

# THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL



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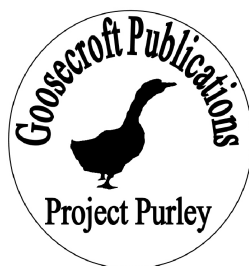
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## *A Message from our Chairman*

*Catherine Sampson*

Yet another year seems to have whizzed past, accompanied this time with a noticeable lift in patriotic fervour as we celebrated first the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and then the London Olympics. Purley's Jubilee celebrations will certainly be remembered for years to come. Project Purley played its part fully in these festivities and our exhibition celebrating the reigns of Queens Elizabeth I, Victoria and Elizabeth II was our most extensive yet and also our best attended. Thank you to everyone who helped to research and prepare the vast array of exhibition screens and also those who helped during the event itself.

Val Jones took over as Programme Secretary this year and once again we have enjoyed a wide range of talks and visits. Our talks ranged from the 'Upper Thames Patrol' with its vast array of fascinating photographs to 'The Life and Times of the Abbey School in Reading', and over 60 attended that on The River Estate. Stonor House turned out to be as interesting as we thought it would be, whilst Dorchester was revealed to be crammed with more medieval buildings than first meets the eye. For once the rain stayed away at our summer BBQ, although we nearly lost one gazebo to the wind, and we were snow and ice-free for the Christmas party. Both, as always, were hugely enjoyable.

Likewise our two Rain or Shine productions - *As You Like It* in July and *Wind in the Willows* in December proved to be very entertaining whilst also raising almost a further £1000 for local good causes taking the total raised to date to close to £7,000. The journal continues to go from strength to strength under the ownership of Ann Betts and John Chapman, capturing both the history of Purley and that of Project Purley. My thanks to all of the committee for their hard work and support over the year.

Excitingly we now finally have a storage cupboard in the Barn in which to store our archives and we have begun to accession and catalogue the vast array of material which has been collected by individuals over the last thirty years. We begin our programme for 2013 with this collection.

A very happy New Year to you all.

## *Brunel's Bridges*

*John Chapman*

The Great Western Railway through Purley opened in 1840, but in the few years previously there was great activity in the area as the line was constructed. Isambard Kingdom Brunel was appointed as the chief engineer of the Bristol Railway on 4th March 1833 and his first job was to survey the country between London and Bristol and propose a route for a new railway. He was around the Reading area on April 20th and his diary read:

Sat April 20th - Arrived at Reading late. Went to bed. After breakfast went in search of Hughes. After some trouble found at 'Black Boy' Shinfield, gave him maps. With him to Theal Road and into Pangbourne. Returned to Reading, went to Theale. Met a Mr Keeps who shewed me the new church. Returned to Reading.

Sun April 21st - Went to church at the great church - Dr Millman. After church lunched. Started on horseback for Wantage.

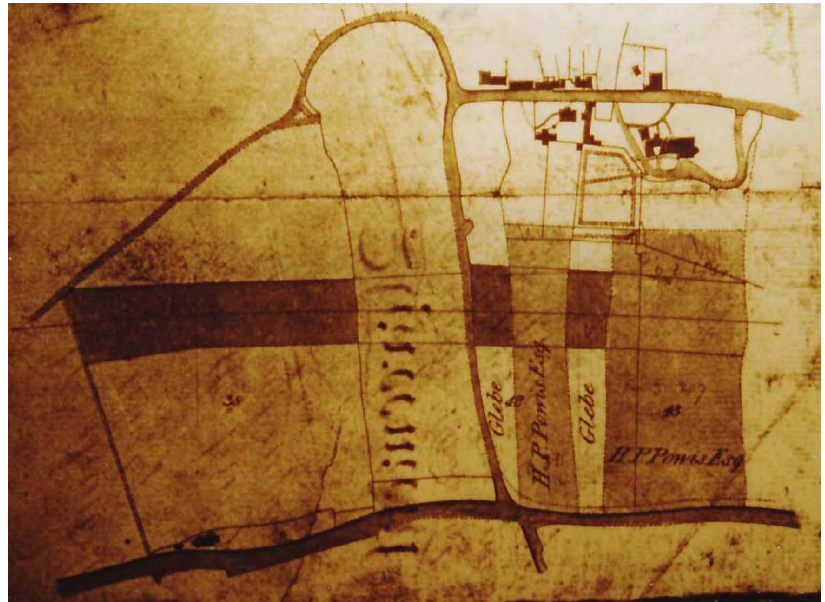
He was fairly clear that part of the route would join Reading to Pangbourne, but how? He toyed with three options through Purley; the first was simply to tunnel from where Tilehurst station now is, direct to Pangbourne; the second was to swing the line north and avoid the hill (Purley Rise) entirely but in the end he settled for the present route through a deep cutting. However Anthony Morris Storer, who had only recently come into his inheritance as owner of Purley Magna was bitterly opposed to the railway, as were most land owners. Brunel spent a lot of time visiting the land owners and most were resigned to the prospect of the railway coming through their estates.

