

THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL



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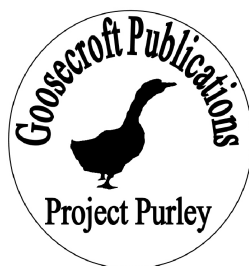
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Mapledurham Lock

by John Chapman

From mediaeval times there was a weir at Mapledurham, owned by the Lords of Mapledurham to store water for the use of their mill. In order to provide for navigation, parts of the weir would be removed to allow vessels to pass. This process was known as flashing. Going downstream it was relatively easy as the bargeman 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.



A boat being flashed downstream

One or two of these windlasses have survived and the site of the one at Whitchurch 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. It was relocated on the island for many years.



The old windlass on the island

The great difficulty with flash locks was that they lost a lot of water from the river and so red-

uced 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 loath 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 Blunt and kept by Roberte Byrde. The list of 1585 gave Mr Michael Blunt as the owner and Robert Blunt as the keeper.

In order to be allowed through a lock the boatmen had to pay a fee. 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 140t, in 1791 as 8/- for 60t, in 1821 as 3/8 per 20 tons and in 1846 as 3d per 5 tons.



Building the pound lock

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 Commisioners tried to rename the new lock as 'Purley Lock' but old traditions prevailed and 'Mapledurham' it has remained.

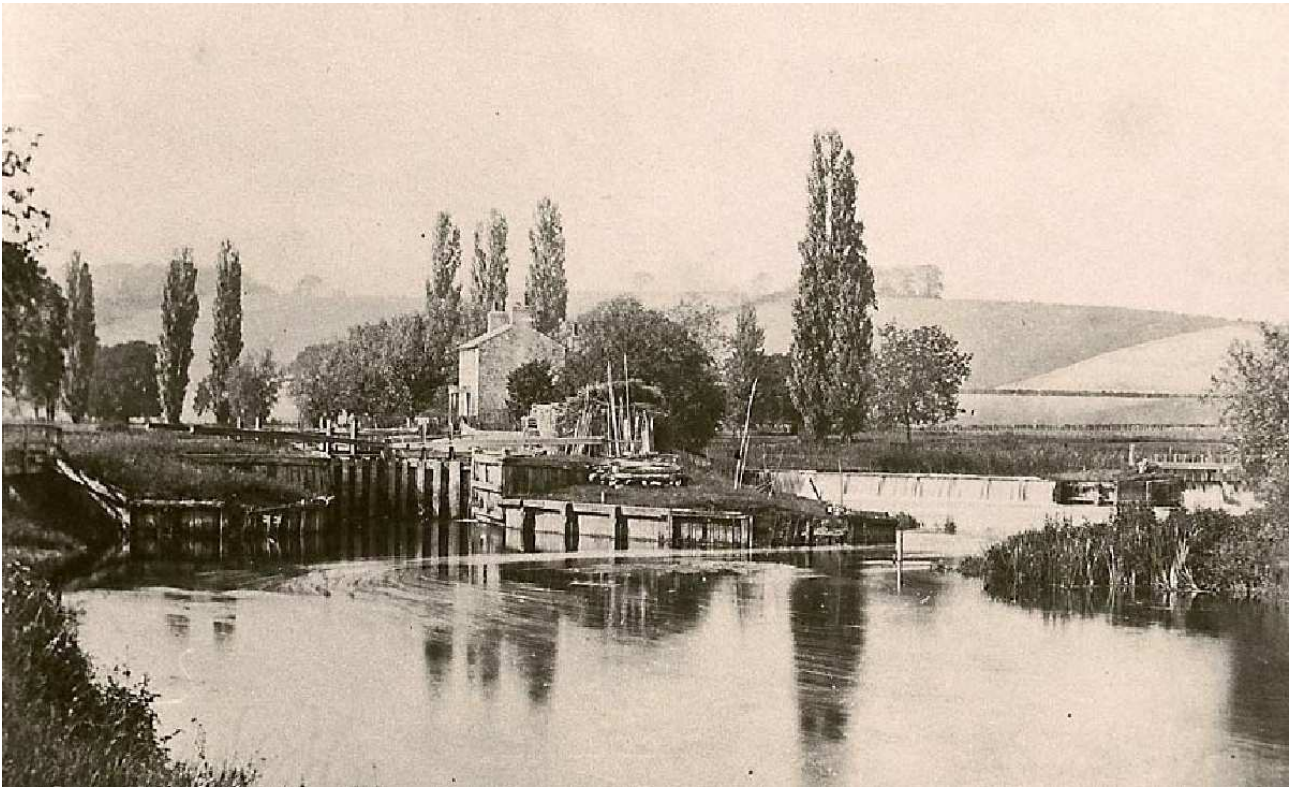
A survey of the river was conducted in 1794 and for the first time we get a description of the lock. The falls were described as 'at the upper cill 4':0", at the lower cill 2':5" only and at the pen 4':2" The width was given as 18:2 and it was recorded that there were no flash and low water marks. There 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 3':9" to 3':3" and 3':0". 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 140t but it was proposed to return to the 1771 rate of 8d per 5t. By 1846 the rate had been reduced to 3d per 5t

