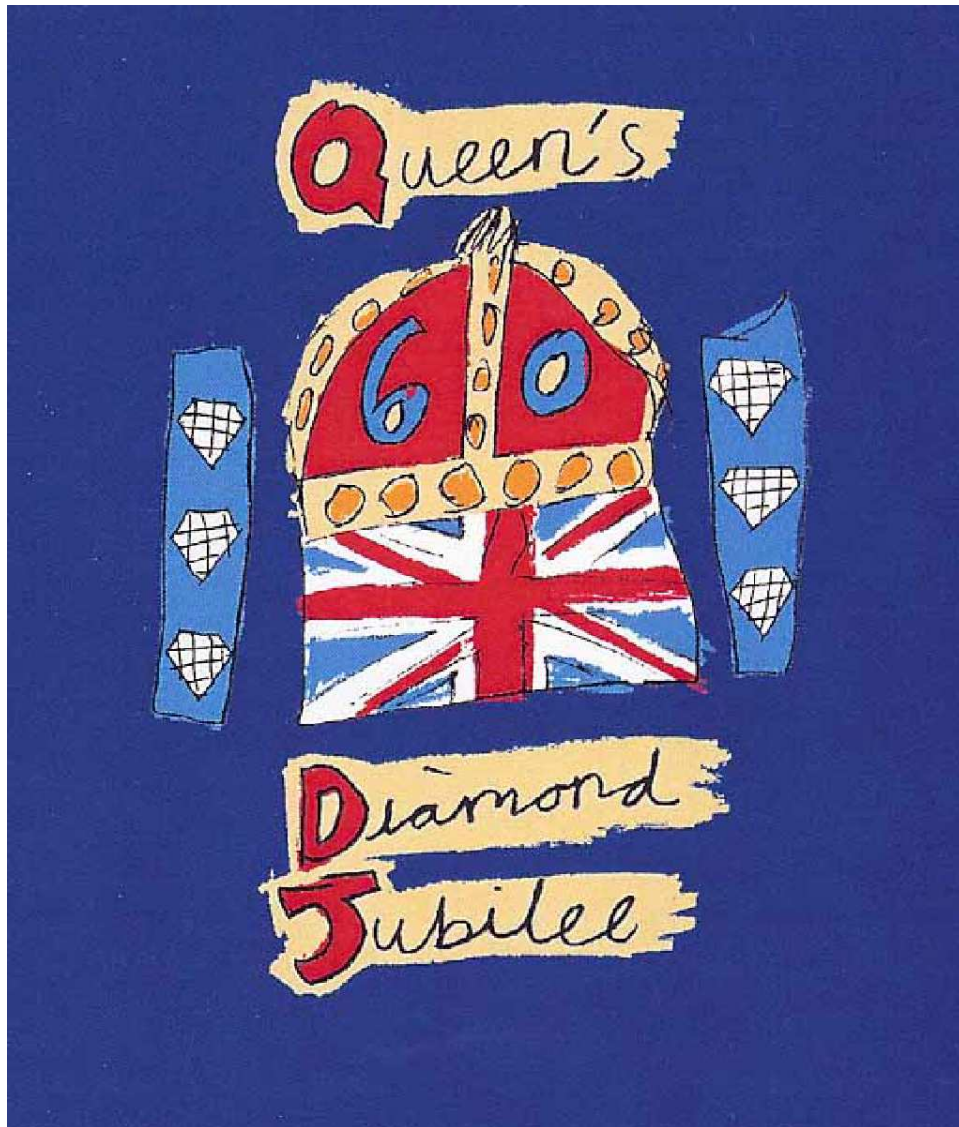


THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL



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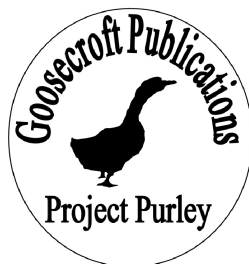
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Three Glorious Queens

