

THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL



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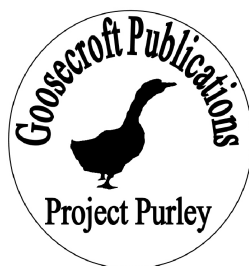
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Chairman's New Year Message

Happy New Year and welcome to your special 100th edition of the Journal! 2015 seems to have whizzed past at speed but looking back through our programme of activity I am reminded of the variety of talks we have enjoyed and of the energy and passion for their subjects of many of our speakers. Well over seventy people attended Tim Metcalfe's talk on farming in Purley making it officially our best attended talk to date although as our membership numbers continue to increase (now over hundred) I suspect we may set another record over the coming twelve months. We have also enjoyed visits to Portsmouth and Sutton Courtenay, the latter despite the incessant rain, our annual barbecue, a relaxed Christmas Party and three visits by the Rain or Shine Theatre Company. Many thanks to everyone who has helped bring these about.

Thank you also to everyone who has contributed to the Journal during 2015. There has been some particularly stimulating debate about the Purley Park 'tunnel' and considerable input into this centenary issue. All of this adds to our knowledge of Purley and contributes to our ever-growing archive. Ann Betts and I have now recommenced our attempts to research and preserve the history of the River Estate. There are still many people that we would really like to talk to, and if you're aware of anyone who lived on the Estate in the 1950s-1970s please do let us know.

During 2015 we have seen the passing of the very lovely Kath Devine, and the relocation to Shropshire of Jean Debney, one of our founding members. Both are much missed. Finally my thanks go to all of the committee who work so hard to make our meetings and activities enjoyable and to promote and preserve Purley's history.

Catherine Sampson

Project Purley 1982-2016

by John Chapman

Well we haven't been going for 100 years, however our Newsletter and Journal has now reached its 100th edition and we are marking it with a special edition looking back over the last 30 years or so.

First; a bit about Local History before Project Purley. The Victorian antiquarians began the serious work after pioneers such as Ashmole and Lyssons had travelled around the country recording what they could of local history. Much of the antiquarians' work was published as articles in the Berkshire Archaeological Journal and occasionally in local newspapers. The Victoria County Histories brought much of this together but tended to focus on major estates and families. Interest waned in the early 20th century but then the Women's Institute got into the act in 1939 and published books of tales from Berkshire Villages. Seven editions were published, the latest being in 1996.

In Purley Joan Wilcox published a few items in the Parish Magazine which she edited and then the church youth group known as Pathfinders began to do more serious research but they didn't last long. When the Silver Jubilee occurred in 1977 the Parish Council organised an exhibition at the Memorial Hall and invited residents to loan photographs and other material.



One of Project Purley's earliest endeavours was to re-enact the 1786 Court Baron for Purley Magna

It was an impressive exhibition but no-one bothered to record what was on display or where it came from.

By the early 1980s three groups were forming - a natural history group, a family history group who were intent of transcribing parish registers and an archaeology group who were digging in the churchyard on the site of the new hall. It was Jean Debney, leader of the family history group who pointed out that many people were members of two or three groups and wouldn't it be better if we all combined. Thus was born Project Purley - we held the inaugural meeting in the old pavilion on 4th May 1982 and 35 members signed up. The objective was agreed 'To study and document the history of Purley'. We deliberately rejected the title 'Purley Local History Society' as we wanted to focus upon the present and future as well as the past. Our members



One of Project Purley's walks to Hardwick - Purley is spread out behind the group

have campaigned for improved village amenities, were instrumental in getting the Barn provided as a community centre and meeting place. We have kept abreast of developments, photographing and recording changes and capturing the bits and pieces of fliers, programmes and the like which are all too easily lost but which add to the historical record. We have had a policy that if anything unique comes along we deposit it in the Berkshire Record Office and just keep a copy.

Jean Debney stimulated a great deal of interest in the village by a long series of articles in the Parish Magazine under the title 'From My History Notebook'. Other members have contributed articles to the Parish Magazine



Rick Jones reveals the answers and the winner's name for our Christmas quiz

and the Berkshire Local History Association's Newsletters and Journals. We began including short articles in our Newsletter and over the years there have been many notable contributions.

The first Newsletter was published in July 1982 under the editorship of John Titterton and consisted of three cyclostyled A4 pages. These continued until September 1985 with just small news items and short reports of meetings. The January 1986 (issue 12) edition was word processed and adopted an A5 booklet format. We saw the start of short articles with one on Warren Hastings. In September 1987 it was announced that John had had to give up the editorship and Society Secretary Jan Jones took over temporarily to be replaced by Pat Deane. Millie Bordiss became editor in October 1993 to be replaced by Ann Betts, our current editor, in May 2002. The May 1998 edition saw a move from Word Processing to Desk Top Publishing with Ron Denman wielding the computer keys. He retired and was replaced by Ben Viljoen in January 2006. In May the title was changed to The Project Purley Journal reflecting the quality of articles now being published. John Chapman took over as designer in January 2011. Initially the Newsletter was printed by Pat Deane at home but this got to be very tedious as pages had to be pasted together in the correct sequence so that the final A5 booklet was all in the right order. One of our members Edna Bint, was part owner of the Print Room on Portman Road and offered to get it printed professionally and they have continued as our printers despite two changes of ownership and name.

The pattern of meetings has continued since the inauguration. We have a talk on the third Friday between September and April with a Christmas social

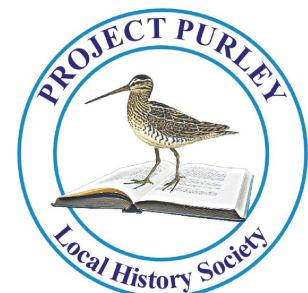
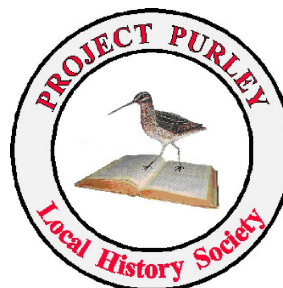
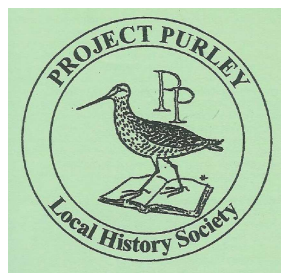
in December. We started off with meetings in members' houses and then switched to the Parish Office; but as numbers swelled, we had to move to the Barn. We now have over 100 members and meetings rarely have less than 50 attendees, usually a lot more. The summer months are usually filled with outings which have become more and more adventurous with trips to London, Salisbury and Portsmouth and walkabouts in local historic towns and villages. Each June or July we have a barbecue which seems to have attracted the rain gods although we have had a few with glorious weather. Initially the barbecues were at Pat Deane's, then moved to Rita Denman's and latterly have been at Ben & Dorothy Viljoen's.

As well as the newsletter we published a series of small A5 booklets to document the results of research but in 2009 we embarked on a much more adventurous project to produce a photographic record of the parish. Catherine Sampson was appointed editor and she managed to assemble a remarkable collection of photographs into 'Purley in Old Images' This was launched by the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire on September 17th 2010 and has been hugely successful, selling over 500 copies.

Our most notable achievements have been our exhibitions. Perhaps the highlights have been the one in October 1983 to launch the extension to the church. Then the 'Wilder 500' celebrations in Sulham and latterly the Diamond Jubilee celebrations at the Barn. The great thing about the exhibitions was the way lots of our members joined in to help and to make real contributions.

As well as the three founding groups, others have been formed. We had the Maps Group, the Heraldry Group and the Oral History Group. We have many recordings of Purley people now long gone, but regrettably they are all on audio-tape and few have retained the equipment to play them. This is a common theme for Project Purley - technology moves on so fast these days that it is difficult to keep up. When we started we were offered the use of a computer on Richfield Avenue and were given a floppy disc to store our work. Now pretty well all our members have access to a computer, we use them to communicate, make presentations and produce publications.

Over the years we have collected an enormous number of photographs and documents of all sorts ranging from copies of mediaeval charters to fliers for local events. We have been struggling to bring some order into our archive



The evolution of the Project Purley logo

which is split between a physical archive of documents, display panels, magazines, tape recordings and books, with an electronic archive of photographs, images, press cuttings, articles and much more. As each former member hands over material that they have collected, when they leave, and present members donate material, the archive has swollen so that the majority are awaiting cataloguing and overflowing the space in our cupboard at the Barn.

Another enterprise has been to sponsor visits by the Rain or Shine Theatre Company. David Downs has been the prime motivator. Initially we were entertained to 'modernised' versions of Shakespeare's plays in June but latterly they have put on a midwinter performance as well with some notable feats of acting and staging. The profits from these events have mainly gone to local charities totalling well over £10000.

Finally we need to mention the Committee who organise meetings and visits, produce the four-monthly Journal, keep us in touch with other organisations and encourage members to do research. Our members are always helpful in serving the tea and coffee at meetings and all the little jobs which need to be done in order for things to run smoothly, like putting out and collecting chairs. All in all I think we can say that Project Purley is a model local history society which has achieved a great deal over its many years.

