

THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL



This Journal is published by
Project Purley
The Local History Society for
Purley on Thames, Berkshire

Printed by Hobs Reprographics, Portman Road, Reading, RG30 1EA

Editor: Ann Betts

Designer: John Chapman

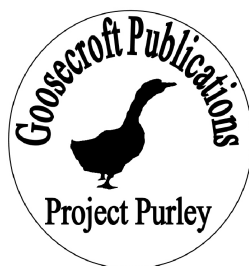
The contents of this Journal are protected by copyright and nothing may be reproduced without prior written permission from Project Purley

© 2016 Project Purley and the Authors

ISSN 1754-677X

For more information about Project Purley visit our website

www.project-purley.eu



Lucy Honor Gutch

by John Chapman & Catherine Sampson

For many years Honor Gutch was one of Purley's 'characters'. Her main claim to fame was as the correspondent for Purley to the local newspapers. She used to write a short piece every week, and sometimes several times a week, for the Berkshire Mercury and Reading Chronicle. She was the unofficial postmistress and her house, where the Post Office was located, was the gossip centre of the village. So from 1966 to 1984 her reports have provided us with a unique diary of village life.

She was born Lucy Honor Gertrude Pennick in Holloway in 1896 - her father Harry Pennick was most interestingly a London City Missionary.

Honor used to come to Tilehurst in the early 1930s to visit the family of her then husband-to-be, Percival Baker, whose family were, according to her, well-known in Tilehurst. They often used to go rowing along the Thames and one day, as they rowed their hired boat towards Mapledurham Lock from the Scours Lane boathouse, they came across a huge signpost announcing 'plots of land for sale in Purley'. She and Percival hurriedly secured a strip in Mapledurham Drive and erected a small wooden hut plus wash house and Elsan corner.

Honor and Percival married in 1944. He lived and worked as an assayer on the Rand Gold Mines in Johannesburg, South Africa and she travelled out there by ship at one stage and apparently enjoyed an exciting tour of the mines. Passenger lists online at Ancestry would suggest this was in 1959. It doesn't appear that she lived out in South Africa with him though and we are not sure when Percival died or how the marriage ended (assuming it did).

During the Second World War Honor worked for the Royal Society of Arts at their evacuated address - Westfield House, Purley. When the war ended and their head office functions began to be transferred back to London she also relocated there with them for a few years.

She had known Harold Gutch and his first wife Florence (nee

Maggs) since her early days in Purley. Florence died in 1959 after 19 years of marriage and Harold and Honor married 4 years later in 1963.



John Edwards of Purley Garage helping Harold Gutch move the Post Office sign from the Garden House to Purley Rise Stores in 1977

Harold took on the sub-postmaster role when the franchise moved from Lichfield Cottage to the Garden House after Amy Pocock retired in 1956. However after their marriage, for most of the villagers, it was Honor who was the postmistress who served customers from their small front room which also carried several lines of goods, including sweets. Harold retired in 1977 when the franchise was taken up by Christine and Roger Jones at Purley

Rise Stores from 1st August. Honor continued to run her shop but had to put a piece in the December 1977 Purley Parish News to remind people she was still around:

Don't forget that the Old Post Office is not yet dead, but very much alive at the same hours to serve you with stationery, plants, library books, etc. etc.. And of course Christmas cards and calendars.

Harold died on 22nd March 1978 and in the May edition of the Parish Magazine she published his obituary:-

HAROLD WALTON GUTCH : REMEMBRANCE

Dear Purley friends,

Just a short note about our much respected and loved late sub-postmaster Harold Walton Gutch, who for the past 22 years lived and served in the Purley Village Post Office. Many will remember that he also cultivated a well filled Nursery and greenhouse, hence Nursery Gardens.

After Florence, his first partner passed on (a clever design artist, specialising in gold lettering - teaching at Reading University and other colleges) the Nursery had to give place to the important Post Office work. Love of people and the O.A.P.s and the village now became priority. However Harold still found time to express his God-given gift as an artist - colour and flowers being his favourite theme - some of his best pictures were exhibited at the Reading Guild of Artists annual shows.

As a young man he received tuition in Engineering and Draughtsmanship etc at Reading University - the subjects proving to be of great value during his army career overseas during World War 1.

Between the wars he spent some time in Australia farming, a severe drought and attacks of malaria made it advisable to return to England.

