting our many nature lovers. While on the subject of natural history we have been regaled by Michael King's notes in the Journal which have opened the eyes of many of us to what is going on around us.

The outing to Buscot Park was pretty well washed out but members still enjoyed the house. The performance by the Rain or Shine Theatre Company filled the Barn twice and we raised £750 for Macmillan Cancer Support with the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire coming to help us present it. The occasion was saddened by remembrance of the loss of two dear friends, Ron Denman and Richard Hall, both of whom have been sorely missed.

The Journal has gone from strength to strength with some

fascinating articles on a wide range of subjects. Thanks to Ann Betts and Ben Viljoen for all their hard work. Ben also is to be thanked for framing an old window removed from the church in 1984 and now again on view in the chancel.

We have a new meetings secretary in Tony Trendle and he is putting together an ambitious programme for 2008 with some novel ideas. Your committee have been active in making plans for the future with a lot of hard work from all. Thank you all for your support and enthusiasm.

Finally may I wish every one of you a very happy and prosperous New Year and I look forward to seeing you at our meetings and other events in 2008.

### *Macmillan Presentation*

On Wednesday, September 19<sup>th</sup> the Project Purley committee and a few guests met at The Barn to present a cheque for £750 to Abbie Stevens who was representing Macmillan Cancer Support. Philip Wroughton (now Sir Philip), the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire, was also in attendance.



*Sir Philip Wroughton, Abbie Stevens & David Downs*

The donation of £750 was the profit from Rain or Shine's production of "Twelfth Night" in The Barn in June. The theatre company will return next year on Friday, the 6<sup>th</sup> June to perform "A Winter's Tale."

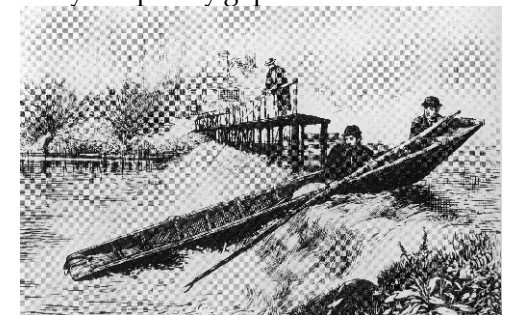
## *Mapledurham Lock*

JOHN CHAPMAN

The River Thames was for many centuries Britain's main highway. It was both a way of penetrating England from the North Sea and a barrier between the south and the midlands. Bridges were few and far between but there were places where it was possible to wade across or persuade a local fisherman to carry you across. It had three very conflicting primary uses: for providing water to run watermills, for fishing and as a transport link. Unfortunately for the boatmen and fishermen it was the millers who owned land adjacent to the river and had the greatest say in how the flow of water should be controlled. In order to grind corn it was necessary to maintain a good head of water upstream so that the power of the water falling could be used to drive the mill. The obvious way to do this was to build a weir across the river to act as a dam.

From mediaeval times there was a weir at Mapledurham, owned by the Lords of Mapledurham to store water for the use of their mill. This was located on the north bank as this was where the firmer ground lay, the Purley side being very marshy. In 1369 King Edward called for a survey to be made of the Thames between Henley and Streatley to identify the obstructions to navigation and where conflicts were occurring.

For many years the conflicts were partly resolved by the use of flash locks. These were essentially temporary gaps in the weir which could be opened and closed to allow boats to pass through. This process was known as flashing. Going downstream it was relatively easy as the boatman merely had to steer for the gap and he was 'flashed'



through. Going upstream was a lot more difficult and usually there was a windlass set into the bank a bit upstream and the vessel was attached to a rope and wound through against the current. One or two of these windlasses have survived and the site of the one at Pangbourne is known. However we do not know where the one at Mapledurham was located, but it would almost certainly have been on the Oxfordshire side about a quarter of a mile above the mill.

The great difficulty with flash locks was that they lost a lot of water from the river and so reduced the level of the upper reach that it could sometimes be two or three days before there was enough water to run the mill. Naturally the millers were very loth to allow flashing and usually levied very high charges as well as making the barges wait. A secondary effect was that in the reach above the flash a boat could be grounded because of shortage of water.

