

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

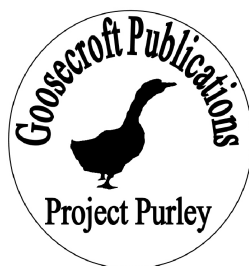
The contents of this Journal are protected by copyright and nothing may be reproduced without prior written permission from Project Purley

© 2017 Project Purley and the Authors

ISSN 1754-677X

For more information about Project Purley visit our website

www.project-purley.eu



Chairman's New Year Message

Happy New Year to you. I do hope that you had a lovely Christmas.

This is my last Chairman's New Year Message, for a while at least, as I stand down under our five year rule at March's AGM. I became Chairman just before the Queen's Jubilee and the highlight of that year was undoubtedly the Reigning Queens' Exhibition which attracted over 750 visitors and told the story of Purley during the reigns of Queens Elizabeth I, Victoria and Elizabeth II. Since then we have put together, or supported, a considerable number of smaller exhibitions and displays, celebrated our 100th Journal edition with a special edition and of course enjoyed a succession of speakers, trips, BBQs and Christmas parties.

Our archives have grown considerably and Rain or Shine has continued to perform twice-yearly to packed crowds. This year's performances raised money for the Blind Children's Society and the Intensive Care Unit at RBH, the latter in memory of David Edwards who sadly died in 2016. None of these activities would have happened without the efforts and dedication of our members, now numbering well over 100, and my thanks go to you and particularly everyone who has served on the committee over the past five years.

Looking forward there is still much to do and more research to be unlocked. Ann and I will, we hope, finish our research into the River Estate before too long, and Martin Bishop is now beginning research into the history of the cricket club in preparation for their pending 50th anniversary. But there are still many burning questions out there to be answered - why not have a go at uncovering their stories yourself. Just be prepared to end up addicted!

Catherine Sampson

We are sure everyone will be sad to learn that Catherine's mum died just before Christmas - one of the reasons she could not be with us at the party.

Postal Services in Purley

by John Chapman

Early Postal Services

The Romans had a very efficient postal system which enabled letters to travel very quickly over long distances. The word 'post' relates to the staging posts that have to be established to enable a messenger to change horses after about 15 miles, or less if the going is steep. The system began to revive in the 12th century when the king needed to send and receive messages and other bodies like merchant guilds and universities set up their own networks.

By the 17th century the royal system had developed with six main routes radiating from London and other people being allowed to send their messages for their own purposes. In 1637 Witherings, the king's chief postmaster, reorganised the six main routes and banned the carriage of mail by anyone other than the Chief Postmaster's employees. In 1657 an Act was passed for establishing a General Post Office and this was put into effect at the Restoration in 1660.

The General Letter Office

The Post Office as we know it today was established in 1660 as a service which anyone could use to send letters. Letters were charged for by distance and the number of sheets. The charges were accumulated during the journey and paid by the recipient. Letters usually consisted of a single sheet of paper folded and sealed with wax with the address written on the outside, usually together with the sender's signature and often a message to the post boys. Colonel Henry Bishop was appointed Postmaster General in 1661 on the basis that he paid the Crown £21,500 per annum and kept any profits he might make.

The way the system worked was that local post offices were set up along the routes and to send or receive mail you had to send one of your servants to pay a visit to your local office, which in our case was at Reading. By the Post Office Act of 1765, the Postmasters General were given authority to establish official Penny Posts in

any town and its environs, where that course seemed advisable. With the ending of the Napoleonic War, and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the number of Penny Posts in provincial cities and towns increased greatly. The Penny Post charged an extra 1d per letter to deliver it.

The cost was paid by the recipient, not the sender of a letter and depended upon the distances between the sender's and recipient's local office via London and the number of sheets of paper. By the early nineteenth century the cost of postage had become prohibitive and the system was the subject of many abuses. Numerous schemes for reform were floated by politicians and other influential people, among them Rowland Hill who proposed a single payment pre-paid by the sender regardless of distance.

Since this time the Post Office has evolved into one of the largest businesses in the Country, running the telephone service as well for many years. Postage rates have climbed steadily although it still costs only a minute fraction of the average weekly wage to send a letter as compared with before 1840 when it could take several weeks for a labourer to earn enough to pay for a letter.