Our 100th Edition

In this special edition of our Journal we have commissioned articles on some of the changes that have taken place in Purley since Project Purley was founded. It is now a very different place and our members have both participated in making many of the changes as well as photographing them as they occurred and not forgetting what things looked like before they disappeared. We are very grateful to all those members and friends who have put pen to paper to record their memories. There are so many other aspects we could have covered but space and time did not allow. However we hope this Journal will remind our older members of what we have done and let our newer members know what we can do in the future.

From our first Editor

We received the following from John Titterton who started the Newsletters many years ago and who now has moved away from the area:

Congratulations to Project Purley on the 100th edition of its Newsletter. Well done. It is the result of the work of many people over the years. When I edited the first few editions, I was thinking of the present and getting information, both about the Society and Purley to the members. I had not considered that we were creating what would become part of the history of the Society. Here's to the next 100!

Purley Church of England School

by Rita Denman

By 1982 little had changed at the school since the kitchen and toilet block had been added to the main building in 1959. The Terrapin which was installed soon after was still in use but long after its anticipated life. Following the collapse of the roof of a terrapin of similar age and used as a class room elsewhere, emergency strengthening was put in place.

Due to health reasons Head Teacher Mrs D Holder resigned in 1989. The following year was covered by Acting Heads until Mrs J Goddard was appointed in 1991.

The entrance between the old school building and the added kitchen block had always been a ramshackle affair of corrugated opaque polythene panels. It was a great improvement when in 1993 this was replaced by a new brick and timber porch entrance matching the existing one. This was also to be used as a library.

In 1993 a new modular class room replaced the terrapin which was demolished. It was a very exciting day when the class room was delivered in two pre-fabricated parts. A large crane lifted them over the telephone wires and positioned them on the the hill in line with the Victorian building. The



The old toilet block - long boarded up

playgrounds were also refurbished.

In 2006 a separate assembly hall was built behind the modular classroom. The opening was attended by The Bishop of Reading The Rt Revd Stephen Cottrell who blessed the building, its use and the children who would benefit from it. Connecting corridors were added and the Victorian building was modified to provide staff and office space. Until that time the school secretary's office had been in the porch of the old 'boys' entrance.

Mrs J Goddard retired in 2007 and Mrs C Nesbit was appointed.

The recent changes were the subject of much discussion. Proposals were to build a further extension at the back of the site and increase the age range to 11 years, doubling the intake numbers and making the school a full Primary. A change of such proportions on a very small site with neighbours at close quarters inevitably caused many objections. Despite all the obvious problems the work went ahead and the extension was opened at the beginning of the 2015 autumn term.

Mrs Nesbit resigned circa 2013 and Mrs K Fakes appointed 2014

An echo from the past occurred during the time of preparing this item when thanks to the Rawlins family, long time residents of the old village, the school bell was returned to Purley.



The old school bell

Purley Bus Services

by John Chapman

When Project Purley started in 1982 most of the bus services had been nationalised and were part of the National Bus Company. The subsidiary that operated our bus services was Alder Valley and our main service was the no 5 which ran hourly between Reading and Oxford with alternate services run by Oxford-South Midland. We also had the 130 Reading to Newbury and 133 Reading to Compton. Most of these services ran down New Hill, through the Village and back to the main Road by Purley Lane. There was also the no 19 which ran via Overdown to Highfield Road operated by Reading Corporation.

In 1983 the 119 began operation. It came from Reading along the Oxford Road via Purley Village and Long Lane to the Savacentre but it didn't last long and was replaced by the 38/39 which extended to Chestnut Grove from 14th March 1983 with an hourly service. Some of these buses went via Knowsley Road and some along the Oxford Road. At the same time the 100 Newbury to Reading Service was diverted from the Village to run up Long Lane and down Knowsley Road which meant you could catch buses to Reading from both sides of Knowsley Road.

The 1985 Transport Act abolished the National Bus Company and each route had to be declared 'commercial' or 'contract' the latter being subsidised by the County Council. The 100 service was put out to tender and was won by White's Coaches who operated it between Pangbourne and Reading as the 505. Alder Valley eventually became rebranded as Bee Line and sold in 1987 to Len Wright. In April 1988 the Bee Line garage in Newbury was burned down and for a while we had services through Purley run by loan buses from all over the country.

Pangbourne Coaches went out of business in 1985 and their school services were replaced by Reading Corporation's 89 to Little Heath, 88a to Theale Green via Pangbourne and 88c via Tilehurst. They have since been taken over by the Big Green Buses although manned by Reading Buses.

May 1994 saw the Ridgeway Explorer launched. This offered 4 buses each way between Reading and Swindon on Sunday afternoons stopping off at junctions with the Ridgeway for walkers.



Two ex London Routemasters at Purley Post Office stop on service D

Readibus extended its services to Purley in 1985 offering door to door services and regular shopping trips to the disabled.

Reading Buses had been formed in October 1986 as a commercial company, but still owned by Reading Council. It bought out the Bee Line services in our area, running them as Newbury Buses. The no 5 service was renumbered 105 and ran only as far as Wallingford where the Oxford buses terminated so you had to change buses for Oxford.



No longer do we have buses direct to Oxford

In 1994 Reading Buses faced a new competitor, Reading Mainline which used old Routemaster buses. The D Service ran from Purley Post Office via Tilehurst Triangle and was very popular with Purley people. They were bought out by Reading Buses in 1999 and D became 31. Later the Purley Post office stop was abandoned and the 38 eventually became a quarter hour service between the River Estate and Reading and became the no 16.

Services to Pangbourne have almost ceased. We now have just the 143 running from Reading to Whitchurch and Basildon after the 142 to Woodcote and the 132 to Goring were abandoned after subsidy cuts. We still have the rather erratic 28 service which follows a tortuous route via Tilehurst Triangle and the Bath Road to Reading and Caversham and the football buses to Madjeski Stadium on match days.

The Church

by Andrew Mackie

When Project Purley started, David Evans was well established as Rector of St. Mary's and the extension to the church building was nearing completion. Since then much has happened.

It was a surprise to many of us when David Evans decided to move on to a church in London. Faced with his decision, the church leadership team decided that what we needed was someone who would show us more of the Holy Spirit at work, and Roger Howell proved to be the man for the job.

Roger stayed at Purley until he retired from stipendiary ministry. David Archer has replaced Roger as Rector, and given us a much clearer sense of purpose as a church.

There have been a number of other leaders in the church. David Evans encouraged Wally Watkivs and Jean Rothery to become Readers. While Roger was Rector, first Jean and then Andrew Mackie, Sally Robertson and Jean's daughter, Trudie, all trained as ordained ministers. Brendan Bailey came as Curate, and moved on in due course to Nettlebed. Wally has since moved to Bristol, Sally and Trudie to Swindon, and Jean's ministry is now based at the neighbouring parish of Pangbourne with Tidmarsh and Sulham. In addition, too many lay people to list here have taken significant leadership responsibility with the encouragement of all our Rectors.

The move from the extension being solely for the church to it being a resource for the community started in David Evans' time. PurleyTots was probably the first regular user of the extension, and has since been joined by a wide variety of activities from weighing babies and coffees for their mums to various ways for people of all ages to keep or get fit to singing activities for the elderly.

In the last few years of David Evans' time at Purley, once a month he replaced the traditional morning service with a family service. This proved so



The new vestry and hall from a nearly full graveyard

popular that it moved to being an additional service held every week. This service has gone from strength to strength, so that at times in recent years it was difficult to find a seat. In contrast, the number attending the evening service gradually declined, leading eventually to the decision that it should close. This has enabled a new all-age service to be established on a Sunday afternoon.

St. Mary's is in good health. It is one of the few churches in the area which is growing in numbers. All the advice we are getting is that one of the major barriers to the further growth of the church congregation is the size of the building. It is time to start exploring the possibility of a further extension to the church.

The Parish

by Bill Ayling

In July 1982 we left a clement and cool Scotland, where we had lived looking over the Firth of Forth for the past ten years, and moved our home to a hot and humid Purley. At that time it was not Purley on Thames, just plain Purley. The "on Thames" came a few months later. We had a three bedroomed detached house in Scotland which we sold for £21,000. We moved to our current three bedroomed detached house in Purley which cost us £47,750. Goodness knows how much it is worth now! We have a large garden and like the house in Scotland it has an attached garage. The garden and the house seemed like a paradise. The large garden which I welcomed with open arms thirty years ago, seems to have outgrown me. I suppose it's because I'm thirty years older, it does get to be a problem at times.