Part 3 - Queen Elizabeth II

John Chapman

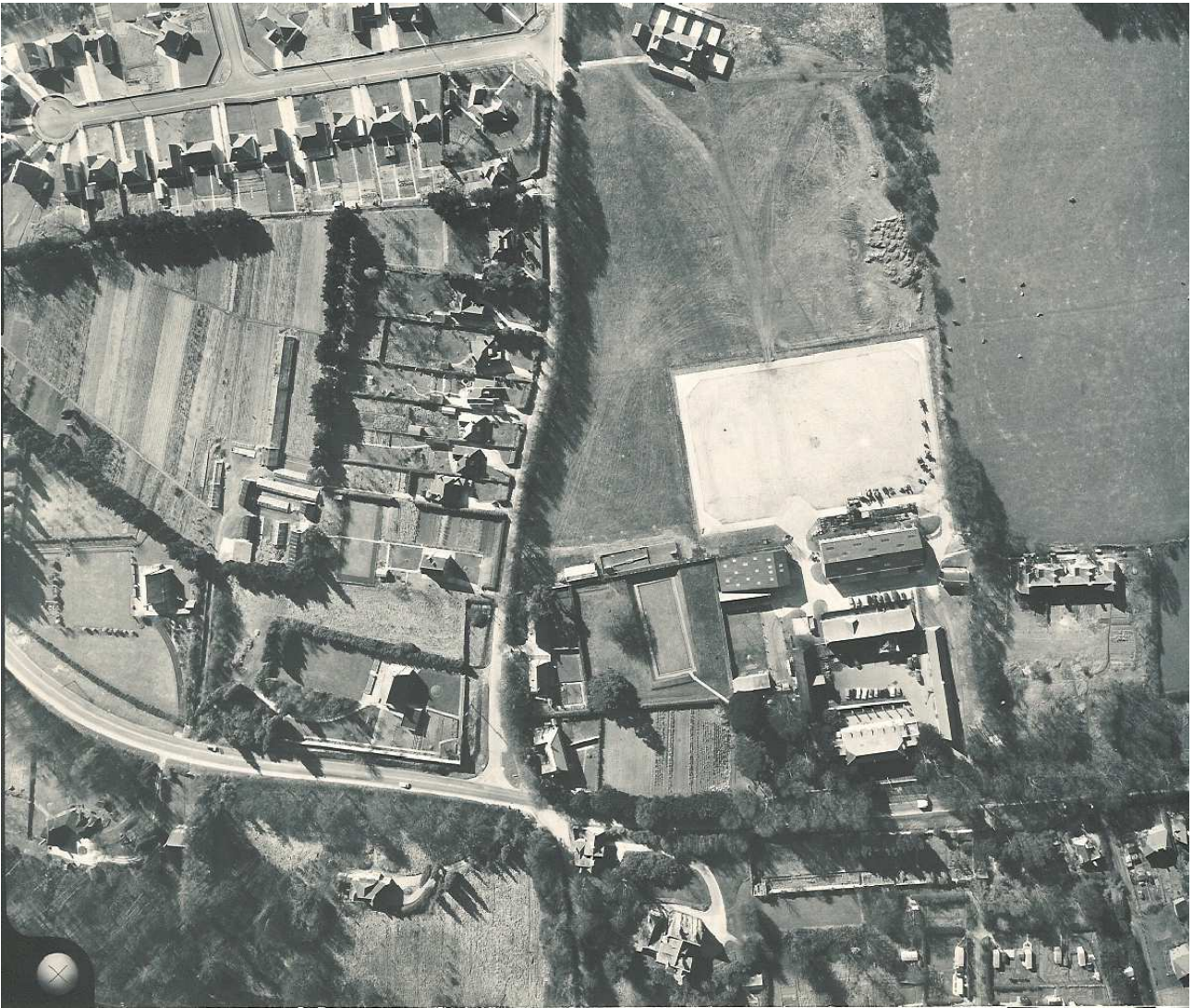
As we come close to the Diamond Jubilee celebrations it is time to look at our present Queen and the goings-on in Purley during her first sixty years.

When Elizabeth was born on the 21st April 1926 it was assumed that it would be her Uncle David and his family who would succeed to the throne after her grandfather King George V. But it did not work out like that. Her uncle, who became King Edward VIII, abdicated in 1936 before he was crowned and it was her father who was destined to carry on the line of succession. He became King George VI and saw us through the Second World War only to die an early death in 1952. At the time Elizabeth was in Kenya, enjoying a holiday with her husband, Prince Philip, whom she had married in 1948. Elizabeth was proclaimed Queen on February 6th 1952 and flew back to England. Her coronation took place on 2nd June 1953 and, for many people, it was their first view of television as they crowded around the available sets to watch the proceedings.

At the time Purley was little changed from what it had been when Victoria died. There were more houses on the Purley Rise Estate and the shacks on the River Estate were gradually being turned into more substantial dwellings. There was ribbon development along the Oxford Road, Reading Road and Long Lane and Messrs G Percy Trentham had recently moved into the Kennels, having bought the property from the South Berks Hunt.