After the formation of the Thames Commissioners in 1771 a timetable for the flashes was devised so that the water from one flash could be used to restore the reach below it to avoid flooding and shortages of water. The times for Mapledurham were set at 7.30 am on Wednesdays and 10.30 am on Saturdays. Not very many keepers' names are known but a report in 1580 said it was owned by Mr William Blount and kept by Roberte Byrde. The list of 1585 gave Mr Michael Blount as the owner and Robert Blount as the keeper.

A House of Lords report dated 1681 gave the fee at Mapledurham as 1/8 but no tonnage was recorded. This had increased to 12/6 per 60 tons in 1720 and was back at 8/- in 1751. In 1771 the toll was reported as having been set by order of 1754 at 8d for every 5 tons, but a report of 1772 gave it as 15/- for 150 tons. In 1775 it was stated as being 10/- for 140 ton, in 1791 as 8/- for 60 ton, in 1821 as 3/8 per 20 tons and in 1846 as 3d per 5 tons.

Local people had petitioned the Commissioners for money to be spent on the Mapledurham reach and so it was agreed in 1776 to build a pound lock at Mapledurham. In fact the lock was built across a headland of Purley. It had wooden gates at each end with sloping banks of earth which became grassed. Stakes were erected to mark

out the navigable channel and to allow boats to tie up while the lock was filled or emptied. It was opened in Summer 1777 and the flash lock was taken out of use in July. In 1786 the Commissioners tried to rename the new lock as 'Purley Lock' but old traditions prevailed and 'Mapledurham' it has remained. A toll of 3d per ton was levied on boats passing upstream. This included a 'free' return passage. Downstream boats were charged three half-pence.

A survey of the river was conducted in 1794 and for the first time we get a description of the lock. The falls were described as 'at the upper cill 4ft 0ins at the lower cill 2ft 5ins only, at the pen 4ft 2ins' The width was given as 18ft 2ins and it was recorded that there were no flash and low water marks. There was only a 'centry box' to take care of the lock which would have provided shelter for the lock keeper who presumably lived in Purley village.

The lock had just been rebuilt of sound oak. Previously it had been made of fir. This latter had been done improperly by a Mr Nicholls. Some of the piles were rotted on the head but generally it was in good order. Soundings at the tail of the lock ranged from 3ft 9ins to 3ft 3ins and 3ft 0ins. Downstream the banks were 'much annoyed by bushes which cease opposite New Farm'. Presumably the bushes made towing difficult. In 1821 the toll had risen to £1.0.10d for a boat of 140 tons but it was proposed to return to the 1771 rate of 8d per 5 tons. By 1846 the rate had been reduced to 3d per 5 tons.

A watch box was ordered in 1798 and this was the first year that the lock keeper was named in the official records. He was Alex Geddes and he was paid 24 shillings monthly. In 1801 he asked for more money and offered to do small repairs and other jobs in exchange. Consideration was given to putting the Purley Ferry in his charge, but it was decided not to as it was 'too far away'. He obtained an advance to 47 shillings however.

Geddes resigned in 1805 and his son James applied for the job and got it. James died in 1816 and his widow Cecily was not only given the succession but the Commissioners decided to build a cottage for her. This was built on the island (see front cover). She was given a pay rise to 70 shillings a month in October 1822. Cecily resigned in

May 1822 to be replaced in June by William Sheppard.

Sheppard was to stay as lock keeper for 54 years, far and away the longest holder of the office. In 1832 the lock was reported as being in a dangerous condition, but what was done about it is unclear. In 1849 the Metropolitan Water Company applied to lay their inlet pipes near the lock and in the same year a toll house was paid for, so presumably erected.

Competition from the railways was getting intense and in March 1853 Sheppard's wages were reduced by a half in common with all other lock keepers. Tolls were suspended for a year in a futile attempt to attract back the traffic. In 1854 his wages were further reduced from 52 shillings to 24 shillings a month but he was allowed to keep the pleasure tolls which were increasing steadily. His duties were also increased and he had to look after the Purley and Roebuck ferries as well as the lock. By 1866 he was back to 52 shillings a month.