Born at The Mount, Caversham in 1897, with his sister Ann he was educated at Summerbrook private school - now incorporated with the University old building in Reading. His first appointment as an engineer and draughtsman was with a well known engineering firm in Reading, at the age of 19. The firm was soon called into war work, and their young apprentice into the Army for service overseas. Demobilisation eventually brought him home and into various occupations, including the Woolwich Arsenal as a draughtsman. The A.R.P. also occupied him during World War 2.

Finally Purley - The Iris Nursery and his much loved sub-postoffice with its happy history of loyal assistants and other helpers throughout the years.

The Nursery with its lovely gardens were my first attraction to a kindly courteous curly haired sub-Postmaster. We soon discovered that we had mutual friends in Tilehurst, so a new chapter in our lives opened up. And what a busy life it has been.

Thank you all dear Purley peoples everywhere for your love and loyalty to one who was proud to serve you. I am indeed humbly grateful to have played a small part in Harold's very busy life.

Honor had become a Parish Councillor in March 1965 and always had plenty to say for herself. In March 1969 she was sent a letter by Bradfield Rural District Council to inform her that planning permission had been given for 20 houses - what then became Nursery Gardens. Another letter which we have in our archives arrived

in 1972 to tell her that she was being taken to court for non-payment of her rates. She retired in April 1976.

She became the correspondent for Purley in 1968, sending reports every week to the Parish Magazine and the local papers, frequently dictating them over the telephone so as to be sure she didn't miss the deadline. She also acted as the agent for the small ads and obituary sections collecting the fees from villagers.

She was always very keen to entertain children and always invited children from the local schools to come conker-picking in the Autumn. However to ensure success she would spend a week or more gathering conkers from her trees and then scattering them over her back lawn just before the children arrived. Her house was known as the Garden House as it was the house built for the gardener at Westfield. For many years they had a caravan park in their back garden until it was moved to St Mary's Avenue, the site now occupied by Thames Reach.

Her reports to the local papers were almost always typed and she kept a carbon copy of them. These files came to Project Purley after she stopped reporting and have languished in boxes for some years. Thankfully they have now re-emerged and are being listed and catalogued in the press cuttings section of our archive. They provide a fascinating glimpse into life in Purley from 1968 to 1984 and here are a few extracts.

13/1/1969 - The Purley Parish Council held their monthly meeting in the Memorial Hall on Monday last week. During discussions it was reported that the rates for 1969/70 had been resolved at 6d in the £, ie no increase as far as the Parish of Purley is concerned. The clerk drew attention to the fact that Purley Lane was now closed for four weeks for the purpose of surface drainage.

11/7/1970 - Owing to a mishap to the collar strap of one of the upstream lock gates there was a temporary halt in river traffic on Sunday afternoon. The result so resembled a regatta on account of the large number of craft of all shapes and sizes milling around both up and downstream that many of the nearby residents were given an exciting afternoon's entertainment.

17/1/1971 - The newly formed Purley Repertory Company held their first Jumble Sale in the Memorial Hall, Glebe Road on Saturday last. The result after paying expenses of hire amounted to £13.

21/8/1972 Miss Florence May Leath late of Purley Lodge Cottage, Purley Village, died in Battle Hospital on August 14th after a long illness at the age of 78 years. Miss Leath was employed by the late Mr and Mrs Hodgkin of Purley Lodge as cook and after 35 years service was presented with a gold watch.....

27/3/1973 On Friday evening last the Purley Tennis Club held a successful Tramps' Supper in the Pavilion at the Recreation Ground. From the 50 members and friends present, four outstanding prize winning tramps were selected.

24/1/1974 - A 33 lb haggis which was ordered from a manufacturer in Aberdeen for a Haggis Supper to be held in Purley on Saturday evening had failed to arrive by Friday night. After a call to Aberdeen railway station, it was revealed that the haggis had become the victim of the rail dispute and was still sitting there. The suggestion to try B.E.A. and as a consequence the haggis was placed on a plane which arrived at Heathrow in the early hours of Saturday. Eventually the haggis was piped into the 110 guests at Purley Memorial Hall.

