

# THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL



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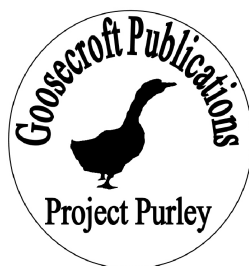
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## *J. W. Kirton & Son*

*By Ian Nash*

My first memories of Mr. "Jack" Kirton were of him delivering milk to my Gran in Glebe Road. She would put out a cloth covered jug and milk would be measured from a small churn. Also I went down to Scrases Farm with the older boys where he was working in the dairy. He worked for Robert Saunders and this was during the war.

Just after the war, I am not sure of the date, he started on his own when Saunders sold the farm moving the business to Yew Tree Farm where he had a small dairy and an eight stall cowshed built, most work being done by the family. Before this the dairy was at the back of



*Joe Kirton delivering milk before the war*

the cottage. For a time he was still using R. Saunders bottles later replacing them with "J W Kirton" on the same design.

His round covered most of Purley, along past Tilehurst Station then up into Tilehurst village and down Long Lane. I started going with Mr. Kirton when I was about ten years old with Albert Clark. We would be in and out of the van with the milk. The same old Austin that had come with the business now had a sign written with "J. W. Kirton & Son". My brother John helped Mrs. Kirton wash the milk bottles in the evening.

Mr. Kirton's day started in the early hours hand milking between 14 and 18 cows. They were all of different breeds and all with girls' names. There were Shorthorn, Ayrshire, Friesian, Guernsey and a Jersey - all T. T. tested once a year. He then bottled up and was ready to do the first round when we arrived about 7 am. After this round we had a nice fried breakfast, then carried on till about 5 pm stopping for lunch. Next it was off into Reading to pick up a couple of ten gallon churns from "Farmers Clean Milk Dairies" in



*Joe Kirton with his cows*

Greyfriars Road. The day was far from finished as we still had to do the “camp” in the evening and he went milking again.

I remember walking much of the way home from Reading one thick foggy day in front of the van. It was so thick I had a job find-

ing the correct way round Kentwood roundabout. In another thick fog we were down the “camp” and again in front of the van looking for the deep water filled pot-holes when the wheel of the van caught my leg and over I went. I had the presence of mind to shout “reverse.” I was taken into one of the chalets and given a rub down and a drink but nothing was broken.

Sometimes we went to a “Thimberley & Shorlands” sale in the cattle market to buy a new cow for the herd. This was quite an experience. We also took the bull calves to market for veal in the van, holding a bucket under their tail, as they were of no use to a dairyman. Heifer calves were kept but weaned off as soon as possible. This was done by putting two fingers in the calf’s mouth and getting it to suck, then gently drawing its head into a bucket of milk and water mix. They soon got the idea and mum was back in the cowshed.

The first heifer to be kept was “Daffodil” and she was spoilt coming up to you and looking for apples in your pocket. She knocked my very small brother “Joe” over but dad was there and no harm was done. Sometimes we would be taken to a Reading match at Elm Park then finished the round later.

Haymaking time was fun for us lads and we all got a chance to drive the tractor, an old pre war Fordson, while the men were loading the wagon. As well as a couple of fields behind the farm some up Long Lane and also the greyhound stadium kennels and



*Albert Clarke with the delivery van*

“The Copse” was cut. He didn’t have a baler then so it had to be loaded onto the trailer by hand. My father who was an old friend of the family and other local men helped. We would climb up the rails of the wagon and ride back on top of the load. My dad used to lay the rick. Of course when the hay was required in the winter it had to be cut out with a hay knife and taken out on a pitch fork. After the copse was cleared we drove the young heifers along the road in the evening and back again some time later. It must be said that Charlie Kirton was very good at maintaining the tractor,

the implements and also the vans, with son in law Tom Brody doing other work. It was a family affair.

One field was usually sown with mangels (large swedes) or cow cabbage. We had a cabbage occasionally for the table. Mangels had to go into a drum cutter which was turned by hand slicing the mangels into cubes. These were fed into the stalls with cow cake while the cows were being milked

There was also an orchard behind the house with a selection of apples, plums and bullas. We couldn’t get the ladder to rest safely on a bough so dad and Charlie held the ladder vertical and I climbed up to pick the apples.



*The Fordson tractor*



*Joe the milkman*

When Charlie joined his dad, Albert and myself had to share the jobs. I stopped going when I started work on the railway and later joined the army, but Albert went full time on leaving school and stayed till Mr. Kirton sold up in the 60s. People now might think we boys were being put on but we enjoyed being out and about and earned more than the paper boys. I had bought my first new bicycle at 12 years of age out of my earnings. Also we did not get pocket money from our parents only a bottle of "Tizer" and maybe an ice cream on Saturdays.