In 1868 a dispute arose with Mr C Blount of Mapledurham House. It seemed to start with a disagreement about the statutory compensation for the weir, but it became very personal between him and Sheppard who was forbidden to land on the Mapledurham side to obtain supplies in April. Mr Blount complained about him to the Conservators and in June Sheppard was told to move to Hambledon. He was to be replaced by a Mrs Strainge. He stayed where he was however and in September the transfer orders were rescinded much to the very vocal annoyance of Blount.

To supplement his income Sheppard was a fisherman. He rented the right to net fish in the river and devised all sorts of traps for the fish including bag-nets and flue-nets. He was reported as having skinned the river clean of fish much above the size of a sprat and he was reputed to send as much as half a ton of fish at a time to Leadenhall Market in London. William Sheppard retired in April 1882 after 54 years' service. He died in April 1889 after having gone to live in Caversham but was buried in Purley Churchyard.

R H Carter succeeded Sheppard as lock-keeper in 1882. He died in office in June 1887. J C Timpson took over in 1887 but he resigned almost immediately in September in favour of John Collier who in his

turn was replaced in October by Walter Crowe. Walter and Sarah Crowe's daughter Maud died in January 1891 aged 8 and Walter followed soon after in June 1894 aged 59. Crowe's place was taken by F Newcombe from Godstow and at his own request he exchanged positions in May 1897 with Stephen Wootton who was assistant at Richmond. He also took a drop in salary of 30 shillings a month.

By now the character of river traffic had changed dramatically. It was no longer the main highway for heavy freight as that was being carried by the railways. What was new however, was the use of the river for leisure. Steamers were plying up and down the river providing a scenic and relaxing passage and dozens of people were turning out in their own boats, mainly punts and rowboats but the more affluent could afford steam power. This brought considerable business to the lock in the summer time and a new lock was built alongside the old pound lock. This was extensively enlarged in 1908. The new lock had brick sides and required far less water even though it was bigger.



John James Thame was keeping in 1914 and there are several cases of his actions as a life saver. It was during this period that the rector of Purley, John Dudley Matthews, was drowned trying to cross the river. Alfred Baldwin was keeping in 1924, William Edward Hatton in 1940 and Frederick G May in 1950. Leslie Ledgerwood became keeper in 1956 but he stayed only one year. It was around this time that the Thames was extensively dredged and the dredgings were landed at Mapledurham Lock to be taken by lorry to the Pond Field where they were dumped. This necessitated improving the track from Mapledurham Drive.

Leonard Ovary took over in 1957 and during his time as lock keeper he was given the 'Best Kept Lock' award in 1971. He left in

1975 to be replaced by George Fielder who became well known on the river for his work in protecting and caring for the swans which were suffering badly from lead poisoning. George retired in April



2007 and became Purley's first 'Villager of the Year' as well as being awarded honorary membership of Project Purley

The lock today is still as busy as ever in summer time but apart from Salter's steamers and regular party boats,

the traffic is almost entirely launches and narrow boats of people either out for the day or using the river for a leisurely holiday. It has been updated several times and now has power operated gates. The



weir is interesting in that it is composed of a number of distinct segments which exemplify the various types of weir control that one can find on the Thames today. On the far side from Purley is a permanent weir controlling the channel

to the mill race, the mill having been restored for the filming of 'The Eagle has Landed' in the 1970s. Then there is a section showing the use of paddles and rimers and a concrete race for the use of salmon travelling upstream. Other parts have computer controlled gates.

## Nature Notes

MICHAEL KING



### August

The month began with two weeks of pleasant sunny weather, but once again the rain and cold temperatures took over. It has been a good year for slugs, but so much wet has resulted in poor vegetable growth and spoilt the summer flowers.

Where do the butterflies go in summer when it rains? Do they fold their wings and shelter under leaves, because they soon reappear when the sun does come out again. Bees and wasps also had difficulty in collecting pollen.

There was a reported sighting off the Cornish coast of a great white shark - global warming!!! This sighting has still to be verified.

### September

The weather for the first two weeks was warm and sunny. Was this summer at last? Sadly no, as the month finished being unseasonably cold with rain and strong winds.