4/3/1975 - On Thursday last in St Mary's Church, a crowded congregation watched intently whilst the Bishop of Reading, the Rev Eric Wild instituted, and the Venerable W R Birt, Archdeacon for Berkshire, inducted the Rev David Evans to the Living of St Mary's Church Purley. The Rev R Parks, Rural Dean of Pangbourne, assisted the Archdeacon. At the close of the service, to mark this memorable occasion, the whole congregation, together with forty members from the churches in Swansea and St Austel were invited to a special reception of welcome ... in long Lane School Hall.

11/10/1976 - The Jubilee Committee for 1977 suggested that the Memorial Hall should be made the centre of use in this connection. Also that a Jubilee Crown should be given to all children up to 12 years of age, resident in Purley. A Jubilee Fund will be organised. Mr Marshall will be pleased to receive suggestions.

18/9/1977 - Her motto might have been 'Let them all come' - they certainly did - always to be greeted with her lovely sunny smile. Even that strange lad who broke into her house while she was out one day shopping, his purpose to steal - did he? I wonder! he stole a forgiving kiss and some motherly advice. How well I remember the sloe gin episode. What a giddy gay reminder Monica Venner's telling narrative gives me. I helped to gather the sloes - many years ago I signed the T.A. pledge, thus the little word 'gin' restrained me from participating in the luscious booze. I can't imagine what might have resulted! - Can you?

11/12/1978 - A heartwarming Nativity play written by Mrs Lyn Nicholson appropriately entitled 'The Inn' performed by the Young Followers of Jesus in the Memorial Hall on Monday 11th December, drew a most rewarding audience of parents and friends Nicola Thompson, the vigilant landlord of The Inn made good entertainment with her steady efforts to keep law and order.

22/1/1979 - The Rev Harold F Hawkins, late rector of St Mary's Church Purley, died on January 11th at his home in St James' Close Pangbourne after a long term of illness at the age of 74 years. During the war years he served with H.M. Forces as an Army chaplain After service in the midlands and Farndon, Notts Mr Hawkins became Rector of All Saints Nazeing in Essex where both he and his wife Nellie spent a number of years of ardent work with a growing community. In 1961 he responded to the call to fill the vacancy at St Mary's Church Purley where both he and his wife and family spent more happy years working amidst a band of devoted parishioners.

19/8/1980 - A coachload of members from the Purley Pavillion Wednesday Club commuted to Bowood House in Wiltshire on Wednesday last week. After enjoying the lovely surroundings and admiring the magnificent oldworld house a pic-nic lunch was thoroughly enjoyed in a quiet shady corner.

6/11/1981 - Thanks to the League of Friends of Purley Park Trust a first rate firework evening with hot drinks was thoroughly appreciated the residents and some of their friends.

27/3/1982 - On Saturday last with the valued assistance of the 'Big A Disco' the Purley Scouts and Cubs group gave a special treat to the under 13s of the village in the memorial Hall. A full house resulted in a collection of £50 towards the funds. There are now 40 Cubs and 24 Scouts with 10 leaders in the group.

In her latter years she became a bit of a recluse, mostly because of age and deafness but sadly she died in a house fire aged 95. The Evening Post reported on November 6th 1991:-

First Cold Snap Victim

by Andrew Boyd

A 95 year old woman was found dead at her home today after a blaze which may have started in an electric fire.

The woman may have left it switched on as she tried to keep warm in her detached house in Purley Rise, Reading and the fire could have been burning all night.



*The police talk to bystanders after the fire
(Photo from Reading Chronicle)*

The pensioner who lived alone and has not been named, was found lying on the floor of her upstairs bedroom after a neighbour spotted smoke at 7.15 am.

She died as temperatures in Berkshire fell to below freezing in the coldest autumn night so far.

Ambulance staff say she probably died of smoke inhalation.

Sgt. Roy Attwell of Pangbourne Police said "The neighbour saw smoke coming from the bedroom but was unable to get into the house because of thick fumes. It does appear an electric fire might be involved. She was lying on the floor and it may be that she was trying to get to the window. We shall be looking to see if she overloaded the circuit trying to keep warm."

A fireman said the fire had been burning slowly and could have begun up to 12 hours earlier.

A neighbour said "She should never have been living on her own but she was a very independent old lady."

Director of Berkshire Age Concern, Ann Snell, warned pensioners to take special care in the cold weather and urged people to look out for elderly neighbours.

The house could not be repaired and was demolished to be replaced by two new ones.