At the rear of the house in Scotland there was a pine forest. At the back of our new house was a rough, unmade road and two semidetached houses and one detached bungalow. All the other buildings were small wooden "shacks". The rough, unmade road is still there, but the shacks have all been replaced by detached houses. The inhabitants of the shacks kept them in excellent condition. They did, with justification, take exception to the term "shanty town"



Bucknell's Meadow - Purley's latest recreation area

when strangers referred to the village of Purley. It was, and still is, a very nice place to live. Now you'd have to search quite hard to find one of the old wooden buildings which were in such profusion when we moved in thirty years ago. Nearly all the wooden edifices have been removed, and in their place are brick built, detached and semi-detached houses.

We were told that shortly before we moved in to Purley gas mains were fitted to the houses, but the inhabitants had to pay for the installation. I'm not sure if this is a fact, but we did hear this from several residents.

Mapledurham Drive was just a very rough, pot-holed, stony lane. Some of the pot-holes were 18 inches deep and stretched from side to side of the lane. I remember that Peter Mason, at that time, Chairman of the Highways and Footpaths on the Parish Council, visited each house in Mapledurham Drive and persuaded the resident to contribute £200 each towards the cost of putting down a new tarmac surface. There was only one family who refused to pay this sum, but the council went ahead and laid down the existing roadway.

There was only one supermarket in the area and that was Asda, but a bus used to go from Purley to Calcot to the combined BHS and Sainsbury's store which is still referred to as Sava Centre. The village store in Colyton Way was run by Les and Pearl, with assistance from Sue. You could buy most things there, except alcohol. The nearest pub was the Roebuck where the Roebuck Hotel is now situated.

If you wanted a drink there was always the Purley Social Club at the end of Wintringham Way. I was Secretary there for a short, very short, time. I didn't believe rumours that it was a "rough House" until one member threatened to punch me from one side of the barroom to the other. That made me realise that there could have been some truth in the rumours. I decided that I was better off as a undamaged ex-secretary. Now the Social Club members are much better behaved and alcohol can be purchased in the Village Shop.

The church under the supervision of a wonderful rector, named Roger Howell, had a well maintained churchyard in which local people were buried. Unfortunately it became too full. The graveyard now is in the Upper Goosecroft and is under the excellent care of the Parish Council. Also in the Goosecroft is The Barn which at that time was at Percy Trentham's grounds. Thanks to a generous gesture from the builders who erected the estate, it was re-positioned in its current location, where it forms a home for many local societies.

Bucknell's Meadow was scarcely more than a football field with a few children's play things, such as a few swings, a see-saw and a "horse" on which you sat and got joggled alarmingly to and fro - often with some trepidation.

Mapledurham Lock was a wonderful place to visit, it still is, but then there was no such thing as a cafe where you could buy refreshments. It was

manned for many years, by an energetic lock-keeper named George Fielder, whose name in letters of gold now leads all the rest on the "Villager of the Year" notice board in The Barn.

Has Purley changed very much in the past thirty years? Yes, of course it has. One thing though has not changed and that is the wonderful, friendly and happy villagers, who have made Purley on Thames such a delightful place to live.

Purley Players

by Jean Chudleigh

Purley Players performed its very first production on 16 October 1993. Initially the shows consisted of Music Hall but within a very short time moved on to become a full blown drama group. The Group puts on three shows a year, a pantomime in January, a comedy/farce in the spring and a murder mystery/dining evening in the autumn.

The group started in the church hall but moved on to make its headquarters in The Barn in 2004 where it remains to this day.

I think it is true to say that it is very much an integral part of village life and has a very loyal following.

Moving the Barn

by John Chapman

Our Barn dates back to around 1740 when it was built as the manorial barn for Purley Magna and located next to the church. Around 1800 it was moved to the site now occupied by Bryant's Close and used variously as a farm barn, stables for the South Berks Hunt and a tractor and storage shed for Trentham's. When Trentham's closed in 1988 the developer Deneshurst Homes put in a planning application to convert the barn into four, reduced to three dwellings. This was approved in May 1989. Then Deneshurst Homes got into financial problems and sold out to Egerton Homes who suggested that it might be best to move it to another site in the Parish - Numerous sites were investigated but eventually it was agreed that one adjacent to the Recreation Ground was most suitable. The land was purchased for £12,500 and then Egertons went into Receivership.

The development was then taken over by Bryant Homes. Their first proposal was to turn it into three large houses with the south wall replaced by glass. To say the least the prospect was ghastly. Then Bryants got a new Managing Director who took a look at the site and declared it must go, as Bryants were in the business of building new homes, not renovating listed buildings.



Dr Robert Howard from Nottingham University takes a core sample

So after a bit of negotiation they agreed to hand it over to the Parish Council who would rent three bays to the Scouts who had been looking for a home and to leave the remaining five bays for some future use. Bryants agreed to pay the costs of moving it and Ovary Construction was given the contract. Initially it was planned to face north as it had in its previous locations; but eventually it was decided to turn it through 180° and put the car park on the south side.

Once Planning Permission was finally acquired on 5th January 1995 work could start. First the Barn had to be disassembled with all the parts carefully marked. The first task was to remove all the roof tiles and store them in a secure container on the new site. Needless to say, many were already broken and many more got broken in the process. This meant scouring the country for replacement tiles. Also over the years Trentham's had replaced decaying timbers with softwood so replacements had to be made from Suffolk Oak.

Nottingham University were contacted to do a tree ring survey and Bob Howard took samples and found two groups of timbers, one from 1509-12 (presumed to be from the Tudor Manor House) and the other from 1725-31. They were even able to pinpoint where the latter group had come from - a woodland near Gatehampton about six miles upstream of Purley.



Reg Marshall, Chairman of the Parish Council contemplates the Barn as it was at Trenthams

Construction of the base for the new barn started almost immediately with trenches dug to accommodate water, sewage and electricity pipes. Then the foundations were built and a concrete floor laid. It was decided to raise the height about three feet so a supporting wall and bases for the interior pillars were built. We were ready for the main job.

Ancient barns were built to a fairly simple system. You first erected frames with upright pillars a cross member and roof supports. All nine of these were built to a standard pattern and put in place. Then the cross members and sills to support the walls and roof were put in place and so there was the basic shape. The exterior walls were filled in with timbers and insulation, plaster board on the inside and elm cladding on the outside. Three small toilets and a kitchen were provided with emergency exits to east, west and north and two doors to the south, one for the small barn and one for the large one. The Building Inspectors however insisted that all the ancient joints had to be re-inforced with iron bars.

The opening took place on 24th June 1995 and the Scouts took over the small barn with three small storage areas in the arcade to the north. Gradually facilities have been improved with a second small kitchen, more toilets, heating and improved lighting. Several internal cupboards have been built, one of which houses Project Purley's archives and recently we had to re-clad the exterior walls, add an audio system and wi-fi, replace the floor and improve the drainage in the car park. The Scouts have built a storage hut behind and the area behind the Barn made secure. But now we have a marvellous community resource which is becoming very well used by all sorts of groups as well as actually making a small profit last year.

Rebuilding the Railway Bridges

by John Chapman

Purley has four bridges over the railway:- at New Hill, Purley Lane, Winston Way and Westbury Lane. They have been in place since 1840 and have had a good clearance gauge for the traffic. In GWR days they had to relay the track every few years and when they did so they always excavated the gravel completely and so kept the same vertical clearance. In order to save money however in recent years they have simply raised the level by re-bedding the rails on top of the old gravel. The result has been that overhead clearance has become insufficient.



New Hill bridge being demolished

When large continental sized containers were introduced on the Southampton to Birmingham route some of them began to catch on the sides of the arches of two of the bridges, New Hill and Westbury Lane, so a speed restriction had to be applied. When the proposal was made to electrify the main line the problems became critical as even more space was needed for the wires. The other two bridges had plenty of clearance so were not a problem.

Network Rail came up with the proposal to demolish the two critical bridges but locals got the Westbury Lane Bridge listed which made Network Rail think again. In the end they got the listing withdrawn and proposed two new bridges built on the foundations of the old ones which meant we would not get two lanes for New Hill traffic.

This was agreed and work started December 2011. The two bridges were treated very differently as it was possible to get a very large crane to Westbury Lane but not to New Hill. For Westbury Lane they built a temporary road across the field to Fiddlers underbridge which gave access to Springs Farm and then built the new bridge in the field to the north of the railway in sections. Once they demolished the old bridge it took a matter of days to lift the parts of the new bridge into place and it was open again for traffic by early January.

The New Hill Bridge was quite a different matter. It was on a bus route so a shuttle service between Chestnut Grove and Knowsley Road was set up and proved very popular. Then the old bridge was demolished and a temporary footbridge erected together with new footways leading to Westridge Avenue and Lister Close. The beams across the two gaps were installed and a road bed laid. This was higher than the old road bed so caused some extra visibility problems for road users. Then the side walls had to be built to a sufficient height that people could not see over or touch the new wires. Eventually it was all done and children from Purley C of E School came along to cut the ribbon for a grand opening on 4th May 2012.