These changing temperatures gave us a second crop of early strawberries on the allotment. Dahlias and Michaelmas Daisies flowering profusely. The leaves on the Horse Chestnut trees turning brown, not autumnal colouring but due once again to the Leaf Mining Moth.

Hedgehog numbers are apparently falling, but no explanation has been given so far. The Fox has become a regular visitor to our garden and uses the lawn as its loo!! On bending down to remove the offending item, I was surprised to see it move. This turned out to be the caterpillar stage of the Elephant Hawk Moth which is

about 3" long, dark coloured, with a "horn" on its last body segment and eyes which enlarge when danger is near. They like fuchsias and the broad leaf willow herb. More Craneflies were inside the bungalow than out in the garden. Canada Geese beginning to feed in the meadows.

### *October*

First week was warm and sunny. Spent the second week in Derbyshire ideal walking weather. Early morning frosts and sunny days ended the month. Weathermen predicting that this coming winter will be colder than the last few years.

Bird migrations appear earlier this autumn. Large flocks of Pink-footed Geese from Greenland and a flock of Siskins, over 1,000 strong, flying in from Scandinavia. Late sighting of a Hawk Moth feeding on the last of the summer flowers and an unusual display of nine Red Kites circling over the bungalow.

### *November*

The month saw much rain and high winds, followed by heavy frosts and a few foggy mornings.

Trees and shrubs still in their autumn coats despite the many bags we have filled with leaves that had already fallen. The winds threatened the east coast with high tides, but fortunately the sea defences were not breached although only by a matter of inches.

Bumble Bees and a lone Red Admiral Butterfly still active. A family member reported seeing House Sparrows collecting nesting materials. Nest building, or insulation against the coming cold weather? Walking along the banks of the Sul just before it enters the Thames observed many shoals of small fish and disturbed a heron busily fishing. There appears to be an exceptional number of Jays in gardens, probably due to the abundance of acorns and berries. If you are at Reading Station and have time to look skywards you might be privileged to see a pair of Falcons terrifying the local pigeon

population. A very small Hedgehog on our patio one evening will it survive the winter? Apparently 126 have been handed in to the wildlife rescue centre in Tewkesbury.

## *Reviews of Meetings & Events*

### *St Mary's Church*

The stirring sound of constantly pealing church bells greeted members of Project Purley as they arrived at St.Mary's for the September meeting. The venue was entirely appropriate as the topic for discussion was the history of our village church. The speaker was our Chairman, John Chapman, and his introductory talk was to be the second in a series of repeats of those given to society members in the Millennium Year of 2000.

As John began it seemed as if he might be the first speaker in the history of Project Purley to deliver his lecture to a musical accompaniment, but fortunately the bellringers finished their practice just as he was getting into full flow. This was a great relief to all concerned, as John's presentation was no mere rehash of his 2000 effort but an updated version with an easy to follow powerpoint display.

We were told that Christianity first came to Purley between 635 AD and 750 AD, and that it was probable that Purley's first church was built around 800 AD. At that time Lords of the Manor could build their own church to improve their social standing, and employ the priest, who could read and write, as their clerk. The original church stood amongst mud and marshland, on an island in the centre of the village, as evidenced by the flood plain maps of 1947 and 2003.

By the year 900 all settlements had agreed parish boundaries - hence the ancient custom of "Beating the Bounds" - which invariably included a place of worship. However Purley's Saxon church was burnt down during the English Civil War period of 1135

to 1139, and rebuilt around 1150. It was dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, a cult which had become popular in France, and whose influence had become increasingly popular in England.

The church was quite small, about the size of the present nave. It had a Norman font and windows typical of the period, and the Reading Abbey charter of 1241 confirms that the parishioners of Purley had to pay a yearly pension of 2 shillings to the Abbot of Reading. In the fourteenth century the church was rebuilt, with a change to Gothic style, incorporating lancet windows and gargoyles adorning the new tower.