Meeting Reports

A Christmas Carol

Rain or Shine Theatre Company

Once again Rain or Shine performed to a packed Barn on Friday 11th December in their seasonal take on Dickens' "A Christmas Carol".

As we've come to expect, the five strong company play numerous roles, eleven I believe, and create magic effects on a single stage with the absolute minimum of scene changes. In this version they stayed very close to the text but played it with real panache. Anthony Young's Scrooge had a rather Pickwickian appearance rather than the usual gaunt miser we are used to but it made his outbursts about beggars, Christmas and warm fires even more petulant and his re-invention as a generous, open-handed uncle and employer much more believable.

Emily Lomax, a new face on the stage, and Jane Lloyd played the female characters and Ellis Wells and Craig Rogers the supporting male roles. A Christmas Carol has a significant amount of long scene setting dialogue, which presents challenges to the actors and director. In this case the simple straight-to-audience delivery worked well.

One of the great problems of any stage or screen performance of Dickens' book is the character of Tiny Tim, whose appallingly over-sentimental depiction has been mocked ever since the book was first printed. In this case the character was played by what appeared to be a Cabbage Patch Doll, perched like a parrot on Bob Cratchit's shoulder - an appearance which brought the house down and will live long in everyone's memories. A classic Rain or Shine piece of invention.

The evening finished with cast and audience joining in a joyful rendition of "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen". We left into the unseasonable warm December evening full of the spirit of Christmas

Rob Wallace

Members' Evening: WW1 memories

Project Purley's first meeting of the New Year on January 22nd was focused on people stories of the First World War. Three Project Purley members talked about personal links to men who served in the First World War, though much of the information shared had to be dug up by painstaking research both here and across the Channel. So many veterans didn't talk about their wartime experiences and their stories only surfaced after they died.

In the case of Nathan Southall, it was his family who didn't talk about the war. Nathan, who was killed in France in July 1918, was the uncle of Janet Southall's husband John. Janet told us how moved both she and her husband were when they visited his grave at Sezanne in France, one of the beautifully tended cemeteries looked after by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. His headstone inscription said 'Gone but not forgotten' - ironic and terribly sad, as after he died the family never mentioned his name again.

Richard McDonald talked about his two grandfathers, who both served during WW1 and survived. His maternal grandfather George Field had joined up for a while several years prior to the war as a musician. He enlisted again in 1914, but with a bad knee (he claimed from marching, the army claimed from football!) he did not see active service. Richard's paternal grandfather James McDonald (photographs showed a distinct family resemblance) served with the Fleet in Scapa Flow and with the Army in France after a few years in the Royal Marines before the war. Richard had a full history, with lots of detailed information available.

The third talk was from Rita Denman about her late husband Ron's uncle, Cecil Bert Denman. The talk was accompanied by a beautifully produced presentation of photographs and illustrations, courtesy of two grandsons who provided the technical backup. The tragically short history of Cecil Denman, who was killed at Ypres in

1915, included a bit of a mystery. His family received lots of postcards from him from before the war when he was in service and briefly in the Royal Sussex Regiment. He still sent postcards while he was in Belgium during the war, but he never mentioned a girl called Maria Fache, whose first communion certificate, dated 1907, was found inside the family bible when it was inherited by Rita. This prompted a trip to Belgium to investigate, where after a series of fortuitous conversations and encounters, Rita and Ron were able to track down Maria's son still living just a few miles from Ypres. He had never heard any mention of an English soldier, but revealed that she married very late - and then only for the sake of the family business. A poignant story, perhaps a love story, which Cecil had never been able to share with his family.

A number of other members brought documents and memorabilia of family members who served, including photographs and medals, displayed on tables round the end of the Barn - showing that many Purley families are keeping the memories alive. In keeping with the theme of the 1st World War, refreshments included home-made Anzac biscuits.

Gillian Wallace

The Canning Family

Project Purley's Chairman, Catherine Sampson, was the speaker at the 19th February meeting on the subject of the Canning Family of Purley. The Cannings' distinctive but dilapidated tomb in St. Mary's churchyard, with elaborate carvings and railings around it, was the starting point of a long trail of research for Catherine.