When I came back home in 1961, I again helped with haymaking which was now done with a

baler but still loaded on the wagon with pitchforks. I also went milking two evenings a week. There were now around 20 cows but now milked with portable electric milking machines. Each cow had a different amount of food such as cow cake and crushed oats according to her yield. When all was ready we would rattle a bucket and down they would come to stand at the gate. They knew their own stall in the shed and there could be quite a problem if one came in wrong trying to push the interloper back out. After each cow was milked the milk was taken into the dairy to go through the cooler. The milk was tipped into a drum about 6 feet off the ground then fed down over water cooled vertical corrugations and into a filtered 10



*Purley milk bottles*

gallon churn. That's the best milk I've ever tasted and I always had a pint to take home. Mrs. Kirton was still doing the bottle washing with my cousin Laurence, she worked very hard. Sometimes Mr. Kirton would tell me to take his gun up the gravel pit field and get a bunny for dinner. It was a cheap meal.

### *Meeting Reports*

## *Recusancy in Oxfordshire and Berkshire*

In April Tony Hadland, writer, historian and frequent public speaker, came to talk to Project Purley about the covert Catholics – recusants – who lived in this area from the time of the Reformation in the mid-1500s until the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. The picture painted of the strategies and subterfuge necessary to keep the faith and the people alive during that time was fascinating. The talk was beautifully illustrated, and combined an obvious enthusiasm and deep knowledge of the subject with a wealth of interesting facts and figures and some great stories.

After the Papal Bull of 1570, when Elizabeth I was excommunicated by Pope Pius V, Catholics were seen as much more of a threat to the Crown, and various laws were passed requiring Church attendance, banning the celebration of Mass, acknowledging the supremacy of the Crown and so on, with penalties from fines to death, with land confiscation being common (and inheritance of land not allowed for Catholics). The laws were irregularly and intermittently applied in a society where the leading families, both Anglican and Catholic, were all close if not intermarried, but this area did have its share of martyrs, including Abbot Hugh Faringdon of Reading Abbey (whose summer residence was Bere Court in Pangbourne), and Fr Edmund Campion, a Jesuit priest who printed anti-Anglican pamphlets from a secret press at Stonor Park, both of whom were hung, drawn and quartered for treason.

Many of the professions were closed to Catholics for much of this period, and Catholic schools were not allowed. But the children of the great families were still educated, and it was interesting to hear that many were sent to Jesuit establishments in France, which

meant amongst other things that the girls generally received a better education than their Anglican peers.

Catholics found ways of surviving despite the professions being closed. For instance, a lawyer might write legal books, which was not strictly practising law, but still kept him respected within the legal profession and within society – and solvent. But the Government also had devious methods of reducing the numbers of Catholics, who were still seen to be a constant threat, and believed to be regularly conspiring against the monarchy – which was not unreasonable after the Gunpowder Plot. Following the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89, when William and Mary came to the throne, inheritance

laws were changed so that younger sons of Catholic families could claim the inheritance of the elder son by converting to Church of England, which must have tempted many younger sons who (like the daughters) were victims of our primogeniture system.



*Abbot High Faringdon  
plaque in English Martyrs Church  
on Liebenrood Road*

Tony talked about the many aristocratic Catholic families in the area, including those from Englefield, Stonor and Mapledurham. He also talked about the artisan families who helped in practical ways to keep the faith going, such as the Owen family,

carpenters, one of whom specialised in creating priest holes. Nicholas Owen was obviously a master of his craft, as one of his priest holes was rediscovered at Mapledurham just 12 years ago in 2003.

In Britain, more than 400 years after Henry VIII created the Church of England, the 2001 census counted about 5 million Catholics – about 1 in 12 of the population, which shows how strongly the faith has been held during the centuries of persecution and discrimination. It was only in 1829 that most of the legal discrimination was removed.



*Edmund Campion*

Even as late as the 1940s it was not uncommon to see the words “no Catholic need apply” in job advertisements. In Parliament the discrimination seemed to disappear very quickly, with several Catholics from notable families, including Thomas Stonor, becoming MPs in the general election of 1831. Perhaps this relates back to the top levels of society, where many blind eyes had been turned over the years, and society dinners and dances had carried on regardless of religious differences.

Tony’s talk gave a brilliant insight into the many problems of life for Catholics during the period from the establishment of the Anglican Church by Henry VIII to the Emancipation Act of 1829, and has left us with a number of leads to connections in Purley and the surrounding area which will now be followed up with even greater interest. If anyone has any follow up questions on the subject, Tony can be contacted at [tony.hadland@gmail.com](mailto:tony.hadland@gmail.com), and his book ‘Thames Valley Papists’ is available to buy from the Mapledurham House Gift Shop, or free to download from Tony’s website: <https://hadland.wordpress.com>

*Gillian Wallace*

## ***Portsmouth Historic Naval Shipyard***

The coach-load of Project Purley members had an easy trip down to Portsmouth on a beautiful sunny day on the 11th May, the first of the two summer outings planned by the society. The only difficult bit was getting through Pangbourne in the rush hour, which was even worse than usual – 15 minutes from the bottom of Purley Hill to the roundabout at the Elephant! But many of the attractions of the Dockyard have been around for some considerable time, and were still there when we arrived.