September 14th (1833) - Up at 5 am. Joined Place & Williams ranged on to the island east of Caversham. Breakfasted and mounted. Called on Mr Hawks, surveyor; appointed to be with him at 8pm. Rode to meet Hughes, found him in barley stubble west of cottage. Directed him how to proceed and to meet me this evening at the Bear, Reading. Rode then to Purley Hall. Met Mr Wilder just going in; spoke to him; found him very civil, gave him a prospectus. Rode on to Basildon Farm.

Brunel of course had the whip hand as the railway would acquire compulsory purchase powers through the Great Western Railway

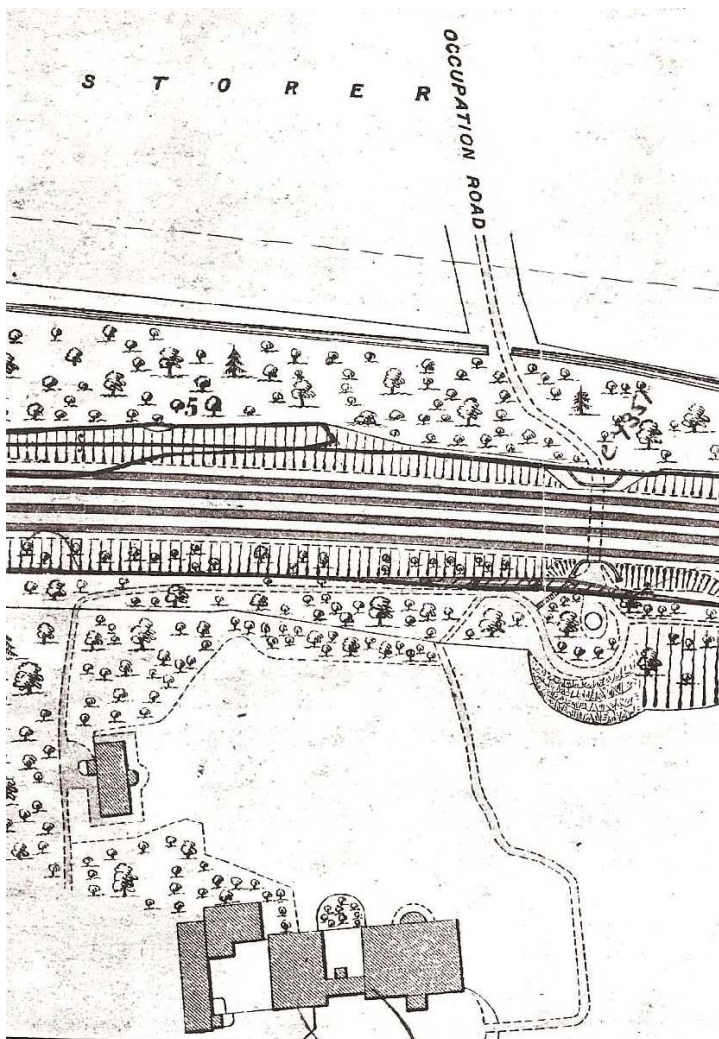
Act which was finally passed by Parliament on 31st August 1835.

The route through Purley was by no means settled so Brunel himself came down to Purley Park to negotiate with Storer and they finally agreed on a sum of £10,000 compensation for the route through a cutting. One of the conditions was that the