Children from Purley C of E School were still being bussed to Pangbourne when they reached 8 but a new school on Long Lane was opened in 1966 and expanded a year or two later. We had two secondary schools - the grammar at Theale Green and the secondary modern at Little Heath. These both became comprehensives and a third school built at Denefield in 1976. A number of primary children went to Englefield school by a special bus but this was curtailed after a young lad was killed crossing the road after getting off the bus.

The next few years saw an explosion in development in Purley. First Highfield Rd and Orchard Close were built followed by Cecil



The junction of Long Lane and the main road in 1960. Highfield Road has just been built but the sites of Long Lane School, Cecil Aldin Drive, Westridge Avenue and Nursery Gardens are as they were before development.

Aldin Drive and then Lister Close (after the old rectory, which had been bought to be a retirement home, collapsed because roof drains had been occupied by ducks). Home Farm moved from its old site to be replaced by Farm Close. The next major phase of development was Purley Beeches which suffered a severe hiccup after the first developers went bust. Then came the Wimpey estate which was built mostly on the land formerly occupied by Menpes Fruit Farm. This was a massive development, part in Purley and part in Tilehurst with a new spine road (Knowsley Road). The Wimpey estate effectively closed the gap between Reading and Purley and turned us into part of Greater Reading. While this was being built the County Council decided to abandon the proposed Purley/Pangbou-



St Mary's church in 1984, just after the extension was opened. See also Waterside Drive, and the Marina

rne bypass which would have started at the Knowsley Road roundabout, cut off Long Lane at the parish boundary and returned to the A329 just east of Purley Hall. In its place Simons Close, Cornwall Close and Brierley Place were built. Several other small developments followed but, in recent years, land to the west of Long Lane was released for housing.

When the reign opened Purley was part of Bradfield Rural District but the 1972 Local Government Act moved us into Newbury District but still under Berkshire Council. 1977 saw the start of a parish boundary review which concluded in 1998 with parts of Purley being transferred to Tilehurst and Pangbourne. Then Berkshire County Council was abolished and the new District of West Berkshire was formed, Purley getting two Councillors but including the Denefield ward of Tilehurst and the parishes of Sulham and Tidmarsh.

In 1952 the rector was Ernest Skuse who had seen Purley through the second world war. He died in 1956 to be replaced by William Morton who had been a prisoner of the Japanese during the

war. He moved on in 1956 with Harold Hawkins taking over. Harold started the Purley Parish News which was turned from a church magazine to a lively community magazine by his successor Derek Taylor. When Derek moved on David Evans arrived and the church at Purley was never the same again. He sold the pews and replaced them with much more comfortable wooden chairs and contemplated demolishing the church and rebuilding it by the Knowsley Road roundabout. Eventually in the search for a church hall the decision was taken to built a modern extension to the north of the church which was opened in 1984. David was replaced by Roger Howell in 1991 and David Archer in 2009 after Roger had retired the previous year. The new hall enabled a number of new clubs and societies to function including a youth club named the Pathfinders and a lunch club for pensioners.

Societies of all sorts have emerged during the reign. The Mothers Union bowed out but the Women's Institute continues to flourish. Various youth clubs have come and gone as have several specialised organisations like the slide club, the music society and the angling club. The arts were well served by several craft and painting societies, the Purley Players, Purley Rep and the Thames Vale Singers. Three organisations joined together in 1984 to form Project Purley. When the Silver Jubilee was celebrated in 1977 the Parish Council did a survey and found over 70 organisations and the number is not far short of that now.

Many societies made use of the Memorial Hall which was opened in 1954, the church extension and the Barn which was presented to the Parish in 1994. Other venues have included school halls and two social clubs, at Goosecroft and the river estate. Sports have flourished although archery and netball were short lived. The parish now boasts two sports grounds providing space for football, tennis and cricket as well as more informal recreation. The Farmers' Market now brings many people together as well as providing an opportunity to purchase produce.

The period has seen the end of several small holdings and a few small business enterprises: Trenthams, once our major employer, has gone, Westbury Farm with its former vineyard has been absor-

bed into Springs Farm and Kirtons Farm has been reduced to an agricultural contractor, but Home Farm and Sulham Estate remain, maintaining the parish's rural atmosphere in the north and west.

Public services have changed considerably. Bus services which originally ran through Purley along the main road have been replaced mainly by services for Purley starting with the 19 which ran from Highfield Road into Reading. We now have a 20 minute service 16 from the river estate into Reading, an hourly service to Pangbourne and Reading and a community service 28 which loops around Purley and meanders into Reading by a most strange route. Wheelie bins were introduced in 1982 to replace the old dustbins and plastic bags and now we have fortnightly collection of general rubbish interspersed with a recycling collection. Speed limits have been imposed on much of the main road. The postal service has been reduced to a single delivery and collection each day although our post office remains the centre of village gossip.

