

# THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL



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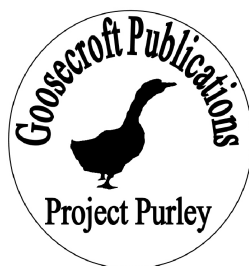
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## *Chairman's New Year Message*

Happy New Year! In last year's message I promised a varied and excellent programme of talks and visits and I hope that you think we delivered that with topics ranging from the 'Mary Rose' to the 'Course of the River Thames' and visits to Waddesdon Manor and the Houses of Parliament. We also enjoyed a wonderful evening at Ben and Dorothy Viljoen's for our annual summer barbecue and the new venue of The Barn for our Christmas party. The programme is published ahead to July and brings visits to Portsmouth Harbour and Sutton Courtenay and if you have suggestions for future speakers or visits, or would be prepared to arrange one, please do get in touch, we have benefitted from some excellent speakers through personal recommendation.

Project Purley is far more than just a talk society though and our other activities this year have included producing three informative journals, a summer performance by the Rain or Shine Theatre Company, two small exhibitions and new research into the Canning family amongst other topics. We have also completed the reshelving of the archive cupboard enabling the work of cataloguing the archive to recommence imminently. John as our archive manager will be leading this activity so please do contact him if you can help. It's not just an absorbing way of finding out more about Purley, it also enables and hopefully encourages more much needed research to be carried out.

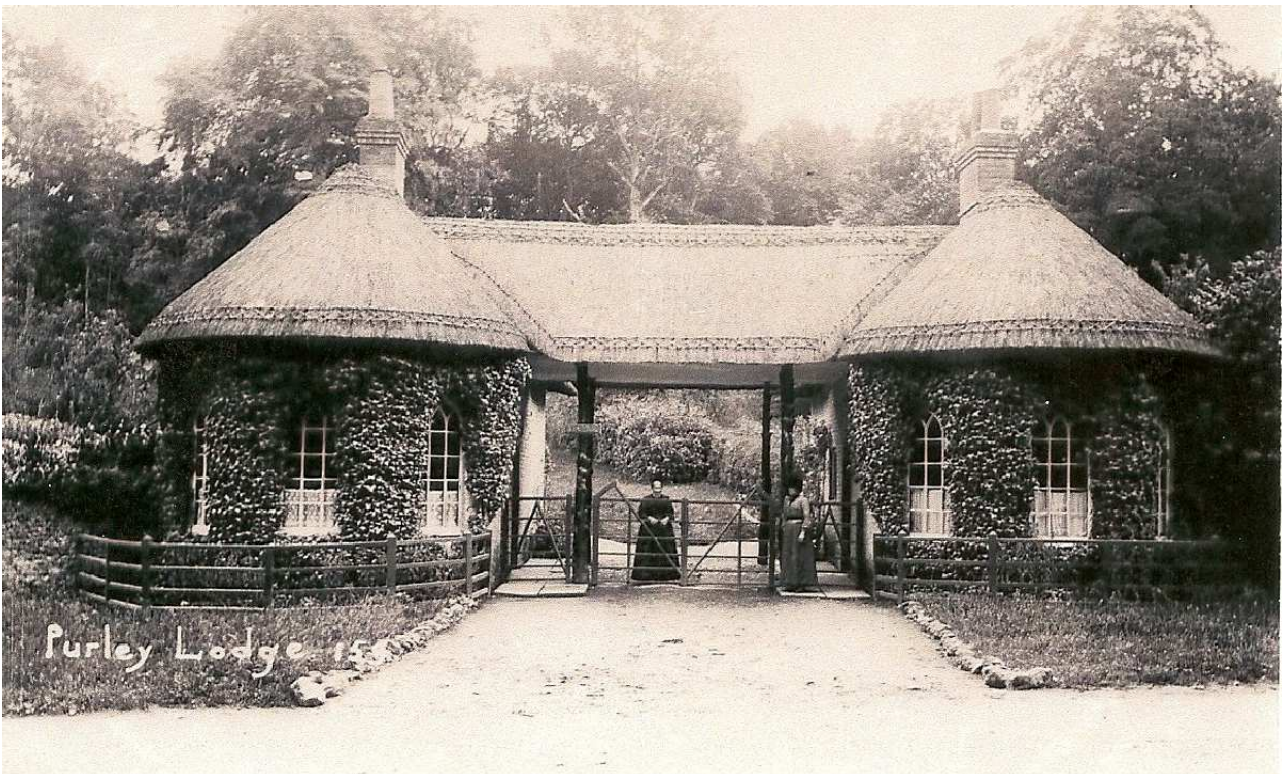
During 2014 we have seen the passing of two longstanding members of the society - Bernard Venners and David Betts, and we will remember them both with great affection and appreciation for all that they did for the society and the community. Finally my thanks go to all of the committee who as ever have worked tirelessly to make our meetings and activities enjoyable and bring us closer to fulfilling our core commitments as a history society.