*The route through Purley Village finally agreed in 1838*

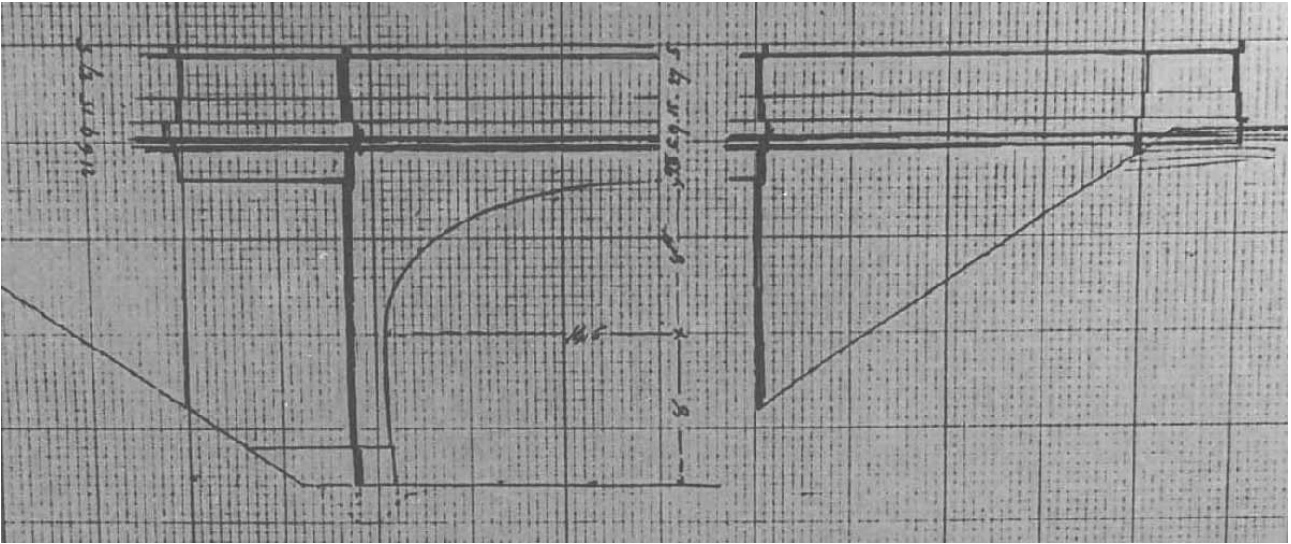
railway should provide an underbridge to allow access between the southern and northern halves of the estate. But it was not until 1838 that the deal was finally concluded.



*The route under the railway to link Purley Park to the church and Purley Gardens*

Construction began almost immediately after the Act was passed and Brunel had lined up a number of contractors to do the necessary works. They started at both the London and Bristol ends and worked their way to meet. The contractors engaged gangs of men, many of whom had worked together building canals. They set up camp with their wives and families close to where they were working and when one job was done they moved on to take on the next job.

Having agreed a cutting through Purley Brunel could



*sketch of bridge design from Brunel's notebooks at Bristol University*

not leave the village isolated so he had to build three overbridges (New Hill, Purley Lane and Westbury Lane). A fourth had to be built to enable the farmer at Belleisle Farm to move his cattle to the fields to the north. In the west of the parish two more underbridges were required, one to allow access for Scrases Farm and Purley Hall (Fiddlers Bridge) and the other for Marsh Farm. A smaller underbridge for the Sul Brook also had to be built. So the contractors were faced with building four overbridges and four underbridges in less than two years, as well as digging a huge cutting and building a long embankment.

Brunel designed everything himself, which was fine so long as he stuck to civil engineering which was the business he knew. When he tried to design locomotives and rolling stock he was a disaster and had to hire the young Daniel Gooch. His designs for bridges were pretty standard but needed to be varied to cope with different angles and different heights. Whether the railway was on top or below made very little difference to the design except that under-bridges did not need much of a parapet and could be narrower or wider to meet the requirement whereas overbridges were all built to a standard width to accommodate the two tracks. The underbridges ranged in size from the



*The small under-bridge over the Sul Brook*

massive one over the Thames at Maidenhead to the minute one over the Sul Brook in Purley.

The first requirement was to build a very solid foundation for the pillars on either side of the line or roadway. Then the pillars were built using black engineering bricks on the inside and the outside faced with normal red bricks. No doubt the local brickmakers did a lot of business with the railway. Once the pillars were in place the arch could be built with a wooden former acting as a



dummy arch during construction. Such was the genius of Brunel that when the arch was completed and the former removed, the brickwork held together firmly and the remaining bridges are still as strong today as when they were build over 160 years ago. After

the arch came the bed for the road or railway with containing walls and then for overbridges, the parapet with coping bricks.

In 1890 all these bridges had to be widened to accommodate the second pair of tracks. Brunel's designs were copied for all the bridges in Purley although the profile of the arch was different as it had to span only a pair of standard gauge lines rather than two broad gauge ones.