In 1952 we had one television channel if you were rich enough to own a TV set. Now we have hundreds of channels (mostly rubbish) which you can receive by cable, satellite, computer or even on your mobile phone. Wayside telephone kiosks have all but disappeared but now almost everyone has a mobile, including the smallest children, and access to the internet providing both information and social interaction.

The world of 1952 has gone. We are now part of Europe, there is no British Empire, our coinage is now decimal as are most of our measurements, but whether we are happier as a result of all the changes is a debatable point.

John Chapman

Meeting Reports

Medals and Awards

Our January meeting was a variation on our usual members' evening when David Downs brought along some of his extensive collection of medals and awards and gave us a fascinating insight into the background of medals and the ribbons that went with them. It had been the ribbons which first attracted David's interest and brought out his collector's instinct. He regaled us with numerous anecdotes and stories behind the medals and gave his opinion on some of the medals brought by members.

John Chapman

The Upper Thames Patrol

At our February meeting, Mr. Bill King spoke to the Society on the subject of The Upper Thames Patrol.

He began by explaining that throughout history, river crossings have been crucial to the defence of our nation. With World War 2 looming there was concern about possible invasion by the enemy and The Upper Thames Patrol was formed using watermen of the Thames Conservancy. About 8,000 men were involved and they had their own regalia. It was anticipated that danger could come from saboteurs with attacks on locks and bridges and it would be the responsibility of the UTP to blow these up if the enemy was seen to be approaching. Pill boxes were situated every half mile, often disguised to look like ordinary buildings and tree trunks were in place ready to be dragged across the road to block traffic.

The Upper Thames region covers 135 miles from Teddington Lock to Lechlade and there are 35 road bridges, 7 rail bridges and 42 locks along this section of the river. Boats were commandeered or volunteered, painted admiralty grey and used to patrol the river and river banks 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The region was divided into six stretches and, in most cases, the headquarters for each section were situated in the nearest public house.

On May 14th 1940, the Home Guard was formed from men aged 17 to 70 and the UTP was absorbed into it. This was a very interesting and informative talk which gave us a completely new insight into the history of our river.



Ann Betts

One of the pill boxes on the Thames

Project Purley AGM

The 30th Annual General Meeting of Project Purley was held in The Barn on Friday, 16th March 2012.

The Chairman reported to the meeting that the last year had been yet another successful one for the Society with some very interesting talks and social events. Project Purley had also hosted the AGM of the Berkshire Local History Association in March and the Berkshire Heritage Forum's meeting in September. Sales of Purley in Old Images have been strong and this has enabled us to purchase new exhibition stands which will be used at the forthcoming Diamond Jubilee exhibition to be held over two days in June.

The Treasurer reported that the Society's financial position remains strong. She recommended an increase in the subscription from 1st January 2013 to £10 per single member and £16 for a couple and this was agreed.

Election of Officers and Committee

John Chapman having completed five years as Chairman stepped down and Catherine Sampson was elected Chairman. Lee Hall was re-elected Treasurer and Ann Betts was elected Secretary. John Chapman will act as Vice Chairman. The current members of the Committee were willing to continue, with the exception of Cliff Debney who is retiring, and they were re-elected en bloc. Commit-



Jean Debney cuts the birthday cake while John Chapman and Cliff Debney show off their certificates of honorary membership

tee Members are : Jean Debney, David Downs, Angela Edwards, Val Jones and Clive Killock who was newly elected to the Committee.

Following the completion of business, Catherine Sampson presented John Chapman and Cliff Debney with honorary life membership of Project Purley in recognition of their 30 years of service to the Society. Angela Edwards had made a cake to celebrate the Society's 30th Birthday and members enjoyed a slice of cake and a glass of wine.

Ann Betts

Scenes of Crime

Ken Wells has been curator of the Thames Valley Police Museum for several years and is just on the point of retirement. He was a former Scenes of Crime Officer and after the AGM he regaled us with details of how the police extract evidence after a crime has been committed.

Most people are aware of fingerprints, they have been around for many years but today there are many more sophisticated ways of taking fingerprints from a crime scene than there were even a few years ago. Ken explained about whorls and the classification of fingerprints so that matches can be made very quickly.

DNA analysis is becoming a lot cheaper than it once was and DNA can be extracted from the faintest trace of human contact from blood to hair and even the sweat from one's fingers - so beware - you cannot help leaving traces and eventually the police will catch up with you and the evidence is damning.