*Catherine Sampson*

# *The Purley Park Gatehouse and Tunnels*

*by Ben Viljoen*

In the Project Purley archive there are several photos of the Purley Park thatched gatehouse. From the OS map of 1877 it can be seen that the gatehouse was on the south side of the trunk road (now the A329) while the rest of the estate is on the north side.

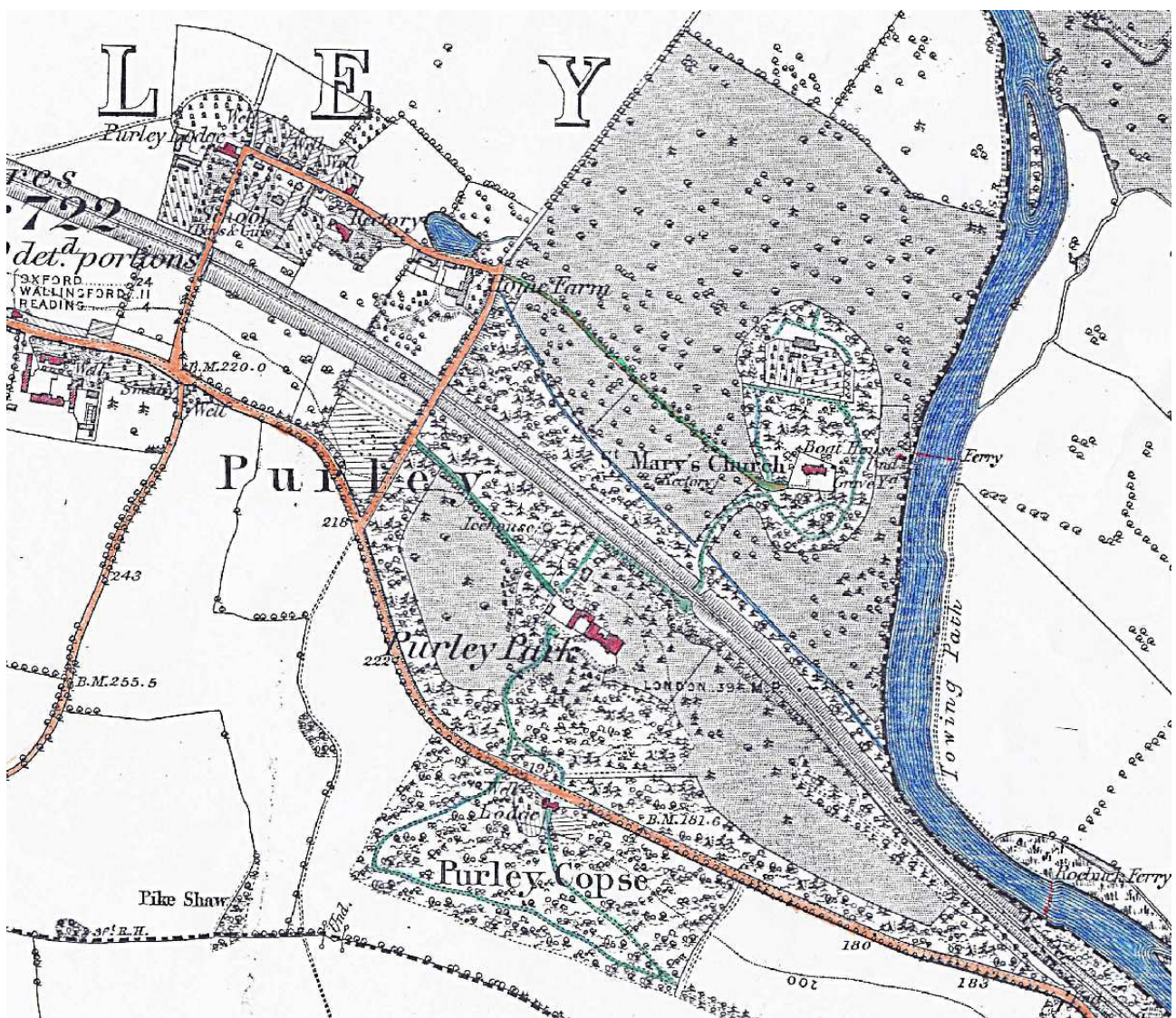


*The Gatehouses to Purley Park*

Without some written record or other form of evidence it is difficult to be certain why the gatehouse was on the 'wrong' side of the road but one possibility is that it was a means of creating an illusion that the estate was larger than it really was. From the OS map we can see that anyone visiting the Storers would have taken the gatehouse as being the main entrance; so a carriage would go through the gatehouse, follow a meandering path and eventually go under the trunk road by means of a tunnel and on to the house. Such a route is shown on the OS map but the path seems rather narrow and the hairpin bend at one point may have been difficult to negotiate with a horse-drawn carriage. This is the situation when