The large chest tomb is carved with the names of three members of the Canning family - Thomas who died in 1825 aged 72, Mary Eugenia, who died in 1828 aged 83, and Thomas their son, who died in 1824 aged 39. The Canning family were Catholics, with close links to other great English Catholic families. Mary Eugenia was first married to Charles Stonor (of Stonor Park), and was born a Blount (of Mapledurham House). Her first marriage ended in widowhood a year after she and her family had been forced to flee Bath

during the Gordon Riots in 1780. Two years later she married Thomas Canning, of Foxcote House in Warwickshire, an apparently impoverished Catholic lawyer with whom she went on to have two sons, Thomas and Edward. Yet the Cannings' chest tomb is in an Anglican burial ground. Outwardly the tomb looks to be in a poor state of repair, with the stonework suffering from the effects of pollution and the railings currently capped off with hardboard for safety reasons, but structurally it is still fairly sound. It was relocated from its original position on the northern edge of the old burial ground in 1985, after the current church extension was built, and so does not now mark the actual burial chamber.

The research trail goes back to Bristol, where the Canynges family were very important cloth manufacturers and merchants, at a time when Bristol was in the ascent and fast becoming the second most important port in England, second only to London. One William Canning who died in 1474 is particularly associated with the rebuilding of St Mary Redcliffe church in the then town. He carried on the family tradition by serving Bristol as its mayor, in his case



The Canning tomb in its original position



A peek into the grave after the tombstone had been moved

five times, whilst his brother Thomas Canynges, also a merchant, served London first as an Alderman, then Sheriff, then Lord Mayor and finally as a Member of Parliament. He married the heiress to Foxcote House in Warwickshire which then became the family seat until the nineteenth century. But the family history of public service did not protect the Cannings from the persecution that all Catholics faced after the Reformation, when taxes and confiscation of land and property over 200 years wore down the family fortunes. Interestingly, this Foxcote line of Cannings from which our 'Purley' Cannings eventually derive, also some five generations earlier sent one son to Garvagh in Ireland, where at some point the family converted to Anglicanism and produced the Prime Minister George Canning (a great supporter of Catholic emancipation!).

The Cannings married well through the years, and it was Mary Eugenia's nephew (by brother Joseph's marriage also into the Canning family) who purchased Purley Lodge, where it seems probable that Mary Eugenia and Thomas Canning ended up living. The discrimination against Catholics which continued until emancipation in 1829 meant that technically burial in a Catholic burial ground was illegal still in the mid-1820s, which probably accounts for the burial of Thomas, Mary Eugenia and Thomas junior in St. Mary's. However there is the complication of a further tomb to Thomas and Mary Eugenia in St James Catholic church in Reading, which Cathe-

rine suggested was probably erected after St James Chapel was built in the 1830s.

The audience obviously enjoyed the talk on a topic so close to home, and from the number of supplementary questions that were asked, really appreciated the amount of research that Catherine has done to put together the family history.

Gillian Wallace

The Annual General Meeting

The 34th Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on Friday, 18th March at The Barn, Goosecroft Lane, Purley on Thames. Following apologies for absence and acceptance of the 2015 Minutes, the Chairman spoke to the meeting. She talked about the varied and interesting programme of meetings and outings enjoyed by members and the continued success of the Rain or Shine Theatre Company's performances in The Barn which have raised over £10,000 for charity since they began. The annual barbecue benefited from good weather and thanks went to Dorothy and Ben Viljoen for allowing us to use their lovely garden once again.

Membership has grown to well over one hundred, but she reported that we had lost two valued members. Jean Debney, one of our founding members, has moved to Shropshire and Kath Devine sadly died during the year.

The Chairman thanked John Chapman and Ann Betts who are responsible for producing the Journal which is circulated to members three times a year, Gillian Wallace who has been doing the write-ups of the meetings for the Journal and the Parish Magazine and Rita Denman who has entertained members with her Nature Notes. She said that she and Ann Betts have recommenced researching the River Estate and put out an appeal for the names of people who could provide new information about this area of Purley between 1935 and 1980.

The Chairman thanked John Chapman for his work in continuing to sort and catalogue the archive material and again stressed the need for help from members in this connection. She also thanked the rest of the Committee for their continued support and reported

that Angela Edwards will be standing down from the Committee this year. Angela was thanked for all her work organising the refreshments at meetings and for writing some of the meeting reports.