But a lot more goes on at the scene - extensive photography, careful measurement and much greater care to protect the scene from contamination.

John Chapman

The Purley River Estate

Catherine Sampson and Ann Betts

The April meeting began with a presentation to Cliff Debney from the Chairman of the Berkshire Local History Society. This was in recognition of his valued contribution to the association during the last twenty five years.

Catherine Sampson and Ann Betts then told us how, after World War I, the parkland adjoining the river was sold and offered in plots at a nominal fee for camping and caravan pitches and that many were purchased by professional families from London for weekend breaks and holidays.

There were several such sites along the Thames as far as Teddington with Purley being the largest.



Cliff Debney receives his gift from BLHA Chairman David Cliffe

At the outbreak of World War II families took up more permanent residence to escape the London blitz. They began to construct more substantial homes, converting Great Western railway carriages, old buses or simple wooden huts.



The 1939-40 floods - Colyton Way

Times were hard with no running water or electricity and sewage was collected weekly but the area became a real community. People began selling eggs, vegetables, flowers and even some black market sweets became available.

Enterprising people set up cafes and small shops which were supplemented by a delivery van from Pangbourne bringing essential items. Even the muffin man was known to have called.



Outside one of the shops on Colyton Way

Eventually Berkshire County Council deemed some properties unsuitable and they were gradually replaced by brick structures, although it was not until the 1970s that they were connected to main sewerage and some roads made up.

It was certainly a most informative and fascinating account of the development and the great community spirit amongst the residents.

Angela Edwards

A Boy when the Century was Born

F R Matthews (1962)

F R Matthews of Sandhurst was the son of the Reverend John Dudley Matthews who became Rector of Purley in 1902. His reminiscences were published in the Berkshire Mercury 3rd Feb 1962

In 1900 or 1901 when I was 10, my father (who had been one of the early masters at Wellington College) resigned from the head-mastership of Leeds Grammar School and was appointed to the living of Purley - as great a contrast as one could imagine.

I still remember the arrival of three large furniture vans drawn by a noisy traction engine. I remember too, remarking as to Reading that horse trams were still running there: in Leeds the newfangled electric trams had taken the place of that most diabolical form of transport, the steam tram, towed by an engine which vomited

smoke and sparks to the great inconvenience of passengers. Another thing I commented upon was that coal was delivered in sacks, contrasting with the farm carts that had brought our coal unsacked, and at 10s per ton!

We stayed first at Belsize Farm (later the Kennels). The parish population was about 300; there was no shop except the Post Office, where in addition to stamps one could buy sweets.



The Post Office run by the Pocock sisters where young Matthews bought his sweets

Almost next to the Kennels was the blacksmith's shop at the bottom of Long Lane, now gone forever, but in those days an important place as the carrier called

there. There was no public transport, but for 6d one could get a seat on the carrier's cart and plod on to Reading's Forbury, where all the carrier's carts assembled, leaving at about 5 or 6 pm for the various villages round.

The carrier was a useful link between town and country and could be entrusted to buy small articles on one's behalf. It was an excitement to go to the blacksmith's shop at night to meet him, and, while waiting, to watch the smith at work.

Entertainment was practically non-existent, unless we made our own. I remember the tea given for the Coronation of Edward VII. Someone lent a phonograph (an instrument with a vast horn which played off wax cylinders); I was told to be very careful of it, but managed to drop box and all!

My chief delight as a boy was the annual change-over of the farm labourers; we children used to congregate in the street and wait for the arrival of the newcomers, who came in hay wains, the

horses jingling with their brass-work and all the family belongings piled behind.

Sometimes life was enlivened by a route march of recruits or militia from Reading depot, the men wore scarlet tunics and with the band made a pretty sight. I remember the first tarmac being laid on the Oxford Road. Motors were few and far between, and before the tarmac came the dust was remarkable; I have seen a trail of dust almost from the Roebuck to the Pulsometer works! Incidentally there was no house between those points except a small cottage by the entrance to Tilehurst Station.

This cottage was called *The North Star*, and had been a place of refreshment for the navvies building the railway. An old marine named Burgess lived there; he was a regular attendant at Purley Church, and always came in a top hat and carrying both umbrella and walking stick.

The village was dominated by Major Storer, who lived at the Park. A regular martinet, the major spent most of his time spying for people landing on the bank from the river. He was only about five feet tall; on one occasion he saw a boat tied to his sacred bank and dashed down to turn it away - it was occupied by the late Canon Coleridge, of Crowthorne, over 18 stone and about six feet high, yet the Major threatened to throw him into the water!