The Mary Rose, now drying out after 30 years of washing and waxing, is truly dramatic, and the artefacts that were found in and around it are just as interesting in their own right. They are all brilliantly displayed in context – some even with a reconstruction of the crew member from the skeleton with his clothing and tools of his trade (though the squeamish didn’t linger over the tools of the ship’s surgeon). An elite group of longbow men were on board the Mary

Rose when she went down, their skeletons showing distinctive signs of wear, and more than 3,500 arrows (made of poplar) and 137 whole longbows (made of a combination of heartwood and sapwood yew) were among the artefacts found. Every tool or part of the ship's structure seemed to use a specific type of wood. Elm doesn't warp, and so was an essential component of the gun carriage of a canon, which could fire a cast iron shot over a mile. The construction of the ship itself consumed an estimated 600 large oak trees – about 40 acres of forest – plus elm for the keel (again to prevent warp), and even in the early 16th century when the Mary Rose was constructed, these big trees were becoming scarce.

The Victory and the Warrior were also dramatic in their own right, but also suffering from the ravages of time, and exposure to the elements. Victory has its own ongoing conservation project, started a couple of years ago when a full survey showed considerable water damage to the wood (obviously she didn't get the full wash and wax treatment) and keel damage from the very old dry dock cradle. The officers' quarters on the Victory looked beautiful, with every comfort – especially in Nelson's cabin. But a second look showed how every square inch of space was put to use, and how everything cleared away for action. Modern house builders could learn something even now – particularly about storage space!



*HMS Victory*

Highlights on a sunny day were the harbour tour, with its excellent tour guide, and a very minor naval victory when the noisy

German teenage school group on the boat were scared into silence by the small group of British ladies of a certain age. There wasn't much evidence of British naval might in the harbour, as most of the Navy shipping in evidence seemed to be awaiting decommissioning or the scrapyards. The harbour boat stopped at the shopping village on the way back to the harbour, and it has to be reported that one or two of our number were tempted off the boat there instead of taking advantage of a last hour of culture at the Dockyard!

All in all it was a really good day out and there is enough to see in Portsmouth Historic Shipyard for another two trips at least, though Action Stations might require a grandchild or two to justify the visit.

*Gillian Wallace*

## *Rain or Shine - The Tempest*

Rain or Shine's sixteenth visit to The Barn took on an extra dimension in June 2015. The actors had performed at Kendrick School on Thursday afternoon, and rather than travel to and from their base in Gloucester overnight, had asked if it were possible to be accommodated in Purley. I am very grateful to Anne and John, Ben and Dorothy and Marjorie and Roger, who willingly agreed to host the seven-strong cast. The outcome of such kindness was that all concerned thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Preparations for the actual performance began at 4 p.m. on Friday afternoon. The actors arrived to set up staging, lights, sound system and costumes. David, Martin and Richard organised the seating, whilst Martin, who had bought the wine and snacks and hired the glasses, set up the bar with Catherine and Ann. With everything ready and tea provided by Jean over, we opened the doors at 7 p.m.

Numbers attending were slightly down this time, but those who stayed away, for whatever reason, missed the usual high quality presentation. The Tempest is one of Shakespeare's later plays, and perhaps with a sense of finality he reduces the comic element and leaves more to the imagination of the audience. Indeed there is little humour until the "A man or a fish?" episode halfway through the play, which gives the actors ample licence for some verbal as well as

physical dexterity. The slapstick begins in earnest with the arrival of the drunken Stephano, played with obvious relish by Anthony Young who complains “My stomach is not constant!” to the obvious delight of the audience.

Taking a lesser role on this occasion was Claire Tucker as the spirit Ariel. She is married in real life to James Reynard, who besides playing Prospero, also directed the production. The couple were married last year and expect their first child in mid-November. All at Project Purley send their best wishes for the forthcoming happy event.

Project Purley audiences are discerning and critical as well as generous. We listened to many appreciative comments as people left, and the occasion raised a total of £450, which will go towards the setting up of a sensory garden at Purley Park Trust. On behalf of Project Purley I express since thanks to everyone – actors, helpers, spectators – who yet again made the occasion such a success.

*David Downs*

## *Barbecue*

This was the twelfth Project Purley barbecue to be hosted by Dorothy and Ben Viljoen in the garden of their home on Beech Road, but it was a first for me. And the first surprise was that it was possible to have five gazebos in the front garden, two barbecues, several tables of food, and almost fifty people without any sense of it being overcrowded. It must have been a conjuring trick. But since Ben is a garden magician, perhaps it was.

The members provided a great selection of savouries, salads, desserts and cheese, with a few volunteers making up the starter, and Ben and David Green as barbecue chefs. No-one can have gone home hungry, and it seems unlikely that anyone went home thirsty. The weather was beautiful, the company was excellent, and a good time was had by all.