A 'watch box' had been 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 24s 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 47s 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 succesion but the Commisioners decided to build a cottage for her. This was built on the island. She was given a pay rise to 70s



The old keepers house on the island

a month in October 1822. Cecily resigned in May 1822 to be replaced in June by William Shepherd.

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 52s to 24s 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 52s a month.

In 1868 a dispute arose with Mr C Blount of Mapledurham House. It seemed to start with a dispute about the statutory compen-

sation 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 Hambleton. 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 30s a month.

A new lock was built alongside the old pound lock and this was extensively enlarged in 1908. The new lock had brick sides and required far less water even though it was bigger.

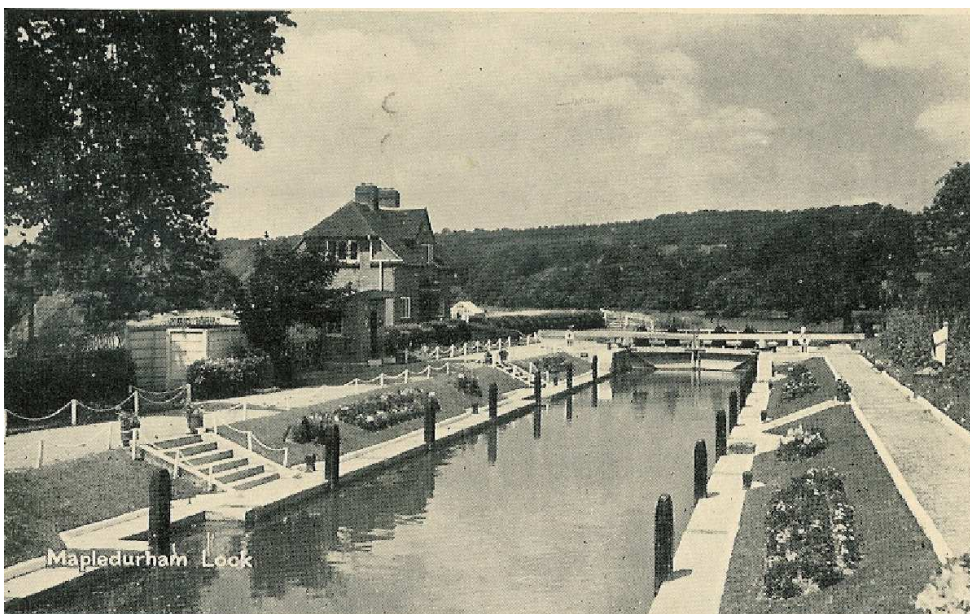
John James Thame was keeping in 1914 and there are several cases of his actions as a life saver. It was during this period that the rector of Purley, John Dudley Matthews, was drowned trying to cross the river.

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.



The lock between the wars with the watch-box

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 to be replaced by Lane Redgewell who was promoted this year leaving the lock to be supervised by stand-in keepers.



The lock in the 1960s showing some of the planting, which made it such a picturesque spot, and the new house on the south side of the lock

Reminiscence

The Day War Broke out

Rob Wilton's famous phrase is the theme for this reminiscence which is a synthesis of articles by Pat Deane and Jean Debney originally published in the *Project Purley Newsletter* of September 1989, plus extracts from an article by John Chapman in *Berkshire - Old and New* and some other reminiscences of Purley people.

Pat Deane asked one of Purley's oldest residents, Mrs Elsie Kirton of Yew Tree Farm, if she could recall the events that took place fifty years ago in Purley.