Another time he saw some ladies picknicking in the park, and, refusing to listen to them, took the tablecloth by the corners with all the crockery and cutlery and hurled it into the Thames. Afterwards one of the ladies said: "Please thank Mrs Storer for inviting us to come here and for lending us all the things you have thrown into the river!"

One great thrill was in August of 1914, when the H.A.C. en route to training camp near Streatley, halted for lunch. It was a wonderfully fine day, and we entertained the officers to an open-air lunch in the garden. A few days later the first world war broke out: most of them lost their lives.

A Weekend to Remember

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations 2-5 June 2012

Catherine Sampson

Purley started its preparations for the Diamond Jubilee in February 2011 when representatives from the village clubs and organisations were invited to attend a community meeting to discuss the Jubilee. Very quickly a steering committee was formed and our vision and objectives were agreed. We wanted to create an enjoyable weekend which people would remember, with events and activities which were either free or represented good value for money; and involved as many of our village societies as possible. We also wanted newcomers to the village, or those less familiar with what was going on, to have the opportunity to know more about the social activities on offer and the parish spaces and facilities they could enjoy.

The end result is that between June 1st and June 5th 2012 we have over 30 activities and events planned, of which two-thirds are free to attend, involving 29 local organisations, and taking place over nine different sites in the village. Many of the events have been planned to fit in with the national celebrations. We have a communal Jubilee Big Lunch planned for Sunday and on Monday evening we will be part of the official Jubilee Beacon Chain across, not just the United Kingdom, but also the Commonwealth. Purley's beacon will be lit on the Church Tower between 10 and 10.30 pm.

Project Purley has been at the heart of these Jubilee discussions from the beginning. We have donated the sum of £600 to the Jubilee fund, being the proceeds from last June's Rain or Shine performance, and also a further amount, currently in excess of £120, from the sale of Brunel bricks. This has now been matched by the Greenham Common Trust, effectively benefiting the village Jubilee fund by £240 in total.

In addition we also have our exhibition, Purley during the Reigns of the three glorious Queens - Elizabeth I, Victoria and Elizabeth II which will take place over Monday 4th and Tuesday 5th June and is free to attend. The exhibition will be rich with images, maps, memorabilia and more, painting a picture of Purley and its

people during these reigns and hopefully 'bringing it to life'. It will be the first time that we will have used all of our new display boards and cases, and they will be joined by many more on loan from a variety of organisations across Berkshire. Thank you to all of the volunteers who have been working hard on this for many months now.

Alongside the exhibition, Project Purley is giving Purley residents the opportunity to find out more about their own and their family's history. An '*Ask the Expert Corner*' will provide free advice on a range of subjects from family history, dating old photographs, military history and dating and valuing antiques and collectables. Providing and sharing information is an important part of what we do, and how we help others to bring their own history to life, and we are working in partnership with Berkshire Family History Society and Simon Jones of Jones and Jacobs Auctioneers to achieve this. If you would like to sit down with an expert - do come prepared with your family tree 'brick walls', old photographs and Granny's old pot, etc, but check the timetable first to see when your expert is on hand.

We will also be running some reminiscence groups to encourage people to recall and share with others their memories. They will all be very informal and we have chosen three topics which we hope people will want to talk about - school days in Purley, memories of the war and the River Estate. John, Rita and I will be facilitating the discussions and we hope that we will have a good turnout for each. Do encourage people you think would be interested to come along. Again the event timings are in the souvenir programme.

Finally to create a rounded exhibition we have also asked some other groups to work with us. Purley Brownies will be running a 'crown-making' crafts area for young children, Purley WI will be providing tea and cakes and a section of the Aldworth Orchestra will be providing music during the Monday afternoon.

Do encourage your family, friends and neighbours to come down to the exhibition and to join in the planned activities that interest them. This is a wonderful opportunity to share more of the history of Purley and to capture and create even more memories for the future.

Coronation Reminiscences of 1953

Catherine Sampson

Queen Elizabeth II was crowned at Westminster Abbey on Tuesday 2 June 1953, sixteen months after she became Queen and just sixteen years since her late father had been crowned King.

Purley's celebration to mark the Coronation began at the end of May 1953. A best dressed house competition was judged on Sunday 31st, the prize for which was a Coronation tea service and then events began in earnest the following day. Many of these events were held in the newly completed Memorial Hall which had been finished especially for the Coronation. Built and paid for by volunteers from the village, the hall remains a fitting monument to their determination to create a meeting venue for the village, as well as a memorial to those villagers who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars. It was the venue for the televised viewing of the Coronation ceremony in the morning and evening of the 2nd (the evening was presumably highlights) whilst the playing field played host to a Gala Coronation Fete and Sports in the afternoon. This included fancy dress and a children's tea -both of which are planned for the forthcoming Goosecroft Gala celebrations to mark the Diamond Jubilee.