*Gillian Wallace*

## *Sutton Courtenay Visit*

This was the biggest outing yet for Project Purley, with 50 members descending on Sutton Courtenay, maybe inspired to try to reclaim it for Berkshire after it was stolen away by Oxfordshire in the 1974 boundary changes. It would certainly be worth fighting for, as it's a really pretty village, with some beautiful houses, at least three pubs – (perhaps we could annexe one of these for Purley?) and enough history to keep all of us occupied.

There were so many of us, we were split into two groups – morning and afternoon, with everyone meeting up at the Swan pub for an excellent lunch. Both groups were welcomed at All Saints Church by the Chairman of the Sutton Courtenay Local History Society, Mary Thompson and the vicar, Reverend Helen Kendrick spent some time with the morning group. The Local History Society very generously provided us with coffee and biscuits when we arrived, with a small exhibition of information about the village and the beautiful church, and Mary Thompson gave us a talk on the history of the village, before she and Norman Francis (a local historian from East Hendred), gave us a guided tour of some of the village sights.

The group didn't manage to make off with anything tangible, and in the best spirit of modern exploration, took nothing but photographs and left nothing but footprints. But the weather was so dreadful that we left an awful lot of very muddy footprints, and may have taken away a few colds. It rained most of the day, and the route we took round Sutton Courtenay was not on dry footpaths. However, there was plenty to see (and to hear about), even with umbrellas up. We saw the house and grave of Lord Asquith, the former Prime Minister, and heard some interesting gossip about his family and the Astor family. We saw the grave of Eric Arthur Blair (George Orwell), heard about the Empress Matilda (who sounded like a lady better known from a distance) and the most intrepid braved the mud and rain to see the Saxon causeway.

Our two guides were very knowledgeable and entertaining, and were presented with small gifts at the end of the tours, and a £200

donation went to All Saints Church to show our appreciation for its hospitality to the group.

*Gillian Wallace*

## ***Village Blacksmiths in Purley (c.1594-1936)***

***by Jean Debney***

*Jean Debney was a founder of Project Purley and wrote a long series of items for the Purley Parish News between 1980 and 1993 under the general title of 'From My History Notebook' Jean has now left Purley to go and live in Shropshire and we wish her the very best in her 'retirement' The article below was published originally in three parts in Project Purley Newsletters of 2005.*

In the past every village had a blacksmith to shoe and care for the horses as well as make and repair metal household and farm equipment. He worked closely with the cartwright supplying metal parts for waggons and with the wheelwright producing iron tyres for the wooden wheels. Blacksmithing was a highly skilled family trade and passed from father to son. The working hours were long and arduous for a poor return: many accounts were only settled annually and then sometimes in kind: e.g. the baker would supply bread, leading to a shortage of ready money. At least one of Purley's blacksmiths was in debt over the value of his estate.

By the end of the nineteenth century, their work as a farrier, or horse doctor diagnosing and treating ailments, had been taken over by trained veterinary surgeons.

The twentieth century saw many changes in transport and industry as cars and tractors replaced the horse and, by the end of the Second World War, the role of the village blacksmith had virtually disappeared. Today, in the twenty-first century, only a few travelling shoeing smiths remain who visit stables on request over a wide area while a vet deals with any medical problems.

The blacksmith's shop was usually at a cross-roads to catch passing trade. In the early 17th century, the site of our smithy is uncertain and may have been a copyhold property in Purley Parva. It is not marked on the map of 1786 for Purley Magna, but several parcels of land exchanged between Anthony Morris Storer, who purchased the manor in 1793, and Philip Lybbe Powys of Purley

Parva may have included the smithy. It is listed as Major Storer's property and located on the tithe map (1840) standing at the SE corner of the junction of Long Lane with Oxford Road (now traffic lights). The premises were sold in 1920 by the Purley Park Estate and demolished in 1936 for road widening.

### **1. Ralph Winbolt: c1570-1605**

The first recorded blacksmith in Purley was Ralph Winbolt who died suddenly in the summer of 1605 leaving debts more than the value of his estate. In 1600 he was 30 years old, born in Brimpton, Berks (i.e. about 1570) and had lived in Theale for three years and then Purley for six. About 1599 he held 10½ acres of copyhold land in the manor of Purley Parva, then held by Lord Norris, and, the same year, married Marian Myles at Englefield.

In October 1605, letters of administration were granted to Ralph's widow and Richard Miles of Bradfield (probably her relative). Among the probate documents is the inventory of his goods and chattles valued at over £23 in July that year, plus some accounts, submitted to the Archdeacon by Marian in April 1606. Her expenses included 7s for the funeral, 3s 4d for the mortuary to the Parson, their only cow worth 30s (£1.50) as a heriot to the Lord of Manor, the rent due at his death, over £2. 5s legal expenses and over £28 in debts added up to more than the value of his estate.

Their house had three sparsely furnished rooms plus the shop containing an anvil, sledges (hammers) with other tools and weales and a grindstone. The rest of the house consisted of the hall where they lived and cooked their food, a kitchen with some household pots, a spinning wheel, wool, fleeces and raw cloth (either Marian or both of them were probably outworkers for the Reading woollen cloth industry) and a loft with their bed and bedding and where they stored some bacon and cheese.