The bridges continued to serve the railway well for the next 120 years but after the millenium things began to change. The railway has to renew the track every so often but whereas in previous years the old ballast was always completely removed and the new rails relaid on the original bed, cost savings were made by laying the new rails on the old ballast bed and re-ballasting. This gradually raised the level of the track and affected clearances. Then it was realised that many of the old bridges would need to be rebuilt to get the required vertical clearance.

The first attempt was to rebuild the Westbury Lane bridge but



*The Purley Lane bridge shows clearly the difference between the broad gauge arch (left) and the standard gauge one (right)*

local opposition was such that we had the bridge listed as an historic structure and the railway was forced to lower the track bed under the New Hill bridge and impose a speed limit to allow the new large containers to pass under. When the electrification project was announced a few years later the railway got the listing of Westbury Lane Bridge lifted and came up with plans to rebuild both Westbury Lane and New Hill bridges, but as they intended using the original Brunel foundations, all hopes of wider roadways were dashed.

Over Christmas 2011 the two bridges were demolished and two new ones constructed. Westbury Lane bridge was relatively easy as they could get massive cranes into position to the north of the



*Rebuilding the Westbury Lane bridge lifting huge pre-built sections into place.*

railway which could lift pre-fabricated sections into place. As a result Westbury Lane was re-opened fairly quickly. Equipment could be routed into the site via the Marsh Farm bridge and traffic to Springs Farm via Fiddlers bridge.

New Hill bridge however was an entirely different proposition and work was much slower as all the sections had to be smaller and assembled on site using much more limited equipment. With the bridge closed for several months all traffic had to be diverted over Purley Lane bridge. The No 16 buses could not navigate this route so a shuttle service was operated from Chestnut Grove to the bottom of Knowsley Road. As a temporary measure two special pedestrian bridges were built and a safer route for children going to the C of E School was constructed. Network Rail gave Project Purley about 100 of the engineering bricks salvaged mainly from the Westbury Lane bridge and these were sold to raise funds for the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. The new bridge was finally opened by children from Purley C of E School on 4th May 2012

## *The Project Purley Christmas Tree*

On December 9th and 10th St Mary's Church held a Christmas Tree Festival. There were 24 decorated trees each submitted by one of the village organisations. Catherine Sampson and Clive Killick worked on the Project Purley entry which was enhanced by a number of baubels recording interesting snippets of Purley's history from Domesday to today.



*Reminiscence***Purley in 1932**

*This month we have a very different sort of reminiscence - a review of the year 1932 written by the Revd Ernest Skuse for the January 1933 edition of the Parish Magazine.*

Purley has a history of its own, and some day we hope to dip into the past and make it live in these pages. Meantime each year as it comes and departs is full of abiding human interest. First we record with regret the removal of Mr and Mrs Aldin of The Kennels, than whom no parish can ever have possessed better or more consistent friends. Then by a coincidence which would be strange if we did not believe that nothing befalls by chance, death has taken from us two parishioners, whose sick-beds were as perfect models as it is given to us to see of patient endurance under disabling pain - Mrs Anderson and Mr Day. And thirdly, we welcome quite a band (for us) of newcomers, for Council Houses are a feature of these post-War years, and the parish which provides them with a site has (in the eyes at least of the multitude) obtained distinction - on the landscape. Cordially we welcome our new inhabitants; we trust that all twelve families will soon be happily settled in, and later on if we may express the hope, we should be glad to see the name of Glebe Road used as a form of address, if Rural District Council regulations permit, and when summer comes we expect that the bath rooms will be a real amenity to the tenants.

Thus far in regard to personnel. As to events, the Mother's Union enjoyed two special gatherings at the Old Rectory on August 24 when Mrs Lister gave the members a garden party, and in the schoolroom on November 30 when the Rev H Lister gave an address. Three meetings have been held of the Parochial Church Council, the net result of which is that so far as finance is concerned good and useful work has been done to set up and keep our house in order.

The Managers of the Day School have met twice, the chief item of their discussion being the increase in the number of our scholars to twenty-three. Provision is in the making to relieve the additional burden thus cast upon our most capable and devoted teacher.

Under Mr Cooper's earnest direction the choir has grown in numbers and in confidence, and we have to thank Mr Rawlins and

Mr Fox for the enthusiasm with which they never cease to inspire our younger members. The latter, incidentally, have had outings in August and October, the first to Sea View and the second to the zoo, tickets for which were kindly presented to us by Miss Silver and Miss Ryley. A fuller notice will appear in future of such occasions as these, but it would be impossible to allow two excursions held this year to pass into history without mentioning that the sea trip in the summer was nearly prolonged by fog into a night's holiday in the Isle of Wight, and that as regards our autumn trip, the first house visited at the zoo was inhabited by parakeets of such gaudy and garrulous type that the chief wit of the party labelled these fowl "The Zoo Choir!" And referring to treats we must not forget to record a visit to "California" organised by Mrs Tidbury for our children out of funds provided as one of her parting gifts by Mrs Aldin.