this part of the estate was surveyed in 1877 but what was it like when first laid out? Had it perhaps by 1877 become just a scenic footpath? What I do think most unlikely is that the elaborate gatehouse would have been built just to provide access to a footpath.

Today nothing remains of the gatehouse or of the tunnel under the road. There are photos of the gatehouse but none of the tunnel. However there are references to a tunnel. In 1996 the Project Purley oral history group interviewed Elisabeth Duncan, the second wife of Colonel Hugh Duncan who had bought Purley Park in 1948. Here are Mrs Duncan's first impressions when she arrived at Purley Park in 1958, she recalls "a large park, floods by the river, fogs on the



*The 1882 First edition of the Ordnance Survey map of the estate*

Oxford Road, a little village outside the gates among the tree-lined roads, the ramshackle river estate, and a large herd of pigs which were always escaping.” And here comes the interesting part of her recollection: “one of their favourite ways of getting out was through a narrow tunnel leading under the main road, to emerge by the gate lodges which were on the opposite side of the road.”

The OS map shows that the tunnel would have been about eighty yards west of the gate house. Mrs Duncan says that the tunnel emerged “by the gate lodges”. Perhaps her memory was faulty or she meant that the tunnel and gate house were in the same vicinity, or this may have been another tunnel; after all pigs could get through a narrow drainage tunnel.

We also know that a tunnel under the road was designated as the village air raid shelter during WW2. Clearly here we are not talking about just a drainage tunnel.



*The tunnel under the railway linking the two halves of the estate now separated by the railway.*

The building of the railway in 1840 partitioned Purley Park and separated the house from the church and much of the estate. The inconvenience was somewhat lessened by the provision of a tunnel under the railway between the house and church. Some years ago John Chapman and I examined this tunnel.

The iron steps that had been used by the gentlemen and the circular path for the ladies to reach the tunnel had disappeared and we had to use a rope to get down to the entrance of the tunnel. Remnants of a circular pond remained that must have looked very attractive when viewed from the church side of the tunnel. As one would expect from a Brunel structure, the tunnel was in very good condition and particular care had been taken to make it attractive with the use of stone to frame the entrance.

So two tunnels would have once been in regular use at Purley Park, one under the trunk road to enter the main park either by carriage or on foot, after a meander through an extended portion of the park, and another to attend church and to visit the parts of the estate on the far side of the railway.



*The carriage route from the 1882 map*

*Biography***William Sheppard (1804-1889) - Lockkeeper***by Jean Debney*

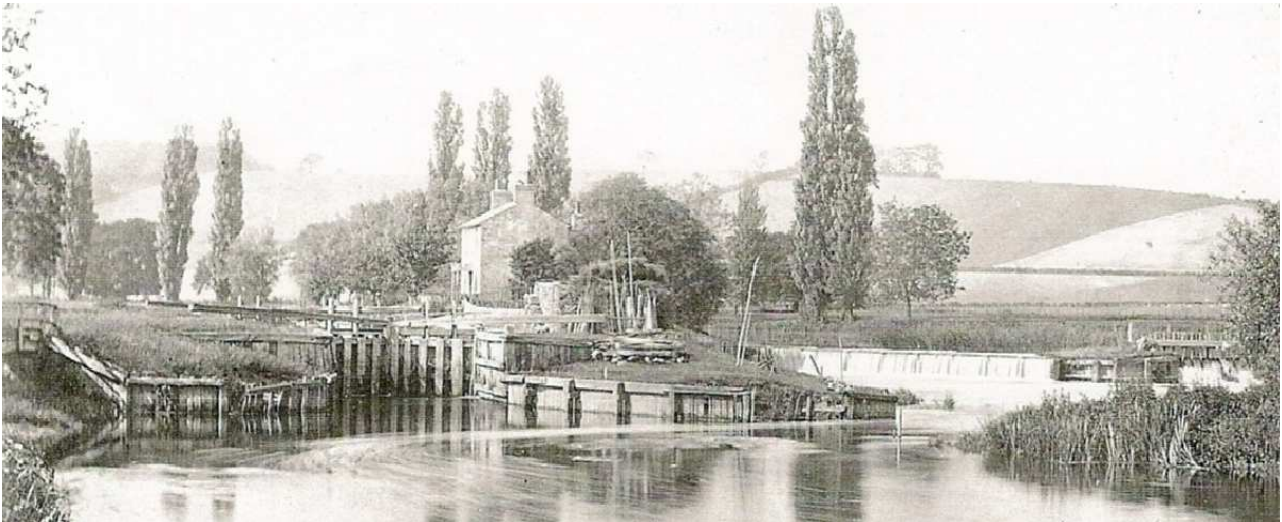
*This article was originally published as one of 'From My istory Notebook' series in Purley Parish News, February 1982*