The following day an impressive panel was lined up to provide answers in 'Any Questions': - Sir Harold Graham-Hodgson, one of the foremost radiologists of his time and a Berkshire County Councillor who lived in Pangbourne, Jack Smith, Manager of Reading Football Club, Ian Mikardo, MP for Reading South and Geoffrey Lovegrove MA. Mr Crossley took the place of question master, normally filled by Freddie Grisewood on the radio, and coffee and biscuits were served afterwards.

Perhaps the most exciting day, and one that seems to be recalled most of all by those living in the village at the time, was the Grand Carnival & Sports on the Saturday. It was held in the Lock Field and the boys and girls swimming events took place in the river. By evening the river had been cleared of swimmers and the decorated boats moved in accompanied by community singing and music. By



The Coronation Queen and her attendants

8.30pm the pirate boat, lovingly restored and decorated with a skull and crossbones by the boys from the youth club, had been manoeuvred into the middle of the river by Calley (Frank Brate-mos) who then set it on fire and apparently narrowly escaped going down with the boat. There was then time for fireworks and a bonfire. Many of the children remember being given a lit Roman Candle to hold and amazingly there does not seem to have been any casualties.

A few photographs of these days survive including ones of the boys patching up the pirate boat, Mr Tickle as MC down at the river and the Coronation Queen and her attendants – three of whom still live in the village. Perhaps the most poignant reminder however is the souvenir programme, beautifully embossed with the Queen's cipher and tied at the spine with a red, white and blue ribbon, a wonderful memory of happy days for our community.



The Coronation Fete



The Pirate Boat

Nature Notes

Rita Denman

December 2 This week we have experienced the first frosts of the winter. It seems strange to think that we are now into winter because it doesn't look like it. The trees along the river line are a beautiful russet colour the sun is shining in a blue sky but there is frost and fog and the temperature has dropped to 4°.

The front of the house is not quite due south but it is a sun trap. There are still roses in bud and the Japanese weeping cherry tree has shed its leaves and the bark is a lovely mahogany colour glowing in the sun light. There must still be active spiders in the tree as there are numerous strands of silk trailing in the wind and catching the sunlight too.



The front of Rita's house

We have been warned that the south and south east of England is in danger of being in an official drought situation if there isn't significant rain soon.

December 9 Some days have been very dark and overcast and then there comes a brilliant sunny day. The sun is very low and extremely bright. I took a walk around the bridle path and the whole area looked as though it was on fire accentuating the red and rust colours in the trees and hedges. Here in the south we have been more fortunate than the north and Scotland where there have been gale force winds and snow.

December 19 The balmy long autumn which was with us until the beginning of December is over. We have been suddenly plunged

into very low temperatures with wind, rain, sleet and snow and heavy weather generally. I have walked around the meadow on most days this week. It is very wet underfoot, although the reservoirs are low due to the very dry year.

There are still bumble bees on the mahonia. The Red Sentinel crab apple trees retain the fruit and they make a lovely splash of colour in a sombre winter setting.

December 30 In the south the days have been short with darkness beginning to fall by 4pm. It has been reasonably mild with occasional rain and gusty wind. A great contrast to the snow of last year.

There is a thermal over the meadow. Since we came to live here in 1975 it has been fascinating to watch the pigeons flying west to east, catching the warm air and rising on a glide. On reaching the top of the thermal they make a loud clap with their wings over the back of their bodies. They do it only in this particular spot. The pigeons have been clapping their wings the last day or two, so presumably there is a warm air flow at present creating the right conditions.

The little garden birds have been twittering in the bushes and hedgerows and a small flock of long tailed tits flying excitedly hither and thither.

January 6 2011 is officially the warmest year in the UK since 1910.

The south east of England escaped the worst of this week's gale force winds. The temperature locally has been variable, in double figures one day and down to 4° the next. When the wind began to rise there was a noticeable absence of birds flying. There were not even gulls who usually enjoy rough weather. The skies were threatening although at times there was fitful sunshine, and it was at one of these moments that I noticed a red kite battling with the wind, quartering Tim's field. Within moments the comparatively calm scene had changed to black skies, torrential rain and high wind.

January 13 For a few days we woke to rain and wind with mild temperatures but the weather forecasters promised more normal weather for January to come. Little owls have been unusually close to the house.