The Girl Guides have had a most successful year, which they have crowned by winning the District Competition, although they form the youngest and smallest company around us. All will congratulate them upon this achievement. Their entertainment too, on December 3, was notable, and finds an all too short but separate report in this issue.

## GIRL GUIDES

The 1st Purley (Berks) Girl Guide Company was started in June 1931 and now has two warranted Guiders, seven Guides and three recruits. Three members of the Company and one Guider went to the divisional camp at Ramsbury (Wilts) in August last, and fortunately came in for the beginning of a heat wave. The other Guider went to a training camp at Exmouth. The Rose Bowl, which was given for annual competition amongst the Companies in the Pangbourne District has been won by the 1st Purley Company. As the Company is the smallest in the District, and it is the first time they had competed, it is a very gratifying result. A very successful concert was organised by the Guides with the help of Mrs Tidbury and her school children on December 3 last. A sum of £4 5s was taken, and I should like to thank all those who came out and so generously gave their support.

*M H Mole (Captain)*

*Meeting Report*

## *The Life and Times of Abbey School, Reading*

On the 21st September, Jane Burrell, a former curator of Newbury Museum and Old Girl of the school gave an enthusiastic account from when the school was founded in 1887 to the present day. Its original name was Reading High School and replaced Blenheim House Ladies School in London Road.

The Church Schools Company, instrumental in founding the school, felt that Reading, with its population of 60,000 was in need of a new school and aimed to provide high quality education with a Christian ethos at an affordable price.

The initial enrolment of forty girls steadily increased to one hundred and twenty by 1902 when Miss Musson MA was appointed Headmistress.

In 1905, under her guidance, the school moved to its current Kendrick Road site with room for six classrooms, hall and space for



*Abbey School today*

playing fields. In 1913 the name was changed to The Abbey School. This was to commemorate a former Reading School dating from 1835 which was based in the Abbey Gateway. A previous school in the Gateway in the 18th century included Jane Austen amongst its pupils. The Abbey School is now a much enlarged independent day school for girls aged three to eighteen years.

Some notable former pupils include Baroness Brigstocke, High Mistress of St.Paul's Girls' School, television presenters Jenni Falconer, Kate Humble, Miranda Krestovnikoff, Sally Taylor and novelist Minnette Walters. The Abbey Gateway is incorporated into the school badge.

*Angela Edwards*

*Meeting Report*

*The Gardens of Marlborough and his  
Lieutenants*

*Ben Viljoen 19th October 2012*

*Blenheim*

During the war of the Spanish Succession John Churchill, Earl of Marlborough gained a reputation as a capable military commander with victories at Blenheim, Ramillies Oudenarde and Malplaquet battles. On returning home he became a national hero, receiving numerous honours and awards, including the Dukedom of Marlborough.

By this time his wife Sarah had become a close friend and confidante of Queen Anne and exerted considerable influence over her. It is therefore not surprising that the Queen decided the ultimate honour of the hero would be the gift of a great palace.

The site chosen was the manor of Woodstock and Parliament voted a substantial sum of money towards the building. The architect would be Sir John Vanbrugh and his brief was to create not only a home but a national monument to reflect the power and civilisation of the nation. In order to achieve this effect Vanbrugh chose to



*The Vanbrugh Bridge*

design in a severe form of Baroque, using great masses of stone to initiate strength.

When Vanbrugh first cast his eyes on the 7 acre site in 1704 with the small River Glyme trickling through, he envisaged “this marshy brook traversed by

the finest bridge in Europe” The marsh was channelled into three small canal like streams and across it rose a bridge of huge proportions. There was also a “Column of Victory” with a great avenue of elms leading from the Palace but going nowhere, just part of the vista.

The Duke however was frequently away on campaigns and it was left to the Duchess to negotiate with Vanbrugh, blaming him for the escalating costs and extravagance of the design. Vanbrugh eventually left in a rage and the work was completed by Nicholas Hawksmoor.