### **2. Thomas Simmons: died 1643**

The only information we have about this blacksmith is that he apparently died suddenly in 1643 without making a will and, on 15 July that year, his brother, Nicholas of Basildon, with Henry Cordey also of Basildon acting as his bondsman, obtained Letters of Administration on Thomas's estate, with Bond for £100, double the

value of his estate, from the Archdeacon of Berkshire. There is no record of his burial as the parish registers were not maintained in Purley between 1640 and 1660, the Civil War and Commonwealth period.

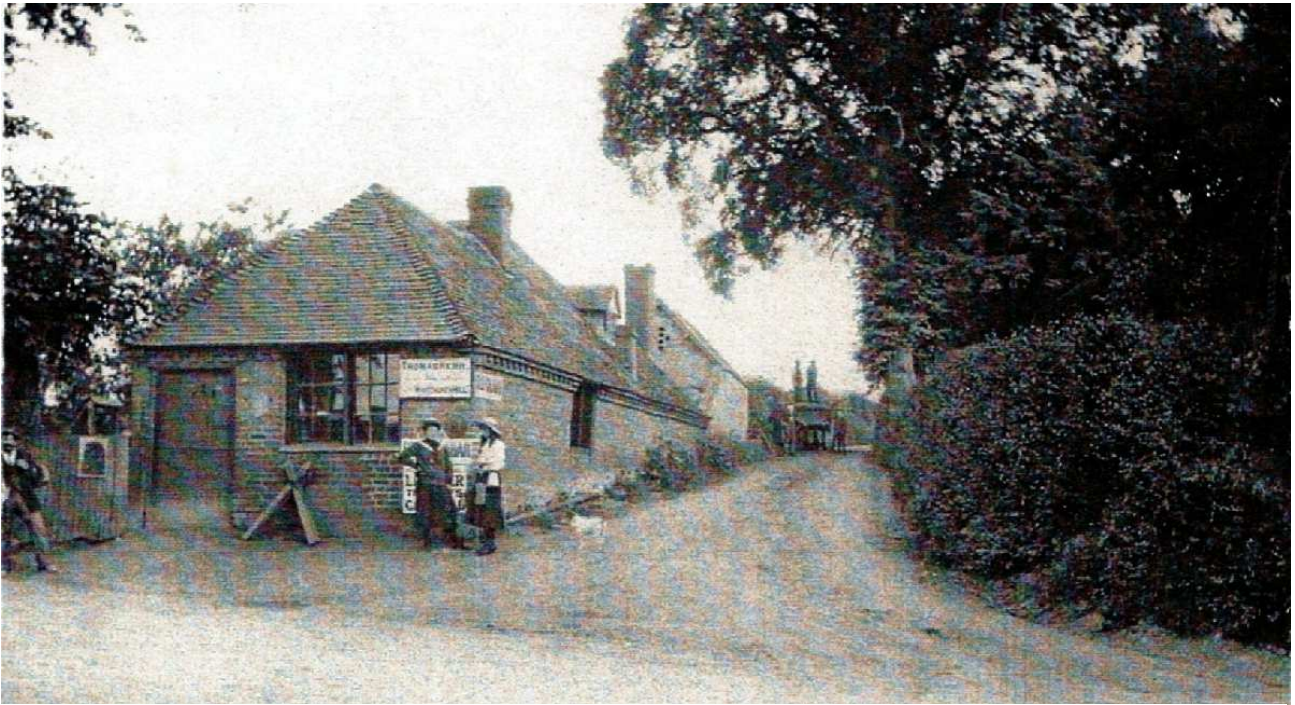
### **3. William Symons: 1696 - 1756**

William was baptised in Purley on 8 Feb 1695/6, son of William and Elizabeth. In 1699, his father renewed his copyhold lease in Purley Parva at 2/- [10p] annual quit rent in lieu of services, and named himself and his sons Richard and William as the first, second and third lives. The property consisted of 2 parcels of arable in Westwood Field (Tilehurst), 2 acres in Cockley Hole Field, 2 acres in Lewdham Field, and 2 lot acres of Meadow in West Doles, Theale Mead, 1½ acres in Kernhams (or Jourdans) Close (in Purley) and he could also graze 20 sheep, 2 cows and 2 bullocks on the common pasture of the manor. The previous tenants of this copyhold had been Joan Briston and Oliver Jorden.

In December 1727, William married Elizabeth Smallbone in Speen and their two sons and four daughters were baptised in Purley between 1728 and 1739. In January 1755, he had become the first life in the copyhold property and, for £40, renewed the lease adding Richard and Mary Loader, children of Francis Loader, a yeoman farmer of Hall Place, Tilehurst, as second and third lives. It isn't known what connection, if any, there was between these two families and why William didn't name any of his own children. He died the following year and was buried in Purley in August.