Purley Magna - A Regeneration

by Tony Trendle

The 200 year history of Purley Magna is well documented and the property remained in the hands of the Storer family until 1920 when it was sold to the Farmiloes. In the second world war it became the home of a pharmaceutical company and, in 1948, the house and its 120 acres was acquired by Colonel Hugh Duncan to be converted into a school and home "for young gentlemen with mental deficiency". By 1951 the house had acquired Grade II listing and in 1968 the Purley Park Trust was formed, placing the property on a more professional footing. The Charity faced ever increasing maintenance costs, forcing it to sell off swathes of land, initially to Westbuild Homes and later to T.A.Fisher, under pressure from Berkshire Social Services who wished to change its philosophy and practice.

Thus a large part of the original estate became a private housing estate; only the house and its surrounding 10 acres remained, and with the approval of West Berkshire District Council, this was finally offered for sale to T.A.Fisher, on the proviso that the remaining residents of the house could be reaccommodated in a western extremity of the grounds.

T.A.Fisher's initial proposal originally included the construction of up to five homes facing Hazel Road, but after arousing a welter of objection from the residents of Purley Beeches, the Council finally rejected the proposal. Thus

the proposal in 1999 was restricted to a conversion of the mansion into 8 apartments plus 12 cottages but subsequent planning approvals reduced the number to 5 and finally to 3 apartments in the main house, and 2 apartments in the adjoining wing which once formed the servants' quarters.

Having now purchased the house, with its surrounding and remaining ten acres of land, the builders set to work on repairing and reconstruction in a 22 month plan involving 18 different firms of specialist subcontractors, and a budget of £2.5 million pounds. The extensive work on the house of 11,000 square feet commenced on the complex roof which included a centrepiece glass atrium, and 525 square metres of replacement slate was needed, new lead box gutters and flashing, and new cast iron water hoppers and downpipes, and finally no less than 5700 metres of timber battens. Already the roofing demands pointed to a heavy overspend on budget.

The walls of the house were in grave disrepair, and over 200 pieces of stone were inserted into the stone facades, the finest Nardesina stone from Italy. Inside the house itself the total ground floor was ripped up and 300 square metres of new oak floorboard were laid, followed by the relaying of 400 square metres of pitch pine flooring to the 1st and 2nd floor. The old and tired window shutters were ripped out, stripped of paint and refinished with sealers and rehung. Doors also were stripped and repaired, and original timber fire surrounds restored to rest on new and existing hearths in slate or marble. Specialists were engaged to repair the double hung sash windows



The mansion , servants' quarters and outhouses as they were in 1984

fitted with new sash pulleys, and the requisite ironmongery to complete the work. Finally in the old house, an attempt was made to repair the existing lime plaster ceilings.

Adding to both the frustration and cost, severe dry rot was found in the portico, requiring a complete overhaul and reconstruction. Alongside the work in the Mansion House, the past Servants' Quarters were designed to contain two apartments, one, a duplex, of 2339 square feet, and a second of 1203 square feet. Again, the walls of this building adjoining the main house, were in poor condition and required 840 spalled bricks, whilst the roof needed repairs to 520 square metres.

The 12 cottages, a complete new build to be renamed The Courtyard, were reduced through planning consent to 9 dwellings and a total of 18 garages to answer the needs of the 14 residences. Over this period of time, a total of 3652 photographs were taken averaging 175 each month.

All the work of reconstruction and repair, took place of course, after the closure of the house, and the removal of the 40 or so residents. Of the land area of 10 acres, 3 acres were allocated for their new homes, and T.A.Fisher built 5 new family units to add to the three smaller bungalows built some 15 years previously. This layout met the requirement of Social Services whose philoso-



The result - flats and a courtyard

phy is to accommodate the caring of people with disability into smaller family units. These neighbours live in complete harmony with the rest of the neighbourhood.

As completion of the development neared, the homes were placed with two agents in 1995, Knight Frank and Haslams, to assess the respective values, and to advertise, and the first lessees (my wife and I), moved into 15 The Courtyard (no Number 13 of course) in February 1996. The prices ranged from £1.5M down to about £400,000, and most were sold in the first half of 1996.

Ten years later, Purley Magna looks in superb condition. The house is immaculate, both inside and out and the adjoining tennis court is well maintained. Managing agents were appointed and remain unchanged to this day. The cost to the residents of running the Purley Magna Estate runs at £42,000 per annum with the gardening and maintenance of the extensive lawns being the largest item at about £17,000, but the appointed Directors maintain a current reserve to keep the account out of debt.

The PPT residents appear to be well contented and harmonise well, although a hospitalisation required a helicopter to alight on the lawns to collect a next door neighbour needing medical attention. We have other visitors too, including fox, deer and badger. On our arrival, we received a regular evening visit from a family of lynx, who sojourned under the large cedar tree but, sadly, quickly disappeared back onto the railway bank when new residents arrived with their dogs.

Buildings such as the mansion house are inordinately difficult to maintain these days but thankfully, we found in T.A.Fisher, a developer of the highest repute and capability willing to accept the high risk, challenge and subsequently at great time and cost to repair the ravages of time. In the end a magnificent edifice was regenerated, providing a home to residents prepared to maintain and retain its beauty and prestige into the future.

Trenthams

by Rita Denman

In 1982 Trenthams was a thriving Civil Engineering firm. The Headquarters had been in Purley since 1951. The old Belleisle Farm house had been extended and was in use as offices together with a newer block to the east and several smaller buildings serving as laboratories. In the grounds were Kennel Cottages originally built for workers of the South Berks Hunt and a prefabricated building built by Trenthams and called Belleisle. In the north east part of the site was the bowling green which often served as the venue for County



Trentham's 'Belleisle' - four pre-fabricated flats

matches. On Long Lane there were three more cottages built for employees, one of which was occupied by Fred Saunders who was later awarded the BEM for his work with the Red Cross. When he died his widow planted an oak tree on the verge in Long Lane in his memory.



The canteen block - one of the original barns from Purley Magna

The Chairman of the Company, Mr Donald Trentham died of a heart attack in 1983. At that time the market was relatively difficult for smaller concerns such as Trenthams and within a few years the company moved to other premises and the Purley site was sold for housing development.

The Egerton Company began the development which was to be named Crown Green. Part of their agreement for Planning Permission involved dedicating the site of the bowling green to the Parish Council to satisfy the 'open space' requirement. The Parish Council promptly leased back the site to the Bowls Club on a long lease and a valuable parish amenity was saved. Egertons built a few houses along Bowling Green Lane and then went into administration.

A new roundabout was built on the main road and this involved moving our ancient milestone about 40 yards to the east. The Barn is now a valuable asset to Purley and the estate has settled into an attractive area but locally it is still known affectionately as 'Trenthams'.

The Wimpey Estate

by John Chapman

The Wimpey Estate is by far the largest development seen in Purley and was effective in joining Purley firmly to the urban conurbation of Reading. Wimpey's acquired three adjoining parcels of land: The grounds of the Menpes Fruit Farm (to the east of Long Lane), the Anglo-American Estate (where Goodliffe Gardens now stands) and a collection of meadows and woodland to the east of Orchard Close. These lands were crossed by the protected line for the Purley bypass. The first houses they built were on Apple Close which was laid out to back onto the proposed bypass and first occupied in 1978.

The bypass was intended to run from a roundabout on the A329 to the east of Purley to one just to the east of Purley Hall, crossing Long Lane at the Parish boundary (where Carew Close is now) A deep cutting was planned with Long Lane being cut off although some thought had been given to a bridge. There was to be a junction with a road leading to Hazel Road about half way between the roundabout and New Hill. Around this time the Bradley's had been contemplating selling Purley Hall and believed the plans for the bypass seriously jeopardised their sale. They lobbied hard with our County Councillor, Frank Lewis, and eventually both the Purley and Pangbourne bypasses were dropped.

By the time this happened Wimpeys had built Devonshire Gardens and Warley Rise, the eastern roundabout and Knowsley Road. They had also come to an agreement with Newbury District Council on public open space. Pike



The entrance to Simon's Close. You can see how the road takes almost a right hand turn away from the line of the intended by-pass. The preserved tree has now gone to be replaced by a younger version

Shaw was to be given to Purley Parish Council and the recreation lands around the Cotswold Centre to Tilehurst Parish Council. They were pressing ahead with building south of Knowsley Road off Warbreck Drive.

With the bypass out of the way Wimpey's were free to build on the protected line. The entrance to Simons Close had been part of the roundabout with two lanes running either side of a protected oak tree. Wimpeys used the entrance and squeezed houses either side as far as Pike Shaw on a somewhat different line to the proposed bypass. Later they built the small estate to the south of Pike Shaw which became Kernham Drive and the roads leading off.

Devonshire Gardens was extended northwards and Cornwall Close constructed on the west end of the line. Instead of extending Warley Rise they built a new development, Brierley Close. All this involved diverting footpaths, mostly by closure orders but several bits were forgotten about and the closures only happened in 2015. Our 'white-witch' Joan Abery however insisted that the footpaths were still open and used to follow the lines through people's gardens and stare at the occupants through their windows. For those who do not remember Joan she used to paint her face white and had a very fierce glare which easily frightened many people; although to those who knew her she was really a very caring and gentle soul (but that's another story).