Each weekend Mrs Kirton cooked a roast dinner on Saturday and had cold meat and jacket potatoes on Sunday so that she could



Elsie Kirton in later life

go to church. It was soon after she left for church on September 3rd 1939 that she heard the news that war had been declared. and admits to being a bit scared. Of course there were changes. One of the first was that evacuees came to Purley. She went to the school to meet her first evacuee - Charlie Andrews - but he did not stay very long as his family moved to Tidmarsh and he joined them.

Next came Joyce Blackhurst. This proved a great success as she was the same age and had the same interests as her daughter, Doris. She remembers them going to the Co-op to buy orange 'wool' which was not on clothing coupons, to knit clothes for their black dolls. Joyce now lives in Tilehurst.

As Mrs Hodgkins' servants went into munitions, Mrs Kirton went to work for her at Purley Lodge. Young girls who came to help had to be taught how to lay the table properly as they were not used to 'being in service'. Mr Hodgkins and his brother were 'high ups' at Pulsometer where munitions were made during the war.

The WI played an important part in Mrs Kirton's life, especially during the war. She had to go to the Food Office to get a permit for refreshments at meetings. The school was used for any village events and it was WI Members who made the black-out curtains for the school. Speakers would come along and give talks on such subjects as 'War time recipes' They also raised funds for sailors (Mrs Hodgkins favourite service)

Mrs Kirton's son Charlie, popped in at this point to say he remembered the Army Engineers using the old gravel pit on the farm (now filled in) to practice bridge building. When they had mastered building them on dry ground they went to Pangbourne to practice on wet ground. Also there was a searchlight in the field behind what is now Denefield School, but they didn't have any guns to shoot down any planes caught in their beam.

In the three months from September to November 1939 a total of eighteen evacuees aged 5 to 6 were admitted to Purley Infants School. The first eight arrived on 21st September, followed five days



Three of Purley's young lads visit the Royal Engineers camp at Kirton's Farm - they are Jack Iles, Bob Iles and Clarence Bowes

later by six more, then three in October and one in November. Most were on their own but some were with their mothers. The School Admissions Register (now in the Berkshire Record Office) records details of their birth, previous school and the name and address of whom they were boarded with, plus details of when they left and where they went.

Within a month ten had left, because the expected gas and bomb attacks did not happen or simply because they were homesick. Dorothy Hall returned to London the day after she arrived, David Moffatt and his mother from Kensington stayed only four days, Joan Buckingham from Hounslow stayed for five days. Only two evacuees stayed long enough to be transferred to Pangbourne Junior School.

Ken Mercer recalled - "In the morning of 1st September 1939 I sold my golf clubs and locked my little red sports car in its garage, said goodbye to my girlfriend and was among the first eight to report for mobilisation and was sent to Mitcham to help defend London. At the false air raid warning of September 3rd all we could do was watch barrage balloons go up and castigate those crews too enthusiastic so that their balloons broke away to disappear heavenward."

Cliff Debney had just returned to Manchester from Horsham and on the next Friday he and his two brothers, each complete with a gas mask in its cardboard box, set out to catch a train for London but they were diverted to Chapel en le Frith in the Peak District for their evacuation.

Pat Deane heard the sirens for the false alarm and she sat with her gas mask on the table waiting apprehensively for something to happen. A neighbour with one leg made a speedy 200 yard dash on crutches and then the all-clear sounded and everyone carried on with life.

Preparations for war had begun some years earlier when the Baldwin Government issued the first circular on 'Air Raid Precautions' in September 1935 and local authorities were charged with the responsibility of protecting their public. The main threat was perceived as being from the air and the popular belief was that the rain of bombs from the heavens would utterly destroy everything on the

ground and anyone who did survive would be killed or crippled by poison gas. Officials and experts roamed the country giving public lectures especially on how to protect oneself. Gas was particularly feared and in a lecture given by Mr S V Fawkes on 12th February 1939 at the schoolroom he released samples of several gases for the audience to savour.