After the Duke’s death in 1722, the park remained relatively unchanged until the arrival of “Capability” Brown in 1764 with his vision of an English landscape garden, with tree planting and man made undulations. However the feature with which he is forever associated is the lake, a huge stretch of water created by damming the river to flood and submerge beneath the water level, the lower storeys and rooms of the bridge itself.

### *Rousham*

Colonel Robert Dormer-Cottrell inherited Rousham in 1719 employing Charles Bridgeman to transform the garden to a more natural style with meandering walks through woods and pools.

In 1737 Rousham was inherited by the Colonel’s brother General James Dormer- Cottrell who called in William Kent. His plan was to create an Arcadian landscape influenced by the advice that Stephen Switzer gave, to all garden owners who were former soldiers, that they should draw on the emotions that they experienced and which sustained during their military careers.



*The Sheemaker lion and horse at Rousham*

There were classical temples, follies and statuary of Roman gods and mythological creatures set in valleys and glades all arranged as a succession of picture tableaux. Both brothers had fought with the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim.

### ***Caversham Park***

William Cadogan had also served under the command of the Duke of Marlborough and in 1718 he became Viscount Caversham and Earl Cadogan. In 1723 he built a magnificent house and laid out a splendid park.

The main entrance was from the north with 1740ft tree lined avenue leading straight to the house. Along the south front was the Great Terrace below which was the parterre or elaborate formal gardens with fountains, vases and statues. On each side were two great stretches of water 900ft long with a Dorick Portico at each end.

Lord Cadogan did not enjoy his mansion and park for long for in 1726 he died on a visit to Kensington.

*Angela Edwards*

*Meeting Report****For Crying out Loud******Bryan Sylvester***

On the 16th November members of Project Purley received a visit from the Town Crier of Newbury, Mr Brian Sylvester. He entered the barn in his ceremonial robes, ringing his hand bell for our silence and attention. Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! - (hear ye, derived from the Anglo-Norman word for listen).

In a tradition dating back to the 18th century his elaborate dress consisted of a red and gold robe, white breeches, black boots and tricorne hat adorned with curling feathers to represent the quills used earlier when Town Criers wrote their proclamations. They were the original newsmen.

The first Bellmen or Town Criers were Spartan Runners in the early Greek Empire and as the Romans spread through Europe the position of Town Crier increased in importance. Mediaeval town criers were usually of some standing in the community as they had to write and read official proclamations. They served as spokesmen for the King and were protected by law as they sometimes brought bad news, such as tax increases.

Proclamations would usually be read at the door of the local inn and nailed to the doorpost, resulting in the expression "posting a notice" and the naming of some newspapers as The Post. Across Europe Town Criers were not always men and instead of a bell, a gong was used in Holland and in France a drum or hunting horn.

Over the centuries the role of Town Cries disappeared but was reinstated by some cities and towns purely for ceremonial duties, civil functions and charity events. Latterly Mr Sylvester has been involved in the Jubilee celebrations and a national mass bell ringing session to kick off the Olympics. He may be seen ringing his bell in Newbury announcing the opening of a new supermarket or special concert.

He left the barn with the traditional call of "God Save the Queen".

*Angela Edwards*

*Meeting Report*

## *The Christmas Party*

On the 14th December members of Project Purley once again held their Christmas party at the home of Rick and Valerie Jones.

This was a most enjoyable evening with plenty of mulled wine and lovely food.

Of course a Project Purley party would not be complete without at least one game. Our admirable hosts had organised twenty five historical teasers, posted around the house, for us to answer. This was duly won by our most knowledgeable member, Rita Denman, with a landslide victory.

The evening ended with some spontaneous singing around the piano. Our thanks go to Rick and Val.

*Angela Edwards*

*right*  
*Members enjoying a*  
*good chin-wag*



*left - Val Jones presents*  
*the prize to Rita Denman*

*Biography***Matthew Hamblin*****Guardian of Napoleon***

*The story of Matthew has been discovered by Val Hannington who is his great-great-great-granddaughter.*

Matthew was born in Purley in 1794 and was baptised in St Mary's on 30th August 1795, the son of James and Jane Hamblin. He grew up in the village but when he was around 17 he enlisted in the 66th (Berkshire) Regiment and embarked on a life of adventure.

He missed the first battles of the Peninsular War while he was in training, but he was sent out as part of a reinforcement to the 2nd/66th Battalion around April 1813. Captain Crauford, one of the company commanders, wrote home to the depot:-

Your long-expected detachment is at length arrived. It is composed of a set of the most unmanageable, ill-behaved scoundrels that I have ever had anything to do with .... These fellows have every vice that is disgraceful to a soldier. There are many thieves, many drunkards, and almost all excessively dirty....