At the time of the Reformation, when Henry VIII sequestered the monasteries, Purley's church was declared royal and belonging directly to the Crown. Any incoming rector, therefore, had to be appointed by the Prime Minister's office. Elizabeth I, however, allowed worship in England to become fragmented due to her suspicion of Catholics, and there were introduced in churches, many unlicensed clergy who just read homilies instead of conducting complete services.

St Mary's survived all these tribulations and, in 1626, there was another rebuild with a new chancel, porch and tower. The bells in the tower date mostly from the period 1627-1635, though others were added in 1787 and 1788. The rectory was also rebuilt in the eighteenth century and the rectors clearly enjoyed a comfortable if not opulent lifestyle. In 1777 Benjamin Skinner's annual account showed that he had an income of £228, whilst his expenditure was just £51. Much of his profit came from the sale of tithes (£140) whilst he could also levy a fine of one shilling per parishioner for non-attendance at church.

By 1870 the church had been redesigned yet again. There was a new vestry and organ chamber, the memorials had been moved to the tower and there was a new north aisle, but the roof slates were wrongly angled so that the supporting timbers rotted as the rain soaked through them. But this problem did not affect the beautiful east window, resplendent with Victorian iconography, or the recently installed and fancily decorated floor tiles. The church was

also provided with oil lamps, refurbished pews, a boiler and a heating system which would keep the interior just moderately warm on cold days.

There are World War One and World War Two memorials inside the church, as well as a tablet commemorating the life of John Dudley Matthews, appointed rector in 1902, but who drowned on the night of December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1914 as he attempted to cross the river from Mapledurham where he had preached at Evensong.

As St Mary's moved into the modern era a monthly church magazine, the forerunner of the Purley Parish News, was introduced and an appeal launched in 1972 for money to build a church hall as an extension to the main building, and which would become a focus for community activities. A number of graveyard pits were excavated by local diggers, including some of the founder members of Project Purley, before the builders began work. However, work by these amateur archaeologists had to stop when a skull suddenly appeared. The police were notified and twelve complete skeletons uncovered. The skeletons were subjected to forensic examination and classified as pillow burials (i.e. no coffin used, but the head supported by large stones) dating from the year 1200 at the latest.

Once the police were satisfied there had been no recent foul play, building of the church hall began in earnest. The work on the extension was carried out by Clarke & Stone Limited of Tilehurst at an estimated cost of £200,000.

John's final illustration was an aerial view of St. Mary's taken in 1985 and showing the church as it is today, a building much admired with a long and proud history and still very much the vibrant heart of our village.

After coffee, tea and biscuits, there was the opportunity for members to explore the church and to contribute to the collection plate. A total of £30 was given which will be donated to church funds.

David Downs

### *Purley Hall*

A bitterly cold evening restricted the numbers attending Project Purley's monthly meeting on October 19<sup>th</sup>, but those members who came to listen to Ben Viljoen's talk on Purley Hall could not fail to be warmed by his enthusiasm for his topic.

This was the third in a series of talks originally delivered in the Millennium Year of 2000, and just as he did seven years ago, Ben began with a photographic tour of the house and grounds as they are now. The property is in private ownership and sadly not accessible to the general public. Furthermore, much defensive planting means that the view of the property, especially from Sulham Woods is greatly obscured.

Ben's carefully compiled selection of slides, taken on a frosty winter morning in 1996 when the Cussins family allowed him access, began with the rusticated gates on the A329, then moved up the driveway to the front of the house. We were shown the dining room, where the three parishes of Purley, Sulham and part of Whitchurch once met - a brass plaque under the dining room carpet marks the exact spot. We also saw the croquet lawn with its superb yew hedge, the rose garden and coach house extension, the Y-shaped canal, the rustic temple said to have been built by Frances Hawes to commemorate the battle of Culloden, and the walled kitchen garden with its restored well, fruit trees and flower beds. The tour finished with a view of the lodges either side of the entrance gates. The lodges are in fact one property as they are connected by an underground tunnel.

Once his audience had an understanding of the present design and orientation of Purley Hall, Ben began his account of its history. In 1485 the manor of Purley La Hyde was left to Elizabeth Carew by her childless brother Nicholas. It was on this site that Hugh Hyde and his son Francis finished the building of Hyde Hall, in the style of a Jacobean manor house, in 1609. Purley Hall, despite many additions and much restoration, remains remarkably similar to the one that the Hydes built.