The Air Wardens Service had been created in April 1937 and organised on a County basis. The Assistant ARP Officer for the County was initially Purley's County Councillor, Colonel J N Norman Walker who resigned in Feb 1940. Purley Parish Council was asked to nominate a Chief Warden for Purley and Mr Stockley was nominated in October 1938. What was alarming however was the local reaction which ranged from apathy to downright hostility, shown very forcibly to the ARP volunteers when they went from door to door. The ARP were finding sites for trenches in the local villages and compiling a register of who had a telephone. A first aid post had been established in Purley but this was closed down in April 1940 and the people of Purley were told they would have to go into Pangbourne for treatment. Shortages of equipment had caused great resentment so in April 1939, Bradfield RDC had resolved to purchase an additional 98 helmets for the ARP at a cost of 12/6 each. Previously an allocation of 256 gas masks for civilian use had been delivered to the school for distribution among the villagers.

Other arrangements made included the installation of a platform above the police station in Pangbourne by Messrs Carter in February 1939 for the air raid siren. This was electrically controlled from within the station and could easily be heard all over Purley. Just after war broke out there was a public outcry for better protection and local ratepayers demanded that a shelter be built at the Purley School. The rector, The Revd Ernest Skuse, was appalled by the idea and vigorously opposed it. He claimed that the village had been declared a reception area and therefore could be presumed to be safe from attack. In the end he was proved right as the nearest bombing came to Purley was an attack on Thames Avenue in Pangbourne

*Meeting Report****Frost Fairs - Ian Currie***

Whilst we all have our own experiences of harsh winters and memories of various snow depths it was left to our speaker Ian Currie, to enlighten us with his illustrated talk entitled "Frost Fairs and Freezes" on the Thames and the harsh winters since 1000 AD.

During the Little Ice Age which is normally dated around 1500 – 1850 AD, Northern Europe experienced much colder conditions and rivers froze more often but this was not the only factor that allowed the Thames to freeze.

The river was much broader and shallower and flowed more slowly. The medieval Old London Bridge which carried shops and houses was supported on closely spaced piers protected by timber casings causing a narrowing of the arches. In winter these would become blocked by large pieces of ice and act like a dam.

In 1434, 1506 and 1575 the ice was thick enough to allow people to drive their carts and carriages across but there was little in the way of organised entertainment. King Henry VIII was reported to have travelled from London to Greenwich by sledge in 1536.

The earliest recorded frost fair was 1564/5 when people congregated on the ice to take part in a football match, archery contests and feasting. Queen Elizabeth was known to have enjoyed target practice on the ice.

During the Great Winter of 1683/4, when the sea off the south coast was frozen up to two miles from the shore the most famous frost fair was held.

Coaches plied from Westminster to the Temple. There were stalls selling trinkets and children's toys. Hawkers sold spiced buns, gingerbread and mutton pies. There was bear or bull baiting, wrestling and horse racing to watch. Printing presses were popular selling poems and certificates recording people's names and time on the ice, and tavern booths selling mulled cider, ale and hot drinks.

London apprentices would be running and sliding, whilst others would be drawn on large sledges or boats adapted for the ice

.The experts would strap animal bones to their shoes and use a staff to ski across the ice.

However the Frost Fairs weren't all fun, many people fell and broke limbs or fell through the ice and drowned and the Ice Men were there to deal with the consequences. It was a disaster for the port as ships couldn't enter the Upper Pool and there were many without work. Trade ground to a halt, coal and other goods became scarce.

In 1789 melting ice dragged a ship anchored to a riverside pub pulling the building down and five people died.

Following some unseasonable mild weather and a week long fog in 1814, the temperature dropped dramatically and by the end of January people were able to venture onto the ice. By the next day London traders were setting out their wares, warming drinks, often alcoholic despite the lack of licence and providing a variety of amusements. They were quickly joined by nine printing presses creating Frost Fair memorabilia. A sheep was roasted and spectators were charged to look at it. People clamoured for souvenirs marked "Frost Fair 1814" and "Bought on the Thames". Even donkeys were tempted onto the ice to give rides. Spectacular at night, stars and fires sparkling under the backdrop of St Paul's Cathedral.

The thaw came quickly. A week after the river had frozen, crowds gathered to watch the passing of large ice flows and chunks of bridges. Sleet and rain ensued and within twenty four hours the ice had gone, although the cold weather lasted until the end of March

1814 proved to be the last Frost Fair. A new London Bridge was built in 1823 slightly upstream from the old bridge which was demolished eight years later. This, together with the creation of embankments, permanently changed the flow of the river. The Thames is now much deeper and flows too fast to freeze.