The Treasurer then gave her report. The Society's finances are in good order but, as in future we will not be receiving a parish grant as this is not available to organisations who raise money for charity, our income has been reduced. It has therefore been decided to retain a portion of the money raised at the Rain or Shine performances to cover this shortfall. However, donations had gone up as Martin Bishop and John Chapman had generously donated part of the profits from the sale of their books.

The cost of meetings is likely to rise this year due to increases in barn hire charges and the cost of external speakers and it was put to the meeting that the annual subscription to the Society should be raised to £14 for single membership and £20 for family membership from 1st January 2017. This was duly agreed.

The Election of the Officers followed and the following were proposed and elected:

Catherine Sampson - Chairman

Marjorie Butler - Treasurer

Ann Betts - Secretary

John Chapman, Martin Bishop, Jean Chudleigh, David Downs, Gillian Wallace and Pam Beddoes were proposed and elected to the Executive Committee en bloc.

Finally, Ron Chudleigh was thanked for his support as an independent examiner of the Society's accounts and the Treasurer was delighted to report that he has agreed to continue in this role.

Ann Betts

The Project Purley Archive

After the AGM business had been concluded, John Chapman gave a short talk on the archive material held by Project Purley. Members have collected many photographs, press cuttings, documents and other ephemera to chart the history of Purley on Thames, and some was displayed for members to look at before and after the talk.

The biggest problem with collections like this – as with libraries – is to catalogue and label the individual items so that they can be found. A box of unsorted photographs isn't much use, any more than boxes of unsorted books would be in the library. John demonstrated the indexing system and database that he has put in place to identify the material, so that anyone looking for (for example) information on a street can look up the street name and identify all the information that we have stored.

Obviously the individual items have to be indexed first, and help with identifying and indexing the material collected would be really appreciated. A fortnightly session has been set up every other Wednesday at the Parish Office by the Barn from 10:00 to 12:00 for anyone who can spare an hour or so – next sessions 4 and 18 May. If this sounds a bit dry and dusty, think again. Going through the old photographs, press cuttings and planning applications can be a great trip down memory lane!



Gillian Wallace

*A view of some of
the binders
holding our
archive*

Lesser known Images of Purley

At our April meeting Catherine Sampson took us on a delightful trip round Purley (and a bit across the borders) in a series of old photographs from the 1880s to the 1960s, with a few recent ones put in for comparison.

The journey started in Purley Village, with picturesque photographs of Home Farm and its cows, and tales of the slightly less picturesque realities of children having to wear wellington boots on the way to school, to get through the mud and slurry on the road. The ivy from Ivy Cottage seems to have spread right down to Purley Lodge Cottage early in the 1900s. Later photographs show that a mass clearance took place sometime in the first quarter of the century - a 1924 photograph of the road shows most houses completely clear of ivy. Many of us in Purley are still fighting the battle!

Images of the River Estate from the 1930s and 1940s were very interesting, showing some of the original constructions by the



This is not just a picture of cows - Catherine spent half an hour pointing out all the cottages and things you do not see at first glance.

owners who mostly came out from London in the summer. There were photographs of the wooden huts, railway carriages and buses that were brought to the plots (and which spent some time flooded most years). There was also one of the construction of the Purley Park Property Owners Association (PPPOA) hut, which was used for dances in the war, attracting the Canadian soldiers billeted in Pangbourne at the time. Some of the families settled permanently on the River Estate, and there were a number of contributions from the audience on the families, where they lived and where they are now.

The tour continued up Long Lane, past the old Menpes Fruit Farm with its small gauge railway, on to Sulham Hill, and to Sulham Lane, with portraits of Sulham families and residents in the 1890s on the way, and so back into Purley

To finish, Catherine showed a few unattributed (but presumably relatively local) photographs in the hope that they could be identified. These included a camel in the snow, and a man riding a zebra, things that might have stuck in the collective memory. No such luck – there were no positive identifications of location, so probably not Purley, but very entertaining nevertheless, as was the whole of Catherine's talk, and very much appreciated by the audience.



*Gillian
Wallace*

*Sheep pens
off Sulham
Lane*

Obituary - David Edwards

In February we were all very saddened to hear of the death of long-standing Project Purley member David Edwards at the Duchess of Kent Hospice.

David grew up in Southall, West London and at seventeen began his career with the Midland Bank. This career was temporarily interrupted by National Service with the RAF and later on he returned to study at night school to complete his banking exams. He always worked at branches of the bank in London, and met his wife Angela at the bank's sports club after she had moved from Merseyside to work in London. They celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary in 2014.