The Anglo-American Estate was a light industrial estate with its entrance

through what had been the gatehouses of Purley Park (you can still see the traces of one of the flanking walls to the east of Goodliffe Gardens, by the bus stop.) It accommodated the Greyhound kennels, a trout farm, a dairy and several other small enterprises. It was all cleared and Goodliffe Gardens built. There was enormous controversy over the siting of the last house which intruded onto the Oxford Road, being described by the Head of Planning at Newbury as a 'visual stop' whereas most Purley residents regarded it as an eyesore. However we have become used to it now.

The final phase of the development was behind the small shopping area when a deal was struck with Reading Borough Council to provide flats and bungalows for their housing tenants. By around 1984 it was all finished.

The New Cemetery

by John Chapman

When civil parish councils were introduced in 1892 separating the parochial functions between those concerning the church and those of the parish as a whole, burials were included in the latter category. However before a cemetery could be transferred from the jurisdiction of the church to the civil parish it had to be formally closed when it was full.

When Project Purley was formed, we had an extension to the old churchyard to the north which was about half full but the rise in population meant that by the mid 1990s it was getting close to being full. There was a great debate as to whether or not to simply let it fill up and then pass the problem to the Parish Council or extend the graveyard southwards into the woodlands adjacent to the marina.

An even greater debate erupted with wild life enthusiasts condemning the proposal and the land owner refusing to sell; but in the end the matter was settled by the Environment Agency who ruled that it was too close to the river as decomposing bodies would pollute the Thames.

The matter passed to the Parish Council who had to decide whether to acquire more land or simply ignore the problem as neighbouring Tilehurst Parish Council had done. They decided to try to purchase two acres adjacent to the Barn. The land owner was willing to sell; but at a price somewhat higher than agricultural value, which is all the Chairman of the Council would consider. Meanwhile the thought of a cemetery close to a children's playground was seen by a small group of activists as an assault on children's well-being - 'they will be traumatised by the sight of funeral processions!' was the cry and protest meetings were held with banners and all.

Around the same time, one of Project Purley's foremost members was diagnosed with cancer and she was desperate to be buried in the parish. So to make sure, she made up the small difference between the asking price and the agricultural value and the sale of land went ahead. As it turned out Jan Jones got the final plot in the churchyard extension.

It was decided that as we would not need all the new land for some time yet, it would be divided into two with the eastern portion laid out as the cemetery and the western portion used for informal and youth sports until it was needed about 70 years hence.

It was laid out in four quadrants with one quadrant reserved for cremation burials and with an entrance arcade to be covered with flowering creepers flanked by a quiet area and a disposal/storage area. One end of the second quadrant was reserved for children, although it has never been used and one area of the fourth quadrant to be left unconsecrated for Muslim or other burials. A yew hedge was planted on the south side adjacent to a small car park and new trees and shrubs planted around the other three sides. Eventually we had to build a small compound for storage of excess soil.

The Bishop of Reading, the Right Reverend Dominic Walker, came to perform the dedication on 5th June 1999 and since then the first two quadrants



The new cemetery is consecrated by the Bishop of Reading while Reg Marshall and The Revd Roger Howell look on

have been about half used. It is kept as a lawn cemetery with no grave edgings, just a small plinth for a headstone, to facilitate maintenance and usually around five years are allowed to let the soil settle before it is grassed over. We had a small problem in that the ecclesiastical parish and the civil parish were not the same and Tilehurst Parish Council refused to contribute towards the costs, so we have to maintain three rates of charge, one for the Civil Parish, one for the residents of the ecclesiastical parish to the south and one for the rest. We cannot refuse burial but we do not want our cemetery to be overwhelmed by people from outside the parish.

The Millennium

by John Chapman

When the millennium was approaching the IT world went into a state of panic - dates would not be handled correctly and business would shudder to a halt. Happily it didn't quite turn out that way. However it was quite a shock to many people - we were used to calling 1990-1999 the nineties but what would we call next year? - eventually we settled on the naughties.



The church decided to mark the occasion by completely rebuilding the belfry so that all six bells could be rung rather than just tolling one bell and hoping it didn't fall down. A new troupe of bell ringers under the Captaincy of Simon Robertson went into action and were taught the art by the Pangbourne ringers. When midnight on December 31st 1999 came they duly came up with the goods and rang in not just a new year but a new millennium.

The Parish Council decided to mark the occasion with a booklet about Purley at the millennium. It was edited by me and a very large number of copies were sold or given away. There was a bit of a hiccup over the cover as the first of the inner pages were printed on

The bells were stored in the foot of the tower while the belfry was rebuilt

glossy board and the intended cover never saw the light of day.

Project Purley organised a '*Beating of the Bounds*' and a second re-enactment of the 1786 Court Baron. The walk around the parish boundary (or as near as we could get) was about 7 miles and there was a very good turnout. They also produced a new tea-towel and put on an exhibition in the Barn on the history of Purley. The January 2000 Newsletter (No 52) was produced with lots of colour pictures. Instead of regular monthly meetings a series of special lectures was arranged which attracted good audiences

The Golden Jubilee

by Jean Chudleigh

Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee was celebrated in June 2002. In its usual enthusiastic fashion Purley packed the weekend with events including the Bell Ringers presenting a full peal of bells on the Saturday to start the weekend. There were cricket and bowls matches, exhibitions, a flower competition called Purley in Bloom, a fancy dress competition, children's parties, a Golden Jubilee Old Tyme Music Hall, discos and barbecues and many more.

The three day celebration concluded with the illumination of two Golden Jubilee Beacons, one at St. Mary's Church and the other at Mapledurham Lock. This was followed by a Firework display at the Lock.

The Diamond Jubilee Celebrations

by Catherine Sampson

Ten years after Purley celebrated the Queen's Golden Jubilee the community came together once again for a long weekend of festivities this time to mark our monarch's Diamond Jubilee - only the second time this has happened in our country's history. The events took place between the 1st and 5th of June 2012 under the strapline 'A Weekend to Remember'. A steering group put together the framework for the celebrations and also organised a number of the events but ultimately over 30 local organisations and societies were involved and events took place over ten different venues in the village. Funding was raised from donations, sale of advertising space in the programme and the programmes themselves, and a grant from the Greenham Common Trust.

With so many people committing time and energy to organising events there was a huge array of choice. There was cricket, football, a treasure trail and bowls, plus plenty of races at a family fun day at Bucknell's Meadow. Goosecroft was the location for a Scarecrow Trail and the Goosecroft Gala, the



The 'Reigning Queens' Exhibition

latter also incorporating a Fancy Dress Competition the winners of which were crowned Purley's Jubilee king and Queen, and a Royal Tea Party. Project Purley staged the 'Reigning Queens' Exhibition', Purley Players put on a Murder Mystery Play set at the time of the Coronation and Thames Vale Singers performed a finale concert. A planted trough competition and a tea dance took place at the Memorial Hall, whilst the Infants School welcomed back past pupils for a special tour. The church held a Coronation service on the Sunday, after which the 'big Jubilee lunch' took place at Bucknell's, and also hosted the official Jubilee beacon on the church tower which was lit at 10.15pm in front of a crowd of over one thousand people. Rather spectacularly the Jubilee concert taking place at Buckingham Palace was beamed onto the tower of the church. Other events included a disco, a 'Purley's Got Talent' evening, and the sail-past of the African Queen.

To mark the occasion each child who attended one of Purley's schools or pre-schools was presented with a souvenir bone china mug. Subsequently a tree has been planted at Goosecroft and a framed collage of photographs hung in The Barn. The only dampener on the celebrations came from the weather, it poured with rain almost throughout the weekend, just as it had at the actual Coronation.

Rain or Shine and Project Purley

by David Downs

The Rain or Shine Theatre Company made their first appearance at the Barn on Friday June 24th 2005, when they performed Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to an audience of 120. With the company taking 70% of ticket sales and Project Purley retaining 30% we were able to donate a total of £425 to our chosen charity, the Thames Valley Air Ambulance.



The Lord Lieutenant, Sir Philip Wroughton, came to help John Chapman and David Downs present the cheque to 'MacMillan Cancer Care'

Although the committee were slightly sceptical at first, Rain or Shine have been coming back to the Barn each year since, always once and more recently twice a year in June and December. The summer performance is always one of Shakespeare's comedies, whilst the Christmas production has included such varied works as *A Christmas Carol*, *Wind in the Willows*, *The Canterville Ghost* and, on one occasion, an *Old Tyme Music Hall*.

I am delighted to report that in the ten years since that first performance, Project Purley has raised more than £10,000 for local and national charities. Those to benefit include Macmillan Cancer Care, Hospital Radio Reading, Dogs for the Disabled, Salvation Army Christmas Appeal, Alzheimer's Society and many others.