Angela Edwards

Annual General Meeting

The March meeting on the 15th, commenced with the Society's 31st Annual General Meeting

The Chairman reported that the past year had been dominated by the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in Purley in which the Society had played an important part. The community came together in a wide range of activities and events and Project Purley had donated the £600 profit from the June 2011 Rain or Shine performance to the Village Jubilee Fund. £200 was also raised from the sale of bricks from the demolished railway bridges. The Society's major effort went into an exhibition which celebrated the reigns of three Queens, Elizabeth I, Victoria and Elizabeth II. It had been the first opportunity to use all our new display screens and, together with other stands which had been loaned and some which had been made for us, we were able to stage the largest exhibition in the Society's history which attracted a large number of visitors and positive comments.

Thanks went to all the members who had helped with preparing and staging the exhibits. The Society also took part in the Scarecrow competition and, later in the year, entered a decorated tree in the December Tree Festival at St.Mary's Church.

The Chairman thanked Val Jones who took over as Programme Secretary last March and had arranged a varied and stimulating programme of speakers and events. The visits to Dorchester on Thames and Stonor Park had been most enjoyable. The annual barbeque and Christmas party were great successes and thanks went to our hosts, Dorothy and Ben Viljoen and Val and Rick Jones.

Thanks went to Jean Debney. Angela Edwards and everyone who had organised and served refreshments at the meetings; David Downs who organised the two visits from the Rain or Shine Theatre Company, which together raised almost £1,000 (the amount raised for charity so far over the past few years amounts to close to £7,000); John Chapman and Ann Betts for producing the Journal and all the members of the Executive Committee for their hard work and support.

This coming year, at the request of the Rector, the Society will

be carrying out a survey of St.Mary's Church Burial Ground including remapping the location of monuments, recording the monumental inscriptions and taking photographs. This is necessary as more unsafe gravestones are likely to be moved to the edge of the churchyard later this year.

In the Treasurer's absence, the Chairman reported the Society had ended 2012 in a strong financial position. The Society had received a grant of £200 from the Parish Council and "Purley in Old Images" had brought in £701.82 against costs of £30 this year. However, we cannot expect sales of this book to continue at this level.

The Society had purchased a new projection screen, lap top speakers, new shelving for the cupboard and archive storage boxes and a gazebo for the summer barbeque. This year we have purchased a portable document and image scanner.

The cost of hiring the barn, producing the Journal and hiring speakers increased over the year and it was proposed that membership fees should be increased from £10 to £11 for single membership and from £16 to £17 for family membership with effect from January 2014. This was put to the meeting and agreed.

There being no other nominations, the Chairman, Catherine Sampson, the Treasurer, Lee Hall, and Secretary, Ann Betts were re-elected for the coming year. All the present members of the Executive Committee: John Chapman, Jean Debney, David Downs, Angela Edwards, Valerie Jones and Clive Killick were re-elected en bloc.

Ron Chudleigh was appointed Independent Examiner.

Ann Betts

The Purley Effect - Rita Denman

After the AGM and a glass of wine we settled back in our chairs to the soothing sounds of Greensleeves being played and quintessential views of times gone by. Our speaker and member Rita Denman began to tell us how on a glorious October day in 1975, she and her husband first set eyes on Purley. It was love at first sight.

She recorded "Before the hurricanes of 1987 and 1990 there were more trees arched over the road from Ivy Cottage to Lister Close and everywhere sparrows were twittering. All was quiet in the lane; the



Two of Rita's favourite buildings

(left) The Tudor Barn at Westbury

*(below)
The infants' school*



old cottages stood basking in the sun and the shell of a new house before them."

Some years later after research by Jean Debney it was revealed the plot showed records of connections to 1380 and history dating from the 1600s.

In the mid 1980s Rita and her husband were able to purchase half an acre of land behind The Mimosas. The grass was allowed to

grow to hay and wild flowers encouraged. After nineteen years the hedge is still layered and more crab apple and fruit trees planted. The wild life is shared with the whole valley.

It wasn't only Rita who was seduced by the Purley Effect. In earlier years several artists have been drawn to live and work in this area of outstanding natural beauty. Humphrey Repton gave us a glimpse of Old Purley with his water colouring of plans for Purley Magna. Cecil Aldin was known as the sporting artist whilst Eliot Hodgkin who was born at Purley Lodge specialised in paintings from nature.