The Hydes lived in Hyde Hall for 111 years (1609-1720) but as a

catholic family they encountered financial difficulties and sold the property to Francis Hawes. He was Cashier to Customs whilst his brother, Thomas, was Secretary for the Navy. Due to their connections, Francis became a Director of the South Seas Company and embarked on a programme of expenditure on his new house which he renamed Purley Hall. He replaced the stone mullioned windows with fashionable sash windows, faced the lower portion of the south front with stone, and most radically, changed the orientation so that the main driveway now swung around the house to the new entrance on the west side. He also built a stable block, constructed the walled kitchen garden and ornamented the property with a series of statues.

When the South Sea Bubble burst, Francis Hawes was declared bankrupt and an inventory made of his assets, including the "contents of Purley Hall." From a document discovered by Ben in the basement of the House of Lords, we know that Charles Bridgeman was paid £122 for landscaping the gardens at Purley. The remains of one of the statues he introduced, that of Hercules and Antaeus, can still be seen in Sulham Woods. Paintings and stained glass windows, including one in the form of a sundial by John Rowell, were commissioned by Hawes, and he was allowed to continue living in Purley Hall due to the generosity of his brother, Thomas, who having bought the property, some years later made it over to him.

Frances Anne, daughter of Francis, was born in 1720 and enjoyed many lovers, including her first husband, Lord William Hamilton. She later became Countess Vane, and when she left Lord Vane for Sewallis Shirley, was described by the Earl of Egmont as her husband's "favourite spaniel bitch." We were also told that she had extremely irregular teeth, though clearly this did nothing to deter her long succession of suitors.

Francis Hawes died in 1764, though his wife continued to live in Purley Hall. She fell further and further into debt so that in 1777 the estate was bought by the Reverend Dr. Henry Wilder of Sulham. He and his family brought a more circumspect aspect to the goings-on at the house, leasing it out to various tenants, one of whom was

Warren Hastings, the former Governor-General of India, and who lived there during his seven year long trial for impeachment.

By 1800 and after several leases, Purley Hall was in a state of disrepair so the Wilders commissioned Thomas Hopper as their architect to renovate the property. Between 1818 and 1820 he removed the top storey, demolished the stable block, filled in the stem of the badly silted canal and replaced many of the sash windows.

For the rest of the nineteenth century the Wilders occupied Purley Hall, though in the Edwardian period it was leased once again, this time to the St.Claire Soames family. One of their daughters, Olave, was aged just 23 when she married the 55 year old Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scout movement. Olave was the archetypal tomboy who kept chickens as a young girl and who supported her ageing husband by becoming Chief Guide.

In the modern period of Purley Hall, the estate has changed hands several times. Iris Moon inherited the property in 1954 on the death of her father, Henry Wilder, but in 1961 it was sold to the Bradley family after being owned by the Wilders for 184 years. The Bradleys made the grounds regularly available to the public for village fetes, but after a short period in residence, they sold to a new owner, Prince Ali Reza. After him came two consecutive owners whose names sound identical but are spelt differently, the Coussens and the Cussins. It was the Coussens who restored the lake. Purley Hall was bought by David Weinberger in 1997 and sold on again in 2002 to an owner whose identity still has to be confirmed.

Ben concluded his talk with a picture of llamas in the grounds of Purley Hall, reminding us of the Indian Menagerie introduced by Warren Hastings and which briefly found a home on the same site. He had spoken clearly, precisely and without notes for an hour and contributed greatly to our knowledge and understanding of one of the most imposing residences in West Berkshire.

David Downs

### *The Cottages of Purley*

Rita Denman delivered the last in the series of repeated Millennium lectures at our meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> November.

She began by setting the scene and mood of Purley past by showing a series of slides taken from old photographs and then took a look at individual cottages. Purley was a rural riverside village, which was bound to the farming cycle and the Christian calendar. The Norman census of 1086, known as the Domesday Book, records two manors, Purley Magna and Purley Parva.