### **6. Richard (or James) Millard: c. 1758 - 1833**

Richard is first recorded as resident in Purley in the Court Leet records in 1791. He had married Rebecca Coker in Reading in 1785 and their only known daughter was baptised in Purley in 1793. In 1796-7 he was elected by the Court Leet, held each year at the Greyhound in Tidmarsh, to be Tithingman, or Assistant Constable for Purley. He was last listed in Purley in 1804 when he probably moved to Reading. Because he had held a parish office, he was considered to be 'settled' in Purley and entitled to parish relief if necessary. Between 1826 and 1833, when he would have been 70, Richard and his wife received money each week from the Overseers of Purley (today we would call it an 'old age pension') which



*The Forge at the bottom of Long Lane*

increased over from 4/- [20p] to 5/- [25½p] and finally 6/- [30p]. After his burial in Reading in 1833 aged 77, Rebecca's relief was reduced to 3/- [15p] a week. But, in March 1835, the new Poor Law Union system was introduced and one of their first acts was to stop the old woman's small pension leaving her to manage as best she could.

### **7. James (Jemmy) Simmonds: 1770-1838, Master Blacksmith**

James was baptised (as 'Jemmy') in Purley on 2 Dec 1770, the youngest son of Richard and Sarah. As a young man, it seems that he left Purley for a while and returned in 1805 as a married man with three sons by his wife, Sarah, née Vickers. Six more sons and three daughters, a total of thirteen children, were baptised in Purley. Unfortunately Levi, the youngest, baptised in 1824, committed a crime and was languishing in Reading Gaol in March 1851.

Between 1805 and 1837, Jemmy was listed as an inhabitant of Purley at the annual Court Leet held in the Greyhound public house in Tidmarsh and was also recorded as a 'master blacksmith'. When his sons reached the age of 12, they too were listed. Between 1813 and 1815 he was the tithingman (deputy constable) for Purley.

After he died in 1838, aged 67, his wife remarried a widower from Ropley, Hampshire.

### **8. John Simmonds: born 1817**

John was the tenth child of James and Sarah above and the only son known to have followed in his father's footsteps as a master blacksmith. He too was listed in the Court Leet (between 1839 and 1847 when the records end) and elected parish constable in place of his father from 1839 to 1847. In 1841 he married Susannah Cordery from Sherfield Green, in Purley and had three sons, the eldest of whom died aged 3. Neither of their other sons appear to have followed in their father's footsteps and, by 1855, the family had left Purley.

### **9. John Cox (1826-1903)**

John Cox, the fifth of the eleven children of William and Louisa (née Stevens) blacksmith, was born and grew up in Pangbourne where he was probably apprenticed to his father. A couple of years after John Simmonds had left Purley, he moved into the Forge with his wife, Caroline, and their two eldest children. Over the next eighteen years they had ten more children baptised in the parish church. Three daughters were married in St Michael's, Tilehurst and at least two sons moved to London where they married and had families. None of them apparently followed in their father's footsteps as a blacksmith. Local directories and other records record John living in Purley until 1904 after which, there is a single unexplained entry in a directory of a blacksmith called Thomas Kerr in Purley in 1907.

### **10. John James Kirk: c1858-1924 - the last blacksmith in Purley**

John was born about 1858 and raised in Woodcote, Oxfordshire where he may have been apprenticed as a blacksmith. After his marriage to Eliza, nine children were born in nearby South Stoke between 1881 and 1899. The family arrived in Purley in December 1904 and the five younger ones were admitted to Purley Village School, the youngest three later completed their education in Pangbourne Junior School.

Between 1915 and 1924 John appears to have gone into partnership with his sons and "John James Kirk & Sons", blacksmiths of Purley, were listed in local directories. In 1920, 1923, 1926 and 1927 the Purley Park Estate was put up for sale and the property was broken up. Among the plots listed in the auctioneer's catalogues

was a “good” blacksmith’s shop and a brick and tiled cottage at the corner of Long Lane and the Oxford Road. The cottage contained a living room, scullery and wash-house with water from a well, three bedrooms plus a large garden and was let to “J. Kirk” at 5s 6d [27p] rent a week. By 1926-27 the site, which measured about 130 feet on the Oxford Road and about 260 feet in Long Lane, was advertised as being “admirably adapted for a motor garage, petrol station and other commercial purposes”.

After John James died in May 1924 two of his sons, Horace and Alfred, were listed in 1924 and 1925-6 respectively. According to Purley’s burial register John was buried in the “centre of three graves by the wall near the tool shed”. His wife, Eliza, survived him until a foggy week in early January 1933 when she died during an “epidemic of flu in the first fortnight”. But she wasn’t buried with her husband “because bones were found when digging there”. Also buried in Purley is their eldest son, Charles, who died in 1951 in Spencers Wood aged 70 and his 61 year old wife, Ellen of Purley, who died in 1940.

The forge and cottage remained empty for some time and some of the village children would stop by on their way to and from school to drop stones in the well and listen to see how deep it was. The final nail in the coffin, so to speak, of Purley’s village blacksmiths came after over 300 years when the County Council demolished the buildings in 1936 to widen the road junction, and later put in the traffic lights. Only one known undated and blurred newspaper photograph exists and was published with the demolition report.