Just over 230 years ago, in 1777, the newly formed Thames Commissioners constructed a turf sided pound lock in a channel dug through a promontory on the Purley side of the River Thames. It replaced the old flash lock which was slow and wasteful of water and caused problems for the miller in Mapledurham. The site of the flash lock was located where there is now a salmon leap.

Initially, only a "watchbox" was provided to protect the keeper until a cottage was built in 1816. It was probably to this house that William Sheppard brought his new wife, Mary Anne Fowler. A more substantial toll house was built on the north side of the lock in 1849 and remained in use until 1931 when the present house was erected on the Purley bank.

William was born in Streatley in 1804. He was one of nine children of John and Mary (née Day). Both he and his younger brother John became lock keepers: William at Mapledurham and John at Whitchurch. William was appointed in June 1828 following the resignation of the widow, Cecil Geddes. For a monthly wage of 70 shillings per month he collected the tolls at the lock and had oversight of the ferries at The Roebuck and at Purley.

Mary Anne née Fowler was born about 1812 in Northamptonshire and may have been one of the boat people on the river. Over a period of 17 years they had eight children baptised in St Mary's, Purley. Sadly, of their six sons, three died as babies, two other sons grew up and married; Ferdinand, a ship's carpenter in Liverpool brought two of his children home to Purley for baptism but was drowned in the Thames at Purley in 1898. His younger brother Edward, a fisherman by trade, remained in the parish and married Sarah Jaggard (1847-1945), a maid from the Rector's household. They had seven children: two of their sons, Charles and Edgar George, are commemorated on the World War I Memorial in the church.



*The old cottage on the island*

Competition from the railways after 1840 badly affected trade on the river - by 1853 tolls were suspended and William's wage was halved. In the following years his wage was further reduced to 24s per month, (i.e. approximately 6s a week to support his wife and children), It was another 12 years before his wages were restored to 52s per month.

A strong minded character, he was involved in a dispute with Mr C Blount of Mapledurham in April 1868 and as a result Mr Blount forbade him to land on his property to obtain supplies. Following this upset, Sheppard was transferred to Hambledon but was back in Purley a few months later - no doubt to Mr Blount's annoyance.

It was recorded in '*Summer Days on the Thames*' that William Sheppard was the most inveterate destroyer of fish that the Thames had ever known; he rented the rights to netting and skinned the river relentlessly. With his bag-nets and flue-nets and other diabolical contrivances of misplaced ingenuity he cleared the river of everything that was much above the size of a sprat. He would sometimes send as much as half-a-ton of fish to Leadenhall Market. This is probably an exaggeration but may have some basis of fact or may have referred to his fisherman son, Edward.

William survived his wife for 20 years and was cared for by his youngest, unmarried, daughter. After 54 years of service at Mapled-

urham Lock, he retired to Caversham in April 1882 where he died seven years later. A stone near the north side of the church marks the last resting place of William and Mary.

*Sources: 'The Thames Highway', Fred S. THACKER, 1914, p277; 'Summer Days on the Thames', Alfred John CHURCH (1890); Parish Registers of Purley and census returns,.*

## ***Crofts, Shaws and Piddles***

*by John Chapman*

When the Ordnance Survey began to provide detailed maps of the English Countryside they adopted a new system of identifying fields simply numbering all the fields in a parish in sequence. Later this was changed to a number derived from the OS grid reference of their centre point. This may have all been very efficient but what it resulted in was an almost complete disappearance of the ancient field names which were a glory of agriculture from mediaeval to Victorian times. Luckily many estate maps from the 18th and 19th centuries have survived and with them the names of many of the old fields.

Apart from the Pond Field and River Meadow none of the fields in Purley are commonly known by names today and even those two are modern inventions. Farmers often have names for their fields but few other than themselves ever use them. Names have survived for some wooded areas but often too these have been given modern names rather than preserving the ancient names.