Of course it doesn't happen without a great deal of preparation and we should all be grateful, not just to the actors; but to those dedicated members of Project Purley who help to make each visit such a success. We also acknowledge the support of those regulars who make up the majority of the audience at each performance.

Everybody wins when Rain or Shine come to Purley on Thames. The play provides an entertaining, sociable evening for the village, the actors are employed at what they do best, the Barn is being put to good use and money is raised for good causes. Long may it continue!

Technology

by Gillian Wallace

It was around 1982 that the desktop PC as we know it started to be used by businesses, and within a very short time, by home users. Microsoft Windows was still just a gleam in Bill Gates' eye, and to run one of these amazing machines you generally had to be able to use a screwdriver as well as a keyboard, and have a diploma in untangling cables. But it was unstoppable, and the office PCs, and the laptops and tablets that we carry around with us now are the direct descendants of those early machines – just without the screwdrivers and cables.

But however dramatic the changes were in offices and homes, they weren't very visible out in the streets. In 2015, the most visible sign of new technology in Purley on Thames is probably the display on the bus stop at the top of New Hill, showing when the next bus will arrive (did you know it works by counting wheel rotations on the bus?). Less obvious, but still out on the streets, are the delivery vans from Amazon or Tesco, the joggers wired up to music and fitness monitors, the satellite dishes and the scars down Purley Rise and Oxford Road where the newly surfaced road was dug up to lay broadband cable.

Behind closed doors, the changes have affected everything. Lots of us,



Peter Perugia surrounded by technology scanning photos for the Project Purley archive

including myself, have been able to crawl out of bed at 08:55 and be at work by 09:00, courtesy of clever computer programmes that allow us to connect up to office systems anywhere in the world from anywhere else (except perhaps Pangbourne, which is still a mobile phone black hole!). We use Google for everything from a recipe for supper to the dates of the Tudor monarchs, Skype for video calls to children and grandchildren, and John Lewis online to order a new sweater to pick up from the nearby Waitrose shop. And everybody can use a keyboard. In 1982 a

keyboard was still something a secretary or typist used – not something men or professional women would admit to being familiar with. But then along came email. And now Twitter. What next?

The Purley River Estate

by Catherine Sampson

Just before Project Purley was formed, Newbury District Council finally adopted the four main roads in the River Estate – Colyton Way, Wintringham Way, Chestnut Grove and Brading Way. This opened up the opportunity for further services, and in 1983 the first gas was installed and a bus service was extended onto the estate by Reading Transport. Two years later the first post box was installed in Colyton Way. Over the last thirty three years the evolution has continued of what was once a uniquely different part of Purley. More of the remaining smaller, undeveloped plots have been sold and developed during this time and whilst some still remain largely unchanged from the early years of the Estate, it is likely that more of these will ‘disappear’ in the not too distant future.

One significant casualty of this increasing urbanisation is the Purley Park Property Owners’ Association, formed in 1936 as the Estate’s residents association. During the 1980s and 90s It became increasingly embroiled in legal disputes over land ownership until the committee eventually made the decision to restrict their remit to social activities only. Membership numbers were



The River Estate from a helicopter - 1984

also falling steeply and in 2000 the Committee disbanded and has not met since, although the PPPOA continues to exist. The privately-owned Purley Park Social Club has lasted throughout and continues to develop new ways to bring new people through its doors. At the other end of Wintringham Way Bucknell's Meadow has been increasingly used as a community space for everyday play and sports and also organised events, aided by increased expenditure on facilities and equipment by the Parish Council.

Given its position on the flood plain, some roads and gardens on the estate flood regularly, usually doing little damage, but more significant floods occurred in 1990, 2007, 2008, 2012 and 2013/4. The most serious of all however was in January 2003 when forty houses flooded, the worst event since 1947. The water table rose so quickly that a number of residents had to be rescued by boat. West Berkshire Council came in for criticism at this time for its lack of on-the-ground response and with growing concern for the impact of climate change, the last fifteen years has seen a far more co-ordinated response to these events. Purley on Thames Parish Council's flood risk plan includes designated response and evacuation centres, a local warning strategy and continues a tradition of a network of volunteer flood wardens. Whilst West Berkshire Council's Flood Risk Management Strategy co-ordinates response with local and national organisations. In late 2014 a flood alleviation scheme in the form of a clay bund behind Wintringham Way and a pumping platform was completed by the Environment Agency.



The 2003 floods brought water to the top of Mapledurham Drive

Farming in Purley

by Tim & Vicky Metcalfe

Home Farm was bought from the Bucknell family in Spring 1983 and by September of that year, Vicky and I had established the basis of our Holstein Friesian herd which we milked for the next 27 years.

On arrival, the farm had a large cattle shed, a small hay barn and 200 beef cross bred animals which were roaming the farm land. These cattle were soon sold and the first job was to install water troughs across the farm. The cattle shed housed our newly bought herd of pedigree Holstein Friesian cows and a reinstated milking parlour. A small herd of pedigree Aberdeen Angus travelled to Home Farm with us, the first cows having been bought in 1972, of which the present herd are descendants.

The milking herd increased to 80 cows over the next few years, grazing grass which naturally grows so well in the Thames Valley. During those years, Home Farm was an all grass farm, producing hay and silage with a few acres ploughed up each year to grow maize. Out grazing during the summer, the cattle all needed to be housed for the wet winter months to protect the land, and it seemed every other year we were adding to the collection of buildings on the farm. Alongside the cattle, we had a flock of free-range chickens for over 10 years, selling the eggs locally.

Milk was sold to Marks and Spencer for the latter years until July 2010 when we said goodbye to the milking herd having decided to concentrate on beef and arable. We increased the beef suckler herd, with the aim of having 50



Tim talking to his Aberdeen Angus calves

Angus calving each year, rearing all the progeny. By then we had also been given the opportunity to farm the majority of Springs Farm, the neighbouring farm, growing wheat, barley and grass there and ploughing more of Home Farm enabling good rotation of all crops.

Over the last few years, modern farm machinery has transformed the speed at which we are able to carry out our field work, and allowing us to help other farmers with various tasks. Our latest building is capable of storing 600 tonnes of cereals, more than enough to cope with our annual harvest. Using world-class genetics through artificial insemination, the Halstoe Herd of Aberdeen Angus continues to improve, and will hopefully achieve a premium in the marketplace.

Looking to the future, farm profitability will no doubt continue to fluctuate and although we embrace a small amount of diversification, the Metcalfes hope to keep Home Farm as an agricultural unit.

Changes I Remember

In this section we include snippets from residents who have recorded changes in Purley since 1982. We thank them all for their contributions.

Development

When we moved in to Beech Road in 1975 there were fewer than 40 dwellings and all but a handful were bungalows. By the time Project Purley was born the road had already been extended eastward beyond the lane, increasing the number of dwellings by 50% - and the new ones were all houses! Bit by bit things grew and grew. Five houses added extensions, and three more put rooms up in their lofts without changing the roof-line. Then one after another bungalows began to grow upwards into houses till now ten of them have become two-storied. As if that was not enough, two plots had a second house built on them. Finally, in the past year or so, two large houses have been pulled down and each replaced with two even bigger ones! Finally? Probably not, no doubt there will be further changes to come. Somewhere along the line the lane (which we used to drive down!) acquired the name Goosecroft, to the puzzlement of the Kirtons to whose farm it had originally been the track.

Jacky Brown

Beech Road has witnessed changes in housebuilding techniques this year. We watched fascinated as cranes off-loaded pre-fabricated wall sections complete with windows and holes cut out for electrical sockets. Three weeks later the house was watertight

Margaret Cowling

Most of the shacks on the River Estate have gone - We now have the Barn which is a great Asset.

Lee Hall

Trenthams still existed. The Barn moved from Trenthams to its current location when the Trenthams estate was developed

Martin Bishop

The gentrification of lower Purley as the old huts and shacks have been upgraded

Rob Wallace

Estate built in Long Lane opposite Carew Close

Peter Bean

Infill - ie houses built on plots which in some cases we didn't know of their existence. Resulting in schools, transport and roads overcrowded. As well as demands for FP surgeries and dental surgeries being even more critical

Shirley Tytler

The engineering company has gone to be replaced by Merit Tyres. The electric substation, or was it a telephone exchange, was sold. Lots of the temporary homes on the riverside park have been replaced with brick properties, the new ones especially are built up high because of the threat of flooding. The flood bund has been built. More homes, lots more traffic. Traffic lights at the junction of the A329 with Long Lane and Purley Lane. Bollarded crossing points on the A329. (I admit I'm not sure how long they have been there) It's still a good location. On the edge of the metropolis that Reading has become but still in the countryside with woods, and fields to walk in and the river to enjoy.