January 21 The weather has alternated between beautiful clear frosty days with blue sky and sun, and dark cloud with considerable rain and wind.

The birds are beginning to sing their spring songs and there is a blackbird who has claimed a nearby tree and begins his repertoire at about 7am when it is hardly light and continues for a couple of hours. It is a wonderful sign of spring not far away.

Catkins are dripping all over the hazel tree. The bumble bees are out on warm days and the ladybirds continue to appear around the house in unexpected places.

January 27 Winds have been variable from blustery to gale force. A flock of chattering redwings arrived and distributed themselves among the tall trees at the garden boundaries. The local herons visit garden ponds and this week a pair flew over the garden making a squawking noise. The first time I have seen a pair or heard their call.

Two very bushy tailed foxes were gambolling in the meadow. January is a busy fox month. It is the height of the mating season and when last year's cubs leave the den. The winter wheat field is a beautiful blue green. The red kites have been flying and the roe deer too have been frequent visitors to the farm fields.

February 3 The temperature was -2° and at Benson in Oxfordshire it was down to -11° very dry cold air coming from Siberia. The forecast was for snow. It was a very exciting time for the weather forecasters as there were many changes and warnings.

February 10 The weather dominated everything. The excitement mounted as we awaited the arrival of the snow. We all have a sort of snow madness and love it when it is falling and everything looks so beautiful but the feeling soon wears off when it comes to getting out and about in it. The extreme cold made worse by the wind chill was something that we in our temperate climate hadn't needed to cope with for some time but during a respite day from the harsh weather 7 roe deer were lying under the hedge and the strong colouring of pheasants a gorgeous sight in a light fall of snow. The rooks are beginning to be active but most wild life, like the human species, is lying low.

February 17 The pair of swans which over the last few winters have come regularly to graze in Tim's pasture field are back despite the fact that it is now a wheat field. The weather has turned very mild but is expected to return to very cold conditions.

February 24 This week has brought spring like weather with temperatures up to 16° but is expected to return to winter next week. The spring bulbs are well in advance of their normal growth and daffodils are in bloom already. The primroses have been flowering on and off all the winter.

March 2 The weather still dominates and on very mild days there have been really spring-like mornings. Beginning with fog, dense in some areas but once the hazy sun was out the meadow called me outside. The Mirabelle plum tree which was a sapling from the Rectory garden is in bloom and the small daffodils beneath it seem to have sprung up overnight. The catkins which were produced so early in the year sadly have perished in the deep frost.

The birds are singing their hearts out and the rooks flying to and fro with nesting material. The group of roe deer and pheasants have continued to visit the farm fields.

March 16 The weather remained erratic. Although drought in the south east is still very much in the news there has been fog and damp air, and fortunately for my newly planted fruit trees the meadow is still wet.

I happened to catch sight of something moving very fast across the wheat field and at first I thought it was a dog chasing some low flying birds. There were some folk out with a dog but I soon realised that they had surprised a roe deer and it had taken fright. For the next few minutes the creature ran, and it is a wonderful sight to see a deer running in full flight, crisscrossing the field and jumping several hedges until it eventually disappeared from sight.

March 23 For the last few weeks the bright stars, Venus and Jupiter have been either side of the moon and fortunately we have had some clear night skies to enjoy this heavenly sight. The vernal equinox has brought beautiful spring mornings with golden sun and golden flowers.

There is frog spawn in the garden pond and a heron has been lazily cruising over the gardens just waiting for a 'froggy going a-wooing O!' for his breakfast.' Hey Ho says Roly!

March 30 The weather is still the topic of conversation. In this part of the UK we have woken to beautiful blue skies and glorious sun with a little haze over the hills with at night clear deep unfathomable heavens with the moon and all the stars visible. A gift to those interested in astronomy and a deep satisfaction to the rest of us. The temperature has been summery but there has been no rain and this is becoming a real worry. The spring flowers are coming into blossom but of course in the strong sun they don't last very long.

The Brimstone butterflies are out the birdsong is superb and I have heard the emotive song of the skylarks overhead. A red kite astounded me in its flight by suddenly turning and flying in the opposite direction.

April 7 We may get fed up with the weather but we never tire of talking about it. From sitting in the garden with morning coffee and listening to the birds we returned to indoors with the heat on. A hose pipe ban is now in force in this area.

April 13 The week has seen some fairly typical April weather, with showers and sunshine. Some of the showers have been of hail and sleet and snow with thunder as well but the skies have been interesting to say the least. A high blue sky with sunshine but beneath a layer of black cloud with silver linings and huge white billowing clouds all casting dark shade or brittle brightness over the valley.



A red kite in action