The old field names often incorporate a word which describes its function as well as a naming word. For example Meadows and Meads were fields adjacent to water which were used for producing hay; Closes and Crofts were pieces of enclosed land usually used for keeping specific types of animals in (or sometimes out).

The Parish Council decided some years ago to revive Goosecroft, one of Purley's ancient field names for the recreation ground. The original Goosecroft was somewhat bigger and covered all the

present recreation ground area and a bit more beside. One may presume this was the field where the villagers kept their geese. Purley had several other 'crofts'; we can assume Horsecroft was used for keeping horses and I leave to your imagination what Duncroft was used for.

Several of the old names have been used to name roads in the village in recent years. For example Kernham Drive recalls a large field called Kernhams which covered roughly the area now occupied by Apple Close and Orchard Close. Similarly Elyham recalls the name of the whole area of the former Trenthams site. One name got slightly misunderstood. It was intended to be called Simmonds Close after the name of the family of village blacksmiths who gave their name to a field roughly where Cecil Aldin Drive now is. However when officialdom published the name it had been transformed to Simons Close.

Another interesting word used in naming was piddle or pightel. Originally this was a small piece of land which formed part of one of the great open fields but these too gradually were enclosed. The emphasis is on 'small' as we still use this in a different context to describe something 'piddling' or so small as to be hardly worth while. We had quite a few of these in Purley although they were not actually that small; Ilsley Piddle was where the eastern end of Beech Road and Belleisle now are, Farmers Piddle was to the south of this. Block Piddle and Elms Piddle were to the south of Goosecroft and now form part of the large open field between Long Lane and Sulham Woods. Shepherds Piddle has largely been built on by the houses to the west of Long Lane and Purley Cross Piddle was roughly where Carew Close now is. There were several others in the village.

A warren was a parcel of land where rabbits were encouraged. This day and age one is not inclined to encourage rabbits but in former days they were a valuable source of fresh meat. The land to the east of Purley Hall was used for this purpose and the fields were known as Upper and Lower Warren. Little Warren was where Skerritt Way now is and it gave its name to the wood at the extreme east of the parish which was known as Warren Shaw. A Shaw is a small wood and its use is recalled in Pike Shaw. There were Meadows or Meads running alongside both the Thames and the Sul

Brook and the boundaries of many of these are easily recognisable today. Working from the Lock one had first Lock Mead, then Elms Mead, Mr Powys' Meadow and Common Mead which took you to the Sul Brook. Past the Sul Brook was Saltney Mead and lastly Charley Mead. Alongside the Sul Brook was New Mead to the east and Emmetts Mead to the west. The latter name would indicate it was infested with ants, especially when you notice the field further to west was known as Dry Ground.

There is great controversy about the derivation of many of the names which preceded the functional word, traditionalists tend to assume they reflect previous owners or tenants but there are some who believe many are anglicised corruptions of ancient Celtic phrases which described the topography in the same way that many Welsh place names do today. Whatever the truth may be, place and field names are a fascinating study and one can learn a lot from them.



*A selection of streets with a fieldname connection*

*Meeting Reports*

## *Purley from the Air*

A large number of members, visitors and guests crowded into the old Barn for the first meeting of our autumn and winter programme.

The evening began with a presentation by David Downs of a cheque for £500 to Marion Jacobs of Crossroads Care (Reading), a charity who rely entirely on donations. The donation was raised from the profits made by the Rain or Shine Theatre Company's performance in June of Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice.

Jean Debney gave a brief report of the archaeological finds made, with Catherine Sampson, of pieces of brick, tile, and pottery in the grounds of the warden's bungalow behind St Mary's Church, where it is believed that the old Manor of Purley Magna stood.

This was followed by a fascinating illustrated talk by John Chapman from his collection of aerial photographs of Purley between 1947 and 2013. They showed in great detail how and when the



*David Downs presenting the cheque to Marion Jacobs*



*The Purley River Estate in 1984. The Marina is bottom right and the Church is hidden behind the trees*

village developed in the post-war years. Several images showed the extent of flooding, particularly in 1947 when it was difficult to see where the river ended and the landscape and houses began.

The early images were taken by the RAF, then by private companies and individuals. In 1984 John took the opportunity, while attending a fete at Denefield School in Long Lane, to take his camera with him on a helicopter ride over the village. The pictures were in colour and included many close-ups of roads and roof-tops.