Probably the young Matthew was not typical of the recent recruits, many of whom had joined up to escape the grinding poverty of the towns or to avoid going to gaol.

His first engagement was at the Battle of Vittoria where Wellington won a decisive victory against the French which forced Napoleon to appoint General Soult to command the French army and completely re-organise it. For the next several months the 66th were part of Byng's Brigade, chasing the French out of Spain. He won further clasps to his Peninsular War Medal for the battles of Pyrenees, Nivelle, Nive, Orthes and Toulouse. The 2nd/66th returned to Cork in July 1814 and eventually finished up at Portsmouth.

Napoleon was finally defeated at the battle of Waterloo in 1815 and was despatched to the island of St Helena in the South Atlantic. One of the regiments sent to guard him was the 2nd/66th and they remained on that duty until the Emperor's death on the 5th March 1821. His body was escorted to its grave by a detachment of the 66th who had to carry the coffin to the burial spot as the hearse was unable to make the final journey down a narrow footpath. Matthew could well have been one of those involved and he was certainly



*Napoleon's funeral procession - Was Matthew one of the soldiers depicted?*

present. The regiment returned to Britain in August 1821.

Matthew stayed with the regiment until 1830 when he returned to Purley to marry Sarah Franklin on the 11th January 1831. They had eight children, James (1831), Mary Ann (1833), Eliza (1834), George (1837), Henry (1839), Sarah (1842), John (1847) and William (1853).

In April 1851 his son George aged 13 placed an iron bar on the railway at Purley. George, an agricultural labourer, was taken to court and fined £5 with 8/6 costs. He was unable to pay and went to prison for 6 weeks

In 1876 some of the veterans of the 66th held a dinner in honour of Matthew at the *Dukes Head* on Broad St. There were about 40 attendees and after speeches Matthew was presented with a purse of eight guineas and driven back to Purley with his wife.

When he was in his 80s he and Sarah moved to Tyldesley cum Shakerley in Lancashire to live with his son William, who was a mine labourer. His other son John also moved up to Lancashire. Matthew died in Lancashire in 1885, survived by Sarah who finished up in a workhouse in her 90s.

*John Chapman*

## *Wind in the Willows*

The popular Rain or Shine Theatre Company made their annual pre-Christmas visit to The Barn on Friday December 7th to present James Reynard's adapted version of '*Wind in the Willows*'

The afternoon performance at 1:15 pm was played to a handful of villagers, but mostly to Years One and Two children from Purley C of E Infant School, accompanied by their teachers. The five to seven year olds were entranced with only one child asking to go to the toilet, a sure sign of the actors' ability to entertain their audience.

The evening show played to a crowd of 110, most of whom were at the other end of the age range. But the attention, laughter and applause the cast received as well as the requests for autographs, more than justified the claim in the show's advertising that it would be suitable for all ages from 6 to 106.

James, who also directed, has his five-strong cast telling the story of Toad's adventures in flashback, though the majority of the action was true to Kenneth Grahame's original writing. The actors, playing more than twenty characters as they constantly changed appearance and dialect, produced exactly the right blend of humour, movement and drama, with Anthony Young excelling as Toad.

The set, stage and props were fascinating too, so that at various times we saw a caravan, a rowing boat, a barge, two horses, a couple of motor cars and a railway engine, as well as many colourful costumes and hats. Audience participation is the tradition with Rain or Shine also and Jan Page must surely be in line for a BAFTA after her delivering of the word 'guilty!' at the end of Toad's trial.

I am grateful to Ben, Clive, John and Marion for their help in preparing The Barn and tidying and clearing away afterwards, and also to Angela, Catherine and Val for organising the refreshments. As a result of everybody's efforts and of the generosity of those who contributed to the retiring collection, Project Purley will be able to donate the sum of £470 to our local Purley Park Trust.

Rain or Shine will return to The Barn on Friday June 7th, 2013 to perform Shakespeare's '*Comedy of Errors*'

*David Downs*

## *Nature Notes*

*Rita Denman*

Towards the end of July the heat was debilitating but fortunately it cooled down in time for the Olympic athletes.

### *3rd August*

There are many Red Kites in the area which fly around all the time. As I was working in the garden I became aware of two kites calling to each frequently. It seemed that there was a chick in a nearby tree which was being answered from some distance away. Eventually the parent bird came nearer, and the chick flopped out of a nearby ash tree and flew groggily towards the parent bird.