He was a good and keen sportsman. He played at Brentford Football Club as a schoolboy, was good at basketball and a strong gymnast. David also played squash, badminton, bowls and golf. When he was over 70 he bought his first wetsuit and a surfboard and went body boarding in Cornwall. He and Angela also enjoyed cross country skiing holidays. David was a keen gardener, bridge player, and member of a Scottish country dancing class. He also enjoyed singing and after retirement became a member of the Thames Vale Singers.

David was a thoughtful, gentle gentleman and always willing to lend a hand. He was often the first to help put out the chairs at Project Purley's meetings and was always in the background quietly supporting Angela. He will be sorely missed.

Nature Notes

Rita Denman

4th December 2015 In the last few days, with an early morning sun shining through the valley the aspect has been calm and benign. The bare trees with just a few golden leaves still hanging on have been back lit by the low sun creating magical dells. Rooks gather in the ash tree and perch silently absorbing the unseasonably warm sun but suddenly the mood changes. The sun is covered by cloud that thickens and darkens and the valley is changed to a threatening place of skeletal trees reaching out to catch the unwary and the

rooks begin squabbling and complaining. As the weather isobars tighten Clodagh, the latest in a series of storms, has howled her way through the valley setting the trees into a wild dance and whipping up the river and then suddenly the wind drops and the rain begins.

12th December 2015 In the south skies have been dull and heavy with occasional bursts of sun but it has been very mild. There are flowers of all seasons in bloom. Welsh poppy, scabious, wallflowers, viburnum, roses, primroses, hellebore and pansies. There are still many berries on the pyracantha but the wood pigeons are gradually stripping them to the lower branches. One bird in particular has become so confident that he gorges on berries and then perches on a nearby post to digest before he has another feed. He remains there for long periods of time and has become such a familiar sight that Betty and Flo the cats have accepted that he is there and he ignores them completely. Although we have been enjoying such calm weather, storm Desmond arrived with a vengeance across Cumbria, dropping rainfall that has exceeded all previous records and reactivating waterfalls that have been dry for decades.

18th December 2015. It might as well be spring! The abnormally high temperatures continue and night times have been comparable to those in an average July but cloud and rain have persisted. Spring bulbs are growing fast and in some parts of the country daffodils are beginning to blossom. In the garden the spring flowering mahonia is well advanced. This usually flowers in early spring and is a source of nectar for the bumble bees. I am wondering what effect this spring like period will have on wildlife. The birds are really confused and as it becomes light the small birds are singing a sort of winter dawn chorus. Eyes have been on the skies to try to spot the Space Station carrying our own Tim Peake.

25th December 2015. On Christmas Day there was a full moon, the first on the 25th/26th December since 1977. After some mixed weather the sky was clear and at the back of the village where there is no light pollution the moon shone like day on a scene that hasn't changed for generations.

8th January 2016. To begin 2016 Nature Notes, we must comment on what nature has thrown at some unfortunate folk in Cumbria, Lancashire, Yorkshire and now parts of Scotland. Many have spent the festive season away from their homes as a result of storm Frank.

The sight of the disintegration of the ancient bridge at Tadcaster was awful. In this part of the Thames Valley there have been very high winds and small flocks of rooks have been hanging on to the madly swaying branches of the ash tree. On an occasional bright day the roe deer have been sheltering under the hedge and a pheasant found its way back to the meadow after long absence. There has been fog, a little frost but mainly rain, persistent and for long periods with a tropical deluge from time to time, but fortunately not in the quantities experienced in the north. However it has all added to the ground water level which is being watched anxiously.

15th January Weather records are being broken daily and following the almost constant rain and wind of recent weeks it was good to wake to a welcome calm, sunny morning. The rising sun shining on even the smallest tree trunks turned them to pillars of bronze. The long bleached grasses on the hill contrasted with the bright green growing in the hollows. The bare trees glowed against the heavy sky in the background. The animals have been sheltering in the adverse weather but a few hours of sunshine have seen swans flying and a group of geese moving up the river. The river is fast running but has not topped the banks although there is an amber warning in force for the Purley / Pangbourne area.