Marion Venners

The Barn was at Trenthams before estate built. School was just an old building - no temporary building at front. Over last 30 years a number of shacks have been replaced by brick houses on the River Estate

Rick Jones

Disappearance of most of the wooden shacks in Lower Purley. Move of the Barn when Trenthams left the area and new housing estate/bowling green that replaced the company's offices. Change of Purley Park house to flats and accommodation provided within Purley Beeches estate of previous Purley Park residents. Other new homes in and off Hazel Road (Duncan Gardens etc). Development of the Church site in Hazel Road enabled us to move here

Glynis Murphy

Nature and Countryside

High hedges have been encouraged to grow round what is now Springs Farm and the footpath is very enclosed. However, a permissive footpath has been created along the north side of the railway line to continue the footpath to Pangbourne avoiding the need to go along the main road, in daylight anyway.

Marion Venners

Big increase in red kites

Jean Bean

Very few if any people swimming in the Thames now - our children did in the 80s!

Sue Fraser

The set-aside land near the woods and Purley Hall has gone. It may have come and gone in the time Project Purley has been in existence. It was lovely walking on the flower rich meadow with the cowslips. The kites have come over from Oxfordshire and there seem to be more jays and buzzards too, and I have even seen a sparrowhawk occasionally in the last couple of years but we don't get so many kestrels. Over the past 3 summers there have not been any bats over the garden in the evening. Where have the hedgehogs gone?

Marion Venners

Skylarks no longer seen or heard

Peter Bean

Roads and Transport

Bus services to Reading has improved

Jean Bean

20 mph speed limit down Purley Lane.

Sue Fraser

Bus service has improved - street lighting has been extended and roads made up on the River Estate

Marion Dabbs

The shuttle buses while the bridges were being rebuilt were great - we got a service back for Purley Village

anon



One of the shuttle buses approaching Purley Lane bridge



The new grey electrification gantries east of Westbury Lane

Many streetlights now LED so white instead of yellow and cause less light pollution.

anon

The traffic calming islands on Long Lane - driving slalom. Sky Blue buses

Kathy Tytler

Better bus service. Better making of footpaths

Rob Wallace

A big green fence was erected along the north side of the railway line. The railway bridges have been heightened but at least they are still red brick. Gantries are going up for the electrification of the railway line. There's no bus to Wallingford any more.

Marion Venners

High speed trains. The loss of two of Brunel's bridges and the complete mess the builders have made of the new ones! Improved Reading Buses service to Purley/Reduction of Thames Travel bus service through Purley. The SCAR on the landscape that are the supports for cables along the rail track

Glynis Murphy

Community

No really serious floods until 2003

Rick Jones

More community activities - fireworks, Project Purley, walking groups etc etc. Finally something done about flooding.

Rob Wallace

We moved in to Allison Gardens in 1986 having spent four and a half years in Aberdeen. We found it to be a very friendly close of ten houses which were built in around 1970 and people moving in tend to stay. Two of the houses are still occupied by the original residents; one family has lived in their house for over thirty years and another three for almost as long. The children who played in the street when we arrived have now grown up and moved away but two new families with young children have brought the sound of children's voices again. We soon got used to the sound of the trains (the high speed trains rushing by and the goods trains much slower and taking longer) and actually miss them when they stop for two days over Christmas. I can't say I appreciate the monstrous gantry which has now appeared in preparation for the electrification of the line but at least it is down in the deep cutting behind us and mostly screened by trees.



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Ann Betts

We used to be able to take lovely pictures of trains, but now, even if we can see over the walls, the views are interrupted by horrible grey gantries.

anon

The restoration of the church bells ready for the Millennium

Sue Fraser

George Fielder, lockkeeper, retired. Bucknell Trust sold their land which allowed parish council to extend allotments.

Glynis Murphy

George Fielder - retired lock-keeper

*Meeting Reports**The Royal Abbey of Reading*

The 2015/6 season got off to a good start on September 18th when Professor Brian Kemp came to talk to us about the Royal Abbey of Reading. This is an enormous subject and Brian knows more about it than almost everyone else combined so he focussed on just three aspects of its history: The foundation in 1121, relations with King John and the hand of St James.

The Abbey was founded in 1121 by Henry 1 who wanted a place where he could be buried and remembered. He was just getting over the death of his son and heir in a shipwreck and was keenly aware of his own mortality and his need for grace in the afterlife. He consulted Cluny Abbey in France and they sent eight monks and Peter to be its first Prior. It was dedicated to St Mary and St John the Evangelist and the monks followed the Cluniac rites which were a variant of the Benedictines.

By the time the church was built Henry had decreed it was to be an independent foundation so on the 15th April 1123 it was dedicated as an Abbey by Thomas Becket and endowed with lands all over the country. Mainly those of the Priory of Leominster and including a pension of two shillings per annum that had previously been paid to the Minster Church of Reading by Purley parish. Hugh of Amiens was installed as its first Abbot and he was mitred which meant he ranked with bishops. It was also freed of all feudal obligations. Later Isabella de Siffrewast gave the Abbey lands in Purley. At the time Battle Abbey held lands to the north west of Reading and Henry bought them out and added them to the endowments. The name 'Battle' is still recalled in the former hospital and primary school.

When Henry was buried there in 1136 a grand tomb with his effigy was erected before the High Altar. Over the years it had numerous Royal visits and was host to meetings of Parliament.

When King John came to the throne in 1199 he used the Abbey as a depository of the gifts and relics he acquired and its collections included over 240 major religious objects as well as numerous documents and works of art. He was very friendly with the monks and seems to have held the Abbey in very high esteem. In May 1215 Robert Fitzwalter, the leader of the rebel barons came to meet John at the Abbey and refused to give him the oath of allegiance. The result was Magna Carta sealed at Runnymede and the rest is history.

Among the relics was the hand of St James. This had been in the possession of the Abbey for many years. It had been brought to Reading by Matilda (Henry I's wife) in 1133. In 1155 St James was added to the dedications of the

Abbey and the three shells design, originating from Compostella became the emblem of the Abbey and is still the emblem of Reading Borough Council today. The links with Santiago de Compostella in Spain were very strong and Reading became the start of pilgrimages to there.

The hand was taken on crusade by Richard Coeur de Lion, John's elder brother and John had taken it to France in May 1200. When the Abbey was destroyed in the 1530s the relics were all either destroyed or secreted away. It was reputed that the hand was buried but rediscovered several centuries later in 1786 and is now held at a church in Marlow.

John Chapman

The History of Englefield

The Barn was packed full for Project Purley's October meeting to hear local historian Richard Smith give a talk about Englefield estate. As a resident of the village, and with family connections to the village going back several generations, he brought his personal experience and family memories to a most interesting history of the estate and its owners over the years.

The Englefield estate is a rare survivor in England, having preserved its lands and its village over the years since it was recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086. It is first mentioned as the site of a battle in 871, when the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the battle of Englafelda, between the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes, who came out from Reading (even then the expansionist town ...).

The survival of the estate is more surprising when looking at the twists and turns of ownership over the years, and this is where some pure luck must have come in. The Englefield family held the estate from 1186 until 1559, when treasonable activities by Sir Francis Englefield (who had fled into exile in Spain) resulted in the estate being eventually sequestered by Queen Elizabeth I and given to Francis Walsingham, her famous spymaster. From Walsingham's daughter it came by marriage to John Paulet, the 5th Marquess of Winchester. It was then passed down through the Benyon family via a number of complicated diversions through the female line (requiring name changes). The inheritance line also brought the addition of the De Beauvoir estate in London and land in Essex, which presumably helped to keep Englefield intact despite death duties.

Other factors helping to keep the estate intact were good stewardship and the gradual assimilation of land and control of the estate properties. Even after the Enclosure Acts there were freeholders still recorded at Englefield, whose land over the years was purchased to add to the Benyon-holdings. The Benyon family also owns every building on the estate. This management and

control eventually allowed the family to achieve their goal of creating open parkland around the main house. New roads were built, the old roads that crossed the estate beside the house were closed, and the whole village was eventually rebuilt in the 1850s, relocating it from just outside the house gates to its current location at a more discreet distance.

If this all sounds quite authoritarian, the community involvement demonstrated in management and maintenance of the properties and the whole village can be seen even now, with the school, the Working Men's Club, the shop and the garden centre, and even the new front porches of the village houses (although perhaps changing the colour of the front door might not be tolerated!). And the village houses are still largely occupied by employees or (increasingly) retired employees of the estate.

Over the years the estate seems to have benefited from long term planning, an increasingly rare commodity, which may be the real key to its survival as a classic English country estate, with estate managed farms and a model village. The idyllic image was painstakingly constructed over many years, and was only once publicly dented, when Constable painted the house in 1832. The painting included cows in the foreground, which to the Richard Benyon of the day seemed more agricultural than aristocratic, and so they were overpainted with deer. Presumably the cows of 1832 weren't as good looking as the current Richard Benyon's herd of pedigree Herefords!

The excellent talk concluded with some village photographs from the early 1900s by the Tidbury Brothers, photographers.