John explained with great clarity the main features of all the images making it a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

*Jean Debney*

## *Literary and Artistic Footprints of the Thames*

An almost record audience crowded into the Barn on Friday 17 October to hear Nick Brazil from Whitchurch talk about 'Literary and Artistic Footprints of the Thames'. Each literary and artistic figure was illustrated with coloured slides, information about their achievements plus other details.

The talk began with the Catholic house of Mapledurham just across the river where Alexander Pope (1688-1744), the poet and satirist, was a regular visitor. As Catholics his family had to live ten miles outside London and they settled in Pope's Manor, Binfield, where as a child he suffered from tuberculosis of his bones which left him a crippled hunchback. He created a theatre with a statue of Pan and wrote many poems and plays. By the early 1700s he had formed a close, but platonic relationship with the unmarried daughters of the Blount family, Teresa (1688-1762) and Martha (1690-1762)



*Mapledurham House*

his favourite. After his death he left everything to Martha. Mapledurham was also where scenes from the film *The Eagle has Landed* were shot after WW2.

Nick then moved on to talk about Cecil Aldin (1870-1935) who, influenced by the artist, Randolph Caldecott, became famous as a sporting artist and for his pictures of dogs. A copy of his picture of the horses in the Purley Remount Depot during World War One hangs in The Barn, the same barn which featured in the drawing. Sadly, his son, Dudley was killed in the First World War (his memorial plaque is in St Mary's church). Cecil Aldin Drive is named after him.

Across the river from Purley, Hardwick House was the home of Caroline Lybbe Powys who between 1756 and 1808 maintained a diary recording the daily social round of her class with gossipy details. Eliza, the wife of a descendant, Sir Charles Rose, was a sculptress, whilst Henry James Rose (1843-1918) wrote *Portrait of a Lady*.

Kenneth Graham (1859-1932) the well-known author spent the last years of his life in Pangbourne. The legend continues that, while living there, he wrote *Toad of Toad Hall*, published in 1908 and illustrated by Ernest Shepherd, basing *Toad Hall* on Hardwick House. However, others believe it was written in Sonning as a story for his only son. Unfortunately his son, who had had an unhappy childhood trying to meet his father's expectations, committed suicide while at University.

Nick finished with a section of other key artists and writers of the area. Eric Kennington (1886-1960) of the King Charles Public House was a war artist in both world wars, and made the war memorial in Kensington and one for Checkendon. May Wedderburn Cannan (1893-1973) was a prominent war poet whose fiancée Bevil Quiller-Couch survived the war only to die in the Spanish flu pandemic in 1919. Finally D H Lawrence author of many well-known books lived, with his wife Frieda, for a short while in Myrtle Cottage, Pangbourne, during World War One.

All in all this was a fascinating talk which was much appreciated by the audience.

*Jean Debney*

## *The Mary Rose*

Another record audience of members and friends crowded into the Old Barn in expectation of an interesting and exciting talk: no-one was disappointed.

Our speaker, Trevor Sapey, arrived with several large boxes and bags containing a tableful of reproduction artefacts found in the Mary Rose plus a suit of sixteenth-century sailor's clothes which he wore to give his illustrated talk. He explained that the long white shirt was tucked round his legs to complete his underwear, his black jacket had separate sleeves tied on with tapes and his knee-length trousers attached in the same way. Slits had been cut in the outer garments so the shirt could be pulled through for decoration. He had a white cap (the surgeon had a black one) under a black woollen round hat. The whole lot looked grubby - washing was not a priority in those days!

Trevor began by outlining the history of the Mary Rose which was ordered by Henry VIII in 1509 as his flag ship, to increase his navy to fight the French. Made of wood from the New Forest and Thames Valley, she measured 45 metres bow to stern (about 4 buses), 30m across and weighed 700 tons. In 1536 she was refitted and given extra guns. Nine years later, in 1545, she was lined up with the rest of the Navy in Portsmouth to defend England from the French navy.

Historians have used a large painting of the English and French fleets in battle that day together with documents to reconstruct what happened. The picture shows the masts of the Mary Rose just above the water as she steadily sank after 34 years' service. Various theories exist as to what caused her to sink and most centre on the heavy guns and the foreign crew who wouldn't have understood the English command to close the port holes. Tragically the netting in place above the deck to thwart boarders prevented many sailors from escaping when the boat started to capsize, and most drowned.

The ship was left to rot where she sank, but was rediscovered by divers in 1965 and in 1979 research began under the control of Margaret Rule. 600 divers, and 1000 dives later, some 19,000 artefa-

cts, large and small, had been recovered. These included the doctor's and carpenter's chests, skeletons of men, shoes, musical instruments, large numbers of nit combs, a back gammon board and a young dog. The hull was finally raised in July 1982. For two years it was sprayed with water to remove the salt, and then with wax and it is currently being dried with giant fan heaters. It is now housed in a new purpose-built museum which opened to the public last year.