Meanwhile, a new era was beginning and motor cars were, from at least 1935, served by the Purley Garage, built in the Reading Road and run by Thomas A. Stephenson. By 1939, Charles Walter Edwards, was listed as the motor engineer - but that is another story...

## *Nature Notes*

*by Rita Denman*

**April 10th.** When March comes in like a lamb it goes out like a lion is an old saying that was fulfilled in the last few days of the past month. A gale force wind roared through the valley casting aside anything in its path. Many bridges in the UK were closed and

drivers of high sided vehicles warned. There is an old hawthorn tree in the meadow that had a lot of ivy growing in it and I had left the ivy to encourage bees but the tree has been struggling and I took pity on it and cut the ivy from the lower trunk leaving the tendrils to die off. The leaves had withered and the strong winds blew them all out of the tree. I will wait to see if the tree responds to the reprieve.

With the beginning of April the weather turned to mild and sunny which was what everyone had been waiting for. Sunday morning, Easter Day, dawned a soft English spring day and I went out into the meadow where many birds were singing and the ringing of church bells drifted across the river. Over night there had been a frost turning everything white but with an absolutely cloudless deep blue sky. A lone red kite had the vast expanse of sky to itself and it flew low, gliding, soaring and showing off the beautiful roundels on its wings. During the day the temperature rose to 19°. The week continued to be a tonic for all of us with warm sunny days and almost too warm nights. The frog spawn is now a seething mass of froth. There have been brimstone yellow and comma butterflies in the garden and from time to time chick feathers float on the air which is hopefully good sign of new life in the nests, and all the time the birdsong is getting stronger and the skylarks are rising.

**April 17th** Despite the uncomfortable pollution coming from a southerly direction, the weather has been summery and really too hot for the delicate primroses which have flopped in the heat. The sun rose in a huge deep orange ball and set in a similar way bringing a temperature of up to 24 ° here in the south. The valley is brimming with life .There are thousands of tadpoles squirming around the edges of the pond and pond skaters darting in every direction on the surface. Green shield bugs, cardinal beetles, St Martin's flies and greater numbers of butterflies, with orange tips added to the list.

Tuesday 14th began with a white ethereal misty valley. The bare tree branches appeared and disappeared in the mist and the unclothed branches of the lombardy poplars stood like tall grasses. Out of the mist a pair of swans flew in ghostly progress across my view and as the sun rose its rays reflected off the white blanket of mist merging earth and sky. Suddenly and within moments the sun burnt off the mist and the flat white backdrop lifted to reveal blue sky, green

barley fields with here and there wild fruit trees in blossom. Solitary bees are emerging from their ground nests, stumbling about in the grass and crawling on the brick paths until their wings are ready to fly.

**April 24th** Temperatures in some areas rose again to 24° and then dropped to 6° which made the weather feel a little on the chilly side. The warm weather brought on a burst of leaves which soon turned the valley into an artist's pallet of many shades of green. At about 9.30 on Tuesday evening there was a perfect sky for stargazers. It was particularly beautiful with a yellow crescent moon accompanied by a brilliant Venus in a velvety sky.

**May 1st** The first of May, May Day, when in days of yore young maidens went out early to bathe their faces in the dew, and Merrie England danced round the Maypole. 'Ne'er caste a clout till May be out' still causes controversy - does it mean the may flower (hawthorn) or the month of May? The weather is cold and we are still in winter garb but the sun rise can be glowing with orange light, tinting the clouds and illuminating my room. Mist rises on the river and the dawn chorus is swelling into an oratorio. The fruit trees in the meadow are full of blossom and the cowslips are spreading even further along the path and there are buttercups in the long grass. As I was working in the corner of the meadow by the farm track, Tim came along with the tractor and a load of manure (I usually meet him on his dung rounds). He said the conditions have been right for a good buttercup year. The sight of a buttercup field is something that gladdens the heart, but Tim told me that they are poisonous to cattle and the fields have to be managed to take account of this.

**May 8th** High winds and heavy rain have brought down dead tree branches and shredded young green leaves. The smooth velvet barley field has been roughed up into a choppy green sea but the garden borders are beginning to fill out and the grass is thick and lush. A white crab spider has been living in a tub of pink tulips for a couple of weeks. As the tulip fades it moves on to the next flower head. When the wind blew its home almost to pieces it clung on to the remnants until the next bud opened.

**May 15th** Weather forecasters are watching closely what they believe is a build up to an El Nino and predicting a hard winter for the UK and dire weather events around the world, promising more

information in June. In the meantime cold winds have persisted with high winds rippling across the barley field and lapping against the hedge.

**May 22nd** Tuesday of this week was a particularly blustery day with heavy grey and black cloud. There were strong winds with white rolling cloud and high above everything a deep blue sky. Wind, torrential rain, hailstones and thunder alternated with dazzling sunshine.