Gillian Wallace

Thames Walk - Oxford to Reading

For our November meeting we welcomed back Wiltshire speaker Bill King for a talk on walking the River Thames. This was the second instalment of Bill's walk along the Thames Path, following the river from the Kings Lock just north of Oxford to the junction of the Thames and the Kennet and Avon Canal at the Horseshoe Bridge in Reading.

The walk was described almost as a series of excursions: loops around the villages and towns along the way, forays into the history of the buildings and landscape, and stories of the people who lived or visited there - with rest stops in peaceful churchyards and pretty pubs. Project Purley members are familiar with the history of many of the places on the route of the Thames, but not all walk the Thames. The talk reminded us of how important the Thames was until very recently for commerce and as a means of transport, and how walking along the river is to follow in the path - actually to tread in the footsteps - of many of the great and the good in England. But where we now

saunter for pleasure, they rowed or marched or fought or wrote or hid away discreetly in one of the beautiful houses on the banks.

Bill described how some of our most famous authors have left footprints along this stretch of the river. Kenneth Grahame is buried in Holywell cemetery (Oxford) – probably not close enough to the water for some of his much loved characters, but a short stroll for him. J R R Tolkien is buried in Wolvercote cemetery, after spending most of his working life living in North Oxford and working at Pembroke and Merton Colleges. Lewis Carroll rowed Alice Liddell and her sisters through Port Meadow, perhaps even then dreaming up fantastical scenes in Wonderland. Agatha Christie lived and wrote in Cholsey for over 40 years, and Jerome K Jerome is buried at Ewelme, which must be one of the prettiest villages in the area, and well worth the excursion from the Thames.

At the 17th century Iffley Bridge, just south of Oxford, Roundheads and Cavaliers fought for control, evidence of the importance of all the Thames crossings – perhaps this one especially, as Oxford housed the court of Charles I between 1642 and 1646. Five centuries earlier, the armies of Queen Matilda and her cousin Stephen fought at Wallingford, and four centuries later the US Army Air Force were stationed at Berinsfield to provide photographic reconnaissance in the second world war. Further down the Thames you can walk in the tracks of Arthur (Bomber) Harris in Goring, where he came to retire after the fighting was over. He is buried in Goring cemetery.

Queen Victoria's son Edward reputedly hid away with Lily Langtree at Nuneham Courtenay, whilst Eric Blair (George Orwell) has a very discreet grave at Sutton Courtenay, although his only connection with the village was his friend David Astor. Both villages are well worth a side visit, even without the celebrity associations.

Bill King's journey was all about the people and the places on the journey. This brief description picks out some of those, though not exactly in chronological or geographical order. But the Thames does not have to be walked from end to end, or in any particular direction. What we took away was the sense of how much has happened along the way, how important the river valley has been in England's history, and how much there is to see on a visit to almost any stretch of the Thames path.

Gillian Wallace

Note

We have not had room for the reports on the Christmas party or the Rain or Shine production of *A Christmas Carol* but they will be in the May edition. However we are pleased to report that after the performance the retiring collection raised £260 for the Salvation Army Christmas Appeal

Nature Notes

by Rita Denman

7th August. Expectant moon gazers were duly rewarded with a wonderful view of the 'blue moon' on Friday last. It wasn't blue but gold. The local geese have been making Oak Tree Field their winter roost for some years now and at about this time of year they begin their noisy comings and goings. I chanced to see a small drama played out between the geese and the cattle in the same field. The Angus herd slowly wandered into Oak Tree field where there was a flock of about 200 geese already grazing. The cattle were to the north and the geese to the south side. The habit of both is to move forward as they graze which meant that the cattle and the geese eventually met. It didn't bother the geese too much but the cows were not happy, especially one youngster who surveyed the situation and decided to rush the geese causing a big fluttering and squawking but not much else. Some sort of communication went through the herd and suddenly they all charged into the geese clearing the field. The 200 or so geese that I could see took to the air as one, but what I didn't know was that hidden in a dip at the north end of the field was another two or three hundred geese and this lot streamed away too. It was quite a sight. Having claimed the field the cows then filed out leaving it empty. An uneasy truce has followed.

14th August The glorious dawn chorus of all the little birds has ended and been replaced by the cacophony of 'goose song' as they move restlessly in groups up and down the valley in the early morning. It seems for the moment at least, that the cattle have been successful in evicting them from Oak Tree field.

21st August Weather in the Thames Valley has been very mixed with runs of three or four days of beautiful summer sunshine sandwiched between down-pours, wind and temperatures below average. On each of these runs of good weather Tim and Ian have harvested grain, made hay, baled straw collected it and brought it back to the Home Farm barns. For me it is a very emotive time of year, perhaps because when I was a child we knew how dependent we were on the harvest. I regret the loss of harvest home celebrations and thanksgiving which now appear to be old fashioned.

28th August No wonder Tim was in a hurry to get the harvest in. He must have known what was to come. Rain so dense it was impossible to see through it.

4th September The traditional washout took place on August Bank Holiday. The weather people tell us that meteorologically speaking September 1st is the first day of autumn. What happened to the summer? Morning has revea-

led dark shrouded trees, grey misty hills and grey mottled skies with a hint of pink reflection from the sun trying to break through.

12th September The week has been blessed with beautiful late summer days and kindly sun. After the recent rains the odours in the meadow are slightly musty with overtones of manure as Tim has been harrowing and muck spreading. There are still many grasshoppers, ladybirds, bees, dragonflies and the occasional butterfly and there have been late chicks as bits of egg shell keep appearing on the grass.

21st September Well into the fall of the year and every day sees a change in nature's colours. There is a profusion of red hawthorn berries, orange crab apples, many black laurel berries and scarlet spindle berries. Leaves are turning and green acorns are sitting neatly in their cups. The freshly ploughed fields are a rich dark brown, fungus appears overnight and the billowing summer hedges are being trimmed into winter shape. The weather changes suddenly from a mellow relaxing sunny day to heavy rain wind and thick morning fog.

25th September This week we passed the Autumn Equinox and darker mornings and evenings are becoming noticeable. On Monday 28th there will be a celestial treat when a super moon total lunar eclipse will be visible in the early hours of the morning. The weather forecast is good so perhaps we will see the blood moon when it turns red. An enormous puff ball appeared in the meadow. It is the one fungus that I know is edible. Delicious sliced and fried in butter.

2nd October In the Purley area we have enjoyed a beautiful Indian Summer. Tim has continued with the preparation of the fields for sowing in ideal conditions and the tractors have been very busy. It has been good to see the garden full of blackbirds and be assured that our local populations are keeping up. Benjamin and I enjoyed a picnic in the summer house and while we were there two young squirrels came scampering around the meadow. Ignoring us they passed in front of the summer house and climbed into the big hazel tree setting up their discordant shrieking to warn others to keep away.

9th October Late afternoon and as the sun sets on a beautiful Indian Summer's day its slanting rays catch the fallen hawthorn leaves that have collected on the path turning them into jewel colours of ruby emerald and gold. Rain is forecast before morning and the crisp crunchy sound as I walk round the meadow will be gone. As expected the weather broke and the rain hardly stopped all day. The consolation was that the birds enjoyed the rain especially the blackbirds that filled the garden.

17th October Daylight is shortening and the temperature has dropped. This has triggered a big change in autumn colours.

30th October This week saw the first real frost of the winter although generally the temperature hasn't been too cold. Leaves are falling and the ash tree will soon be bare.

6th November True to form November arrived with thick fog closing airports and making driving conditions difficult. It is unseasonably warm and summer bedding is still flowering. Skies have been leaden or golden casting a glow over the fields and catching the leaves as they drift from the trees in showers. The millennium oak is in its best autumn dress adding another year ring to what I hope will be survival far into the future and people will wonder what life was like in Purley when it was a young tree.

13th November Our first named storm 'Abigail' has arrived across the UK embedded in the core of the Jet Stream. Here in Purley Abigail has proved to be petulant, one moment sunny and smiles and the next dark with heavy rain and squally winds. Although the gardens are looking very end of autumn the weather has been mild and primroses are in flower with the last of the summer roses.

20th November In the UK we are to get our first taste of winter and snow is forecast for northern areas. The week has been changeable typified by heavy skies, blustery winds and bursts of sunshine that chase shadows across the smooth bright green of the young barley. The rooks spend much time in the ash tree with a lot of communication between them. Perhaps they are discussing the weather.

Obituary

Kath Devine

The news that one of our members, Kath Devine, had died came too late to be reported in the last Journal, but we are now able to include Marion Dabbs' tribute to her.

We were all saddened to hear of the death of Project Purley member, Kath Devine, after a short illness. She and John moved to Purley in 1976 and when John became a member of the Horticultural Society Committee, she willingly agreed to help out with catering arrangements at the monthly meetings and Shows. She was an excellent cake maker and we all enjoyed her lemon drizzle cake. Kath was also a member of Purley W.I. serving on the committee for several years. When John joined the Parish Council and Purley Memorial Hall committee, Kath was very supportive, but always made sure her family had all the help they needed. She was a lovely lady and is greatly missed by all who knew her.

Marion Dabbs