A large number of items were then passed round to examine and guess their use. Needless to say we were all fascinated but very puzzled about most of them until Trevor explained their purpose and how they fitted into a ship's life in the Tudor period. One that caught my eye was a 'match stick' made of a length of carved wood with a notch in one end to hold a piece of knotted rope. This was held by the 'Gun Master' behind the guns and then, when the cannon had been loaded with gunpowder and shot, he ignited the gunpowder to fire it.

The whole evening was absolutely fascinating and the speaker was in no hurry to get back to Portsmouth as he dealt with many questions and comments. Project Purley is planning a trip to Portsmouth Harbour in July 2015.

*Jean Debney*



*Some of the objects used aboard 16th century warships*

## *Christmas Party*

Not only did we have unusually warm weather for our Christmas party (snow and ice are more typical) but we also had a new venue, The Barn, as a consequence of increasing membership numbers making The Gatehouse sadly impractical this year. Thirty-eight members gathered at 7.30pm to enjoy a relaxed evening with a sumptuous 'bring and share' buffet and the normal fiendishly difficult Christmas quiz devised by David Downs. We were relieved to find only one football question this year but completely stumped by another question which no one managed to get right despite several very creative attempts to solve. Overall Jacky Brown was the worthy winner achieving a very credible 17 out of 20 and being awarded a bottle of wine as her reward.

The Barn was suitably decorated with a tree, lots of fairy lights and beautifully decorated tables and thanks go to Angela and David Edwards, Marjorie Butler, John Chapman, David Downs and Ann Betts who helped to get everything ready for the evening and to Roger Butler who along with Marjorie prepared and served mulled wine

*Catherine Sampson*



*David Downs presents the quiz prize to Jacky Brown*

*Obituary***David Betts (1948-2014)**

David was Chairman of the Parish Council from 2003 to 2006 and served as one of our District Councillors from 2007 up to the time of his death. He was a member of Project Purley and passionately interested in motorcars and Chelsea Football Club (among many other things)

He was born at Woodford Green in 1948 and started his career in journalism working for several Essex newspapers. This eventually took him to Shell , editing their house magazine. He moved into public relations moving to Aberdeen and latterly in London. When he retired from Shell he ran his own consultancy for a while before devoting himself more fully to Parish affairs.



*Young David*

He met Ann at the Young Conservatives and they married in 1971. Their daughter Sarah was born in 1975 in South Woodford. After 5 years in Scotland they moved south in 1986 to live in Purley within commuting distance of his new job at Shell-Mex House.

He became chairman of the Parish Council bringing a much more business-like approach to proceedings and producing the Village Plan which he has gradually seen unfold. He was instrumental in getting a 30mph speed limit on the main road through the village. When I asked his advice in 2006 if he knew anyone from the village who would be prepared to take on the job of District Councillor he said 'I could take it on'. I was able to retire knowing I had a good successor and he rapidly established himself taking on the portfolio for Highways and Transport.

We were all saddened by his illness and the deterioration in his health but had hoped to see him recover, so his sudden death came as a great shock to everyone who knew him. He leaves a great gap in our lives. No more will we see him walking his dogs and caring for the parish. May he rest in peace.

*John Chapman*

## *Nature Notes*

*by Rita Denman*

### **8th August 2014.**

The Canada geese are coming into Oak Tree Field now that the grain has been harvested. They announce their arrival with a noisy chorus. Everywhere growth is abundant and overflowing. There are still many bees and butterflies attracted to the oregano. The weather is perfect for the Bristol Balloon festival but the effects of the weakening hurricane Bertha are expected although forecasters are unsure of how strong or where it will hit the UK.

### **15th August.**

It is time for the Perseid meteor shower. I was not lucky enough to see any falling stars, but on the 9th the super moon, when it is nearest to the earth and at its brightest was visible over Purley. There is too much light pollution to see stars at the front of the house, but I am fortunate that the skies are dark and stars visible from the meadow. At the farm there is no rest between seasons and now that the barley harvest is in, raking tilling and seeding for next year has begun. The geese and swans are grazing regularly in Oak Tree Field. They settle as soon as it is light and occupy the field for a couple of hours. They arrive with a great hooting and honking and work their way across the field in small groups fluttering forward until the time for departure. Usually they leave in orderly manner in groups or single file the swans mingling with them. Sometimes they are spooked by something and all rise up at once with a cacophony of sound flying in all directions until they get themselves organised and fly off together.