Hedge-laying in Rita's meadow

Maybe Rita's Purley Effect is still with us. The sense of continuity in the old cottages and farms, the ever changing powers of the river, the peace in the meadows are all still there.

Angela Edwards

The Project Purley Archive

Our January meeting had to be cancelled owing to the weather. It was planned to tell you a bit about our archive but we are having a special meeting on May 3rd in the Barn. However we are looking for folk to help us catalogue the near 40,000 items in our collection. It involves looking at each item, describing the contents and filling in a simple spread sheet. Any volunteers?

John Chapman

History of Bee-Keeping - Mike Dabbs

At the April meeting our Speaker was Apiarist, Mike Dabbs who came to let us into the secret world of beekeeping.

It was thought bees evolved from predatory wasps and have many similarities.

At some point humans began to domesticate wild bees in artificial hives – hollow logs, wooden boxes and woven straw baskets.

In ancient Egyptian temples and caves, workers are depicted blowing smoke into hives as they are removing the honeycombs.

Inscriptions detailing the production of honey have been found on a tomb dating from around 650 BCE. Wax and honey would have been used in the mummification process and found in the tombs of Pharaohs.

Early forms of wild honey harvesting entailed the destruction of the entire colony. The wild hives in trees or rocks were broken into using smoke to subdue the bees and the honeycomb torn out.

In the medieval period abbeys and monasteries were centres of beekeeping since beeswax was highly prized for candles and fermented honey used in the production of alcoholic mead.



This type of hive is known as a skep and is popular in Scotland but it is difficult to harvest the honey.

One of the most renowned beekeeper monks was Brother Adam of Buckfast Abbey who developed a strain of bee valued for its good temper and honey production.

In more recent times 18th century philosophers undertook the scientific study of bee colonies and in the 19th century the movable comb hive was perfected enabling the inspection for disease and other problems.

Sadly there are new challenges for bees – the arrival of the parasite Varroa in 1992, the recent cold and wet weather have contributed to wiping out colonies.

A colony of bees consists of three castes.

The Queen bee – normally the only breeding female.

Female workers, typically thirty to fifty thousand.

A number of male drones ranging from thousands in a strong hive in Spring to very few during a dearth or cold season.

All colonies are totally dependent on the Queen.

Angela Edwards



A cork hive



A piece of honeycomb which has had the honey removed

Nature Notes

by Rita Denman

2nd November

In the last few days there has been torrential rain to sunshine and everything in between. The farm fields near to the meadow are under water for most of the time. There have been warnings that due to the abnormal rainfall since July and the fact that the rivers are full any further rain will cause flooding in vulnerable areas.

Despite the rain and fog there has been bright moonlight with starry nights and fiery sunrises.

9th November.

The curtains have been opened to a monochrome dawn with grey skies, grey hills and a grey mist covering the trees and hills. Slowly, slowly as the light increased the hills became darker and revealed a covering of frost on the fields with a white mist swirling off the river. The dark outline of trees became a foreboding huddle of crouching beasts. The sunrise was heralded by a faint pink tinge in the grey sky and as the sun rose higher the scene changed to sparkling pink and white. The higher the sun rose the stronger the pink became until it turned to a ruddy orange and finally with a flourish the glory of the morning in the valley shone with white frost and golden autumn trees.

16th November

The trees are now full of autumn colour and looking their best and a few days without rain has cheered us all up.

23rd November

After a few days of mainly dry weather the water in the farm field eventually drained away but with heavy rain over the last 48 hours it is all under water again. The wind is very high shaking vents and cat flaps, letter boxes and anything movable.

30th November

Flooding in many parts of the country has been the main news. The River Thames through Purley is very high and a number of residents have remarked that they have never seen it so high and angry.

Despite the grey gloom there are some bright spots in the garden with the winter flowering mahonia, snowball bush and

jasmine trying to liven things up. There was a full moon this week. It was huge and very bright against a cloud streaked sky. The man in the moon had a definite smile on his face. Or was he laughing at us? More rain is expected.

7th December

A dusting of snow has turned the old cottages into confectioners ginger bread houses.