The Speed map of Reading dated 1610 indicates a thoroughfare out of Reading named Pangbourne Lane. On the outskirts of Purley a track ran off Pangbourne Lane, about where the pill box is now, winding down the hill towards the church and manor house of Purley Magna which stood with its farm buildings in the area of the present marina. The track then turned west and continued through the straggling line of cottages and onwards to link up with Westbury, Purley La Hyde (now known as Purley Hall), and Pangbourne. Generally speaking the cottages belonging to Purley Magna were at the east end and those belonging to Purley Parva were at the western end, although there was by no means a tidy boundary between the two manors. The school log book names the track through the village as The Street. It is possible that it ran the whole length of the village and in the 1970s the residents around the school requested that part of the road be renamed Purley Village to preserve the name.

From 1086 until the late 1700s very little changed. Round about 1793 the manor of Purley Magna was sold to Anthony Morris Storer who built a new farm on what is now the A329. At that time the great barn now situated off Goosecroft Lane was transferred from its original site near the river to the new farm, which was named Belle Isle. The barn was subsequently moved in 1995 from Belle Isle, by that time known as Trenthams, to its present location.

Cottages built pre 1600 surviving today would have been the more substantial dwellings of a craftsman or yeoman. It is therefore unlikely that our oldest Purley cottages date from earlier than 1600.

Rita went on to describe the cottages that had existed in Purley.

The gardener at Purley Park had a cottage that was situated about where the end of The Short now is. It was designed in 1863 by Joseph Morris, the architect of Purley Village School. In 1881 it was inhabited by Samuel Mortimer, Head Gardener and his family. The cottage was demolished when the land was eventually developed in the 1970s.

Home Farm was where Farm Close is now. It was a 16<sup>th</sup> century building with 18<sup>th</sup> century re-facing and additions.

The thatched cottage called Yew Tree cottage on the main road was built around 1786. In the 1930s Yew Tree Farm was a dairy farm. The cows were milked by hand and the milk delivered by churn to the whole of the area. The farm was eventually sold and the deeds of Yew Tree Cottage date only from 1979.

Lichfield Cottage was at one time used as a parish house, but is well known as being where the first Purley post office was set up. Much later the post office was transferred across the road to The Garden House, now demolished, and finally moved to the Purley Rise Stores.

There were four wells along the main road and, before the Nursery Gardens area was built, there was a pair of semi-detached cottages where the boundary wall of Nursery gardens is now. They were called Well Cottages and were a pair of tile-roofed one up and one down dwellings with lean-to kitchens attached. According to a resident in the 1920s the well situated in front of the cottages had a decaying lid and wobbly windlass. It was said to be 110 ft to the water, which was wound up in a 4-gallon bucket. Well Cottages were demolished in 1938.

Purley Lodge Cottage in the Village was occupied by the gardener for Purley Lodge and was built in the late 19th century. The site of a well has been found and the remains of the privy at the end of the garden

Lower Cottages were on the south side of Purley Lane and The Street. The site measured just over one quarter of an acre with a gravel pit to the south. In 1793 it was reported that the cottage was empty and almost down. A reference in 1839 described the site as a plantation and a pit and by June 1841 a pair of brick and tile cottages

had been built. Each had a living room, a scullery and pantry downstairs with three bedrooms above and at the back, store and coalhouses, an earth closet, a well for water and a large garden. These cottages continued in habitation until the late 1960s and, when they were demolished, Star and Let Gable were built.

Jasmine Cottage, which bears a plaque denoting it is a building of special architectural and historic interest, appears to have been built in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. A 19<sup>th</sup> century addition was made to the east end of the cottage when it was divided into two dwellings and became known as 1 and 2 Jasmine Cottages. A past tenant discovered a musket and sword or foil buried in the garden.

Rita was particularly excited to show an old picture of the cottage that stood where her own house, The Mimosas, now stands. John Chapman had found this quite by chance. Jean Debney had discovered information about the holding and copyhold of the land dating back to the 1600s. Recently, however, Jean made an amazing discovery when she unearthed the following document. "1380 14 May Lease with warranty from Reginald Malyns, knight to John Carpenter of Purley Magna and Lucy his wife, and Reymund their son of a cottage with curtilage adjoining and seven acres of arable and half an acre of meadow land called Poneyslond, lying in Purley Parva next land of Katherine Ylberd in the east. The document is dated at Purle, Monday after Pentecot, 3 Richard III." It is very rare to find a document of this great age.