**May 29th** World weather continues to be dramatic with flooding, tornadoes and terrible heat around the world.

I was pleased to see a pair of goldfinches in the garden. Starlings have recently been a rarity in this part of Purley, but a small flock descended on Purley Village and for a few hours created bedlam with their squawking and squabbling and flying excitedly in all directions. They flew like bullets from tree to tree and it was difficult to imagine the same birds creating the graceful, awe inspiring murmurations.

At the end of the day I walked around the meadow as the last of the sun's rays were lying in strata cross the fields. The whole valley was bathed in golden light and the white frothy hedge parsley, ox eye daisies and may blossom were luminous against the shadow of the hedge. The short cut grass paths were smooth and dense with the well loved wild flowers of our childhood blossoming in the growing grasses on either side. All the while the birds were singing their evening song and no man made sounds intruded. It was a moment of perfection that no photograph could capture and could live only in the memory. I may never see the meadow looking more beautiful and at that moment I felt that all the hopes that Ron and I had for the piece of rough field that we purchased had been fulfilled.

**June 5th** The meadow is full of wild flowers including lovely large patches of red clover. The grasses are tall and graceful. Alfie the hedgehog who lives in Regents Park has been appealing to home owners via TV, not to enclose their gardens completely and to leave small holes in fences for hedgehogs, which are apparently the nations favourite animal, to be able to travel through the gardens in search of food and lodging.

**June 12th** Cold weather and wind has been the main feature of the week's weather. Many young rose branches have been broken and

leaves tattered. There has been little rain and it has been necessary to keep topping up the water in the tray placed in the meadow for the small mammals. I watched a magpie trying to bend over far enough to reach the water level. At last it worked out that if it walked down the emergency exit slope it would be able to drink. The hedge parsley is almost over and the spring bulb leaves are drying off but there are many roses in bloom and the heady scent from the honeysuckle is intoxicating. All we need now is some balmy weather to enjoy the out of doors.

**June 19th** There has been little rain in Purley for a few weeks and even the damp meadow is drying out. High summer and the garden is full of colour with a mixture of cultivated and basically wild flowers but all blend into a super border. Bees are buzzing everywhere. I watched Betty, one of my cats, doing a sort of gymnastic carpet exercise across the garden, leaping into the air, rolling on the ground and darting from side to side and then I heard the unmistakable whirring and buzzing of a stag beetle which fortunately she did not catch. I was pleased to see that they are still in the area. I leave odd bits of wood lying around for them.

**June 26th** I spent mid summer's day working in the garden and 'standing and staring' from time to time. The weather was warm and sunny but not too hot. In the evening I listened to a complete performance of a Classic fm broadcast of Mendelssohn's 'A Mid Summer Night's Dream' which just matched the mood.... and so to sleep, perchance to dream? No to get up at intervals through the night to see if the northern lights were visible. at 3.15 am it was like day and the northern sky was very bright with red tints. The wooded hills were black against the sky and the pine trees along the summit of the hill made a jagged edge on the skyline. There was a mist on the river and the cattle at Home Farm were lowing. The first blackbird began his song at 3.45 am and this was gradually taken up by all the blackbirds in the neighbourhood.

**July 3rd** The week's weather in the UK was impressive. The Jet Stream dipped way down south to Spain and scooped up the hot weather and brought it north. In Purley it was exhausting, Wednesday bringing the highest temperature recorded in July, reaching 37° at Heathrow. The garden had a few days of glory before the heat arrived to scorch the flowers and fade the delicate pink of the

peonies. On the plus side the barley is ripening and once again turning the fields to gold. In the meadow there are numbers of marble white butterflies and there have been noticeably more Burnett moths. There was a good bowlful of cherries ripening in the meadow only to be taken by the birds - Oh well! live and let live.

**July 11th** There was little time to acclimatise to the sudden heat wave and some were not sorry when the temperatures fell. The sun disappeared to be replaced by cloud and a muggy atmosphere. It was exhausting work keeping the garden and pots watered.

**July 17th** When the rain came it was more monsoon like and now the wind is very lively. In the south we have the best of things, more sun and less storm and wind. The main disappointment is that the garden is going over so quickly. Sir David Attenborough who is President of Butterfly Conservation is urging gardeners to do more butterfly friendly planting as our butterflies are becoming endangered. There have been marbled whites, meadow browns and holly blues in the garden.

**July 24th** Tim began the barley harvest early in the week and by Wednesday the grain had all been gathered although dark clouds were beginning to roll over and it looked like rain. However it held off and the straw was all baled and collected before the heavy rain began. I have spent a lot of time in the garden and meadow this week. A red kite chick called almost continuously from one of the nearby ash trees, the parent bird flying off over the newly cut fields swooping and hovering returning to answer the chick every so often. During the sunny periods Skylarks were singing from their lofty environs and many butterflies danced over the meadow.

**July 31st** Driving rain and wind battered the gardens and it was unusually cold for the time of year. The geese sensing the approach of autumn have been very noisy. Butterflies make the most of brief sunny periods and dragonflies are beginning to emerge from the pond. Tonight there will be a 'blue moon'.

*Rita Denman.*