### **22nd August**

There is a chill in the air and the summer sun is mellowing in an autumn glow. The gardens are beginning to fade although there is still plenty of insect life about. Grandson Benjamin has been mowing the long grass in the meadow which is always full of grasshoppers crickets and other insects. For generations of Purley children, the field of which the meadow is part, was known as 'the cricket field'. Benjamin is eagle eyed when he is mowing in case some little creature is endangered. The grasshoppers jump out of the way as he approaches with the mower and he noticed one had become caught

in a web low in the grass. Investigating he discovered an unusual spider. With some research on-line he found it to be a wasp spider, a comparatively new arrival in the UK. It is easily recognized by its yellow and black stripes and a distinctive zig zag pattern running down the centre of the web. They feed on grasshoppers and crickets and like damp places. The meadow fits the bill completely.

### **30th August**

Following a period of warm sunny weather a drop in temperature has come as rather a shock and the Bank Holiday Monday was definitely a washout in these parts. Very rough weather is being experienced in many parts of the world. The much discussed and long awaited 'bund' flood defense is being built in Purley this week.

### **12th September**

Early mornings have been misty with a pleasantly warm sun breaking through in the late morning. Leaves are beginning to turn and new buds are already forming on the cherry trees.

### **19th September**

Blackbirds and thrush have been singing in the early mornings and a robin has taken up residence in the front garden, appearing expectantly when he hears the sound of a trowel. The cycle of nature is endless and timeless. The hills are shrouded in mist and the newly seeded fields present the same landscape that has been familiar to peasant and parishioner through the ages. Past inhabitants of Purley lived through plague, poverty and persecution but each morning they woke to the same view of hills and fields that delights me today.

### **26th September**

The weather has been ideal for the growth of fungus and there are a number of species in various parts of the garden and meadow. Night times are a little more chill but daytime temperatures are high for the time of year.

### **3rd October**

The jet stream is to the north of the UK. There has been heavy dew but little rain and days have begun with mist and fog clearing gradually to warm sun.

### **24th October**

Rooks and Jays are very noisy and now that the ant hills in the

meadow are exposed the green woodpecker is a frequent visitor. The weather remains very mild for the time of year and many roses are still in flower and most of the trees through the valley are still in green leaf. 'Gonzalo' is the latest in the autumn series of hurricanes crossing the Atlantic Ocean and although it has weakened some parts of the UK have been badly affected. We have been fortunate in Berkshire that the winds have been less destructive, although sadly one life was lost when a tree fell.

### **31st October**

What an amazing autumn we are experiencing. Today all previous records for high temperatures at this time of year have been broken. In 1969 and 1989 temperatures rose to a record 20 degrees. Today at Charlwood in Surrey a temperature of 22.5 degrees was recorded. After early morning mists days have been still and strong sun has accentuated russet leaves and a red glow in the tree bark. Bright green new growth in the barley fields, with deep blue skies and white floating clouds have been the epitome of the English home counties scene. Blue tits are making a feast of the abundant hawthorn berries. Despite the brilliant summer, the effects of last year's flooding have not gone away entirely and parts of the meadow are still damp verging on wet and it won't take much rain to top up the ground water level.

### **10th November**

Fog, frost and the occasional deluge but mainly mild has been typical of the week's weather. The jet stream has moved well to the south of the UK and is across France. My neighbour's ash tree is now bare of leaves and the rooks are noticeably making it their conference centre. A large noisy flock gathers to discuss and lobby with a lot of fluttering and reshuffling of position. Eventually it seems that by common consent the conference is at an end and they all fly down to the meadow for refreshment. Representatives of most of the crow family have been in the meadow, the most handsome being the Jay. Green and greater spotted woodpeckers are also residents and after an absence, pheasants are wandering around again. Roe deer have ventured back into the farm fields.

### **21st November**

The birds have been enjoying the rain this week. Robins and blackbirds have been feeding on the *Pyracantha* berries and blue tits have

been exploring the dying foliage in the flower beds. Background noise is the fall of steady rain and the twittering of numbers of unseen birds in the hedgerow. There have been more frequent sightings of deer which have also been seen out in the lane. Tim tells me that the shepherd is bringing two flocks of sheep to winter graze at Home Farm this year. I have noticed that some are pink!

### **28th November.**

The long warm autumn has continued and the trees have retained their autumn foliage turning the valley into a glorious vista of red gold and russet. It is hard to believe that we have reached the end of November and that the first day of winter is upon us.

and finally.....

*A glimpse into the future - the gantries to support wires for the Great Western electrification project are installed between New Hill and Purley Lane.*