The cottage, which is next door to Mimosas was a tied cottage to Westbury Farm. It has undergone extensive restoration in recent years when it was discovered that the cottage had been built of recycled timbers and bricks. Rita is very grateful to the current owners for allowing her to photograph the restoration as it progressed.

Ivy Cottage is described as 17<sup>th</sup> century with an early 18<sup>th</sup> century addition to the north. It was originally built as a small farmhouse and later divided into two dwellings. It was returned to being one residence in 1976.

The history of the cottage Hemington which stands next to the school, can be traced back to around 1733. In the 1800s the cottage

was divided into two, one half being occupied by the school mistress. The cottage was eventually returned to being one dwelling and has recently been extended.

Rita included in her talk many interesting stories about the old inhabitants of the cottages and showed a selection of slides of old photographs. She painted for us a fascinating picture of Purley as it was long ago; we were all thrilled to hear the history of the few remaining cottages and sad to learn what has been lost to the village. It was a most enjoyable and informative evening and I am sure we all went away feeling we had learnt a great deal about the history of our village.

Ann Betts

### *Christmas Party*

The Society's Christmas party was held on the evening of Friday, December 7<sup>th</sup> at the usual venue of The Gatehouse and proved to be one of the most enjoyable of recent years. Rick and Val Jones made us as welcome as ever at their home. Resplendent with Christmas decorations it was the perfect refuge on an extremely chill night and the number of members attending - thirty in total, including some late arrivals - meant that the house was filled comfortably without being overcrowded.

The festivities followed the traditional form, with Cliff and Jean first to arrive in order to prepare the mulled wine which would greet each guest as they stepped inside. Next came Marion, Millie and David to set up the quiz which would later occupy everyone's brains for a good hour and a half.



*Jean Debney with the mulled wine*

When all the members were present and neatly settled into the chairs

and sofas spaced around the sitting room, Chairman John welcomed everyone, once again thanking our hosts for their generous hospitality. Treasurer, Ben, explained that there would be a modest charge for the mulled wine and Secretary, Tony, announced the programme for the coming months.

A superb buffet had been prepared with each of those attending bringing their own contribution to share and guests were able to eat, mingle and chat during the early part of the evening. Topics



*Val Jones, Trish Wilson & Margaret Cowling*



*Teresa Kenney, Millie Bordiss & Lee Hall*

covered included the building development in and around our village, the very successful Women's Institute dinner held at the Thames Valley University the previous evening, the Purley Players' pantomime due to take place on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, the continuing success of the Farmers' Market and the number of goals Reading would concede to Liverpool the following afternoon (estimates ranged from two to ten but, in the event, Reading won 3-1).

As soon as stomachs were full or were being filled, it was time for the dreaded quiz. Devised by your writer, the challenge was to find the names of 42 English, Scottish or Welsh football clubs hidden around the downstairs part of the house and then to fit those names into blank spaces in a seafaring story. Many of the clues were phonetic, e.g. "the CREWE did in fact WREXHAM furniture," and "the sea AYR suited my MOTHERWELL as she had not had a holiday FORFAR too long." The hardest clue to find was the one bluetacked to the underside of the toilet seat in the bathroom.

The quiz proved to be popular as it kept everyone on their toes literally as well as metaphorically and when the whistle went for full-time, it was found that the winners were Warren and Jan Page. As a team they had 39 correct answers, a splendid effort which earned them the prize of a bottle of wine.



Then it was back to the festivities of eating, drinking and conversation, together with the occasional exchange of Christmas cards and family plans for the holiday season. It was such a happy evening that the time passed very quickly and it was time to depart and return to our homes almost before we realised the lateness of the hour. The strength and attraction of Project Purley lie in the special emphasis on fun as well as research shared by members, something on which we could cheerfully reflect as we said goodbye to Rick and Val and stepped out into the biting cold night.

David Downs

### *Executive Committee*

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