### *10th August*

The meadow is very wet, which delays cutting the long grass. It is very untidy and not looking its best, but there are a few more butterflies and crickets are very noisy. It is a good year for the large green dragon flies, and bats are out on the occasional warm evening. The cats, Betty and Flo like to walk round the meadow with me and they flushed out of the long grass the pair of English Partridge.

### *17th August*

The local geese are moving up and down the river. It seems that at this time of year they begin to get the migration urge, even if they are going nowhere. It is a beautiful sight to see them in flight in numbers, The weather has been mixed and the sun is hot when it shines. Thunder and a heavy rain storm blotted out everything beyond the end of the garden.

### *August 24th*

There will be next to no fruit in the meadow this year, cultivated or wild. Tim at Home Farm has been harvesting the wheat and barley, with difficulty due to the weather. The red kites know the sound of the tractor and always gather overhead for any unexpected harvest of their own. The cutting was finished by head lamp light leaving

the straw to be baled. The following morning a group of roe deer with young were in their old place by the hedge.

Reading Festival weekend and it is raining.

### *31st August*

It has been officially announced that this has been the wettest year for 100 years.

Tim has been unable to gather the straw as it has been getting dry and wet over and over again. In the meantime a large flock of Canada geese and a number of swans have taken over the field. A couple of young roe deer are often by the hedge which has grown so thick and high that they can completely disappear into it.

### *7th September*

At long last the harvest is in. A few days dry weather has enabled Tim to clear the fields. A flock of at least 100 geese are in the field overnight flying off during the day. Tim tells me that there about 2,000 Canada geese on our stretch of the river.

As I sat in the garden taking a rest from a major tidying up, I watched four red kites flying very high in a cloudless summer blue sky. A sudden quiet fell everywhere save for the kites calling to each other while gliding and falling and buffeting each other for sheer joy, and learning all the tactics of flying as they did so.

### *September 14th*

As the weather has been dry I have spent most of my free time working in the garden while there is the opportunity. Due to the predominantly wet summer the garden hose which is wound round a wooden barrel has not been used at all, and is now covered with the creeping blue columbine.

### *September 21st*

We can always depend on plenty of mist in the valley. There are different kinds of mist. There is the kind that blankets out the hills and woodland and with a little imagination one could be on the edge of a far reaching plateau. The most interesting is the light

transparent mist that hangs like a veil across the fields. Shafts of sunlight turn the fluttering birds wings into sparkling sequins. Gradually the veil draws away revealing the full beauty of the valley.

Each evening at dusk a roe deer comes to graze in the meadow. With the wind coming towards me I can stand watching for some minutes. Occasionally it stops to look around, stretching its long neck and big ears together. It seems to be standing on tiptoe, then resumes its feeding.

A less attractive consequence of the weather is the number of microscopic midges. If it becomes normal we will need mosquito nets!

### *September 28th*

The weather has been dominated by the huge 'fronts' that have been circling around the British Isles. It has been the wettest September for 30 years. The roe deer that has been coming to the meadow now considers it safe to bring Bambi with her.

### *October 5th*

The geese are flying in the early light and at dusk. Sometimes in orderly formation, sometimes in a gregarious gaggle and yet again in long straight lines. It is impossible to know how many are local geese and which are passing through. I do remember in our early days in this area when travelling in the Wokingham Road area, that the sky would truly be covered with flying geese. It was an amazing and touching sight. Nature on the move.

### *October 12th*

A flock of house martins gathered over the meadow flying in all directions making a screaming noise and hopefully ridding us of some of the midges. A heron was busy in the hedgerow. It has been a good year for frogs and they are everywhere in the long grass.

### *19th October.*

The fields have lying water following the incessant torrential rain

and ploughing has been brought to a standstill. The pair of English partridge are still around the meadow, Betty (the cat) spotted them and waited her moment to pounce but they were much too quick for her and confused her by flying off in different directions.

### *26th October*

Sunshine has been very scarce. Fog, mist, cloud, rain and low light has greeted us every morning. A change is forecast when the cloud will clear away and a blast of air directly from the Arctic will arrive at the weekend. Snow can be expected on the northern hills. Then it will be back to rain again.



*The Christmas Party - Rick Jones reads out the answers to the quiz*

....and finally: Congratulations to John Chapman who has been made an Honorary Alderman by West Berkshire Council. He is one of only three persons to receive this honour. The position of Alderman is a very ancient one which has recently been revived to mark outstanding service to the community over many years.

*Editor*