Tim Metcalf related to me the story of the sudden emergency on Wednesday morning of last week. The flock of sheep and the cattle were all in the fields bordering the river. Information from the Environment Agency indicated that the river levels would be no higher than 2007 which meant that the animals were safe. During the morning Vicky Metcalf became so alarmed at the sight of the river that she sent an urgent message to Tim to get there fast. By the time he arrived a wall of water was advancing which he said would have swept him off his feet. The sheep had gathered themselves onto an island of slightly higher ground and the water was half way up the legs of the cattle. Organised panic ensued to get a large flock of sheep and the cattle to safety. The shepherd rallied a cattle transporter and a number of friends with tractors and small carriers which ferried the sheep out of the village. Tim herded the cattle away from the river and along the track that hasn't been used in this way for years and back to the safety of Pond Field. The good news is that the recently sown wheat has germinated.

14th to 28th December

The previous week has been marked by thick frost and minus temperatures;but it is raining again. Even the birds disappear on these dark miserable days and there is more water lying in the farm fields. In the last week of December roe deer have been in the farm field, and pheasants rooks magpies and a green woodpecker in the meadow.

4th January 2013.

Following continual rain on New Year's day the rain stopped the sky was blue and the sun was pleasantly warm and I wandered down into the meadow. There was rotting vegetation everywhere. Underfoot was a huge green sponge with water squelching and oozing at every step. The beef herd were along the farm track looking at me balefully.

11th January

We have enjoyed an almost rain free week with the water gradually subsiding. The cattle are mooching along behind the hedge. A flocks of rooks and a few swans have been visiting the farm fields. Snow is forecast.

18th January

Snow is falling steadily and the outlines of tiles and bricks are disappearing. Sky and snowy earth are merging and the horizon gradually advancing. The wind is rising and every now and again it whips up a billow of snow which travels along the street. It has shape but no substance, like an apparition, perhaps of a long past villager seeking their old home. School is closed and generally there is silence with a multitude of falling snowflakes as far as the eye can see.

1st February

Pools of water remain in the farm fields the extent depending on the rainfall from hour to hour. Once again the catkins on the hazel bushes are golden and full of pollen with the promise of a fruitful harvest.

8th February.

It is a biting cold day with a strong wind coming from the Arctic. A very bright sun is burnishing the winter trees and here and there the bark of a birch tree shimmers like silver. There are fast moving grey clouds crossing a high blue sky which create drifting shadows on the hill. A lone red kite is quartering the landscape below. I will never tire of watching this majestic bird circling and gliding in a seemingly effortless way, the sun catching its white wing markings. Gradually the kite works its way out of sight. The sky seems empty after the bird has gone and the sun hides behind the clouds. A moment of glory is over.

15th February

It is a matter for great rejoicing that the sun has been shining for hours at a time lightening our mood. The rooks are very noisy and flying hither and thither gathering nesting material. Snowdrops are out in the hedge and aconite buds about to flower.

22nd February

The appearance of spring flowers and new leaves despite the bitter-

rly cold weather give hope for better weather to come. A heron has been floating along the gardens looking for life in the garden ponds. Everything is just poised for a gala burst into spring.

1st March

The weather is cloudy and cold. The birds are active and beginning to sing as it is now light at about 6.30am. The perfume of the mahonia in the garden is gorgeous. The farm track running alongside the meadow is a quagmire and the cattle look quite dejected as though the weather is affecting them too. Spring seems to be on hold. There is a kind of waiting atmosphere. Waiting for everything to get moving.

8th to 12th March.

Sunday. We woke to early morning fog.

Monday. I drew the curtains onto an altogether softer day. With a light mist and pale sunshine, and as the morning wore on it turned into a beautiful spring day. The water in the big farm field had finally drained away and it was a great pleasure to see Ian arrive with the plough. It was heavy going where the water lies but it was very satisfactory to watch the blades turn over the dark brown soil.

Tuesday. Dawn came grey and misty with the vague outlines of trees and branches still and lifeless, the only movement a pair of silhouetted swans as they flew towards the river. The rising of a rosey sun tinted the landscape and the shapes of the Angus cattle slowly emerged from the mist. Ian was back to till the soil. As the day wore on a few gulls increased to a large flock following the tractor rising and falling in a mesmerising ballet. High above an opportunist red kite kept watch. Another spring like day ended in a temperature of 14 degrees.

Wednesday. Saw a return to dull weather but Ian was back to complete the cultivation of the field

Thursday. A grey all enveloping fog turned to persistent rain with temperatures falling again.

22nd March

Large pools of water are collecting in the pasture field and the Angus cattle huddle together. Calves are being born into a wet and muddy world.