23rd January Morning began with layers of blue and grey mist below a line of dark trees on the hilltop and linear clouds of varying shades of grey tinged with pink as the sun rose. A flock of rooks animated the scene with their comings and goings in full chorus. The temperature dropped widely, to well below freezing but the hazel trees which are full of catkins were like mini lanterns in the sun. An upside down rainbow was recorded in Tilehurst. This is apparently more common than one might think. Correctly called circumzenithal arcs they are caused by ice crystals in the upper atmosphere and are usually seen by people who look up a lot.

29th January The early flowering of spring flowers continues. The patch of snowdrops in the meadow are in full flower. High winds and occasional heavy rain, alternating with bright sunny spells has dominated the weather. Wednesday began with rain and a yellow cast to the valley. Not the sign of sun behind the clouds but a bilious yellow the portent of storm. It was a dreary depressing day. The UK is now feeling the effects of storm Gertrude and Henry is

gathering momentum in the Atlantic.

5th February The RSPB held their garden bird watch over the weekend. It wasn't good weather and only a few birds were venturing away from shelter. I saw seven rooks, three long tailed tits and a robin. Sunday was blustery with rain showers and I walked around a very soggy meadow.. On Monday things began to look up as storm Henry drifted off into the north sea. The day became bright and sunny although there was a chill wind. Wildlife which has been noticeably absent began to venture away from the shelter of the trees. A red kite was flying and a beautiful cock pheasant strutted in the meadow. We have been instructed by the weather presenters about 'mother of pearl clouds.' Polar Stratosphere Clouds, or PSCs also known as Nacreas Clouds are due to chemical reaction in the atmosphere creating the pink and yellow pastel shaded cloud formations.

12th February The week began with red clouds and high above a deep blue sky the herald of storm Imogen. The day continued sunny but very wild with broken tree boughs everywhere. As forecast the southern counties and south coast were mainly affected with reports of 40 ft high waves crashing along the coast. Although it was far less fierce in Purley, Imogen still made her presence heard and felt. It was a very noisy day with trees and bushes constantly on the move, but a pair of swans sat it out in Tim's field while the rough weather shook everything around them.

26th February Thick white frost tinted pink in the sunrise with grey mist on the hills has been typical of the week. Thursday was such a dawning and I was fortunate to see our pair of daytime resident swans coming in to land in the barley field, circling in perfect formation their wings fully stretched and catching the sun as they gracefully set down on the expanse of green barley. It was a sight that set me up for the day. The daffodils greet the frosty dawn very limp and drooping down the sides of the tubs gradually recovering through the day to be dispirited again in the next frost.

4th March. Mothering Sunday. The sky is blue, the sun warm and energising the birds are flying and spring flowers in bloom.

11th March Enjoying two consecutive days of brilliant spring weather it seemed that the corner had been turned into spring but it was a false hope and winter returned with hard white frost and

thick fog. In the Purley area we have not faced the extremes of wind rain and snow felt in many parts of the UK, but much of it has been wet dreary and sunless making us all long for the summer. On Tuesday I opened the curtains onto a strange light. There was a large dark cloud suppressing the sun as it rose creating odd spotlights here and there in an overall darkness. On Wednesday the heavens opened across the south and the rain didn't stop all day. There is a constant churring noise and splashing coming from the frogs in the garden pond. Many more garden birds are appearing.

18th March Most of the days this week have begun with fog sometimes frosty too. Few birds fly in foggy conditions. It is a black and grey world of deadened sound, silhouetted plants, plumed poplars and filigree trees. Vague outlines of hedges and hills wait for the sun's transforming rays.

25th March The spring equinox occurred this week. Although the winter in our part of the world has not been so severe there have been many drab dreary days when colds and miseries seem to flourish and we are thankful that the winter is behind us. For a few days we have enjoyed bright blue skies and sun with increasing warmth. I walked around the meadow to the accompaniment of robins singing and a group of eight red kites circling overhead. They are an awe inspiring sight at close quarters

The new mums and calves have been turned out into the nursery meadow at the farm. It is good to see life in the fields again. The barley has been growing strongly all winter. It germinated well and is growing very thick and began to look a little yellow so Tim and Ian have been out with the tractors dressing the grain fields to replace the nutrients.

The birds are beginning to sing their dawn chorus and bees and brimstone butterflies are flying. Tree buds are beginning to break and the field maples have taken on a definitely green tinge. The wild damson is beginning to break into blossom. Spring is here.