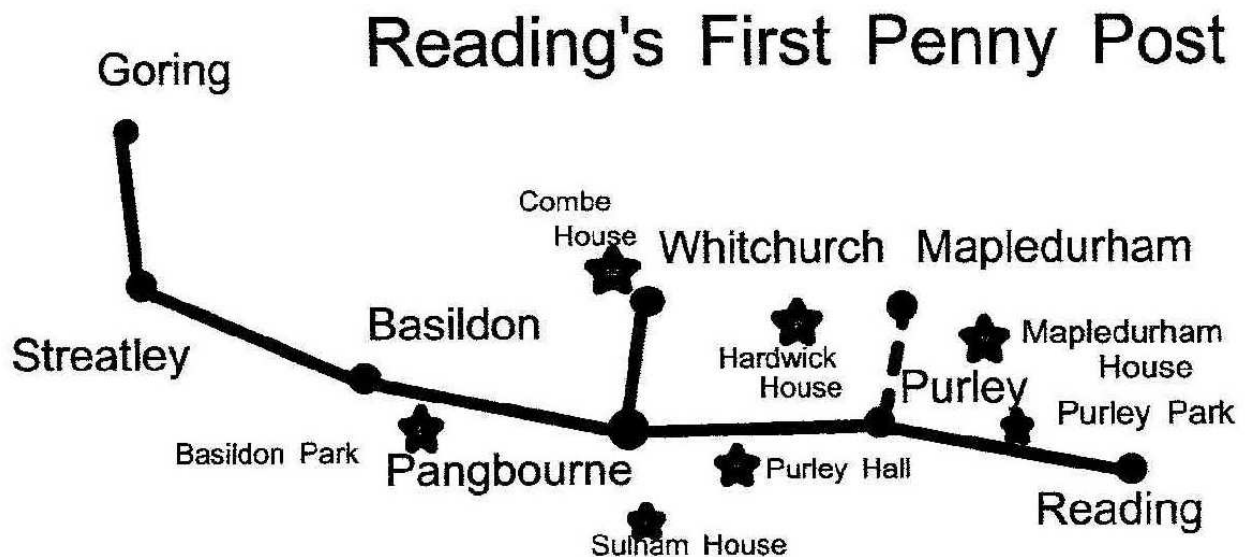
Postal Services in Reading

The earliest known postal service for Reading was that established in 1579 when Reading was a stage on the route from London to Ireland via Bristol. Richard Spignall was appointed Post Master at 1s/8d per day. The town was certainly one of the main Postal Stage points soon after the General Letter Office was established. Henry Paine, an Innkeeper of Reading was appointed Post Master on 19th March 1660.

As well as the official letter carriers who operated only within the post town, most Postmasters had unofficial arrangements with local carriers whereby letters could be delivered to and collected from points along their routes. This was strictly against the law as the Postmaster General had a monopoly which was extended only to his servants (ie the post masters, postboys and letter carriers). Some carriers got around the law by bundling the letters up into

parcels which were legal for them to carry.

Godwin, one of the carriers operating to and from the villages west of Reading had been carrying letters regularly since around 1790 on his daily run from Reading to Streatley. He appears to have done the job on foot and levied his own charges. In 1811 Godwin, who had been doing the job unofficially for 20 years, was appointed as the official messenger to deliver post from Reading to Streatley for which an additional penny could be charged legally. Godwin was paid 20s a week. He had to reach Streatley by 9.15 in the summer and 9.45 in the winter. He delivered letters on the way and left letters for Mapledurham at Purley.



The route of the first Penny Post in the area showing the big houses served.

The route was later taken over by a Mr Teather, who apparently used a cart for the job. He had been in the habit of taking passengers and was severely reprimanded in 1817 as this was strictly forbidden. In 1825 the carrier complained that the duty is greater than one man can perform. He was still paid 20s pw but with an additional £3-10-0 per year for crossing the bridge to Whitchurch. By 1829 a Mr Piercey was operating the route and he was still in the job when the nationwide Uniform Penny Post was introduced in 1840.

The Pangbourne Office 1811-1878

Pangbourne had been made a Receiving House for outgoing letters in 1811 and incoming letters for Sulham and Tidmarsh would be left

there by the messenger. This gradually evolved into a full scale sub-office providing many further facilities. This included delivery to many local villages and later money order and telegraph services.

There was an enquiry into a number of matters at the Pangbourne Office in 1854. It appeared that both the sub-postmaster and his assistant had had to go to Reading on business and while they were away someone had asked to buy stamps and been sold them by the Sub-postmaster's wife. This was regarded as highly irregular by the purchaser who had complained to the Postmaster General. However he saw no great fault and suggested that the situation should not be allowed to happen again. There was a further irregularity in the dating of a bill by the contractor who carried the mail. He was warned to take greater care in future.

Purley was served by a messenger who left the Pangbourne office in the morning and delivered to houses along his route. A second post for Purley had been requested but this was turned down in 1864 by the Postmaster General. The Messenger service was abolished in 1878 when the route to Pangbourne and Goring was absorbed into the general mail delivery service.

The Post Office in Purley

Purley was specifically named in 1811 as a point at which mail for Mapledurham could be left and thus one may reasonably assume that an arrangement had been made with a local shopkeeper for this purpose. In 1846 the responsibility for this link was with Mr Powys of Hardwick House

The earliest Sub-postmaster for Purley was not recorded until Charles Gibbins was listed in a directory of 1847 as the receiver for Purley. Letters arrived from Reading at 7 am and were despatched at 6 pm. He had presumably been appointed before 1844 as he does not appear in the list of subpostmaster appointments for the years 1844-47 which are the earliest preserved in the Post Office Archives. Between 1871 and 1884 Dinah Green was the postmaster. She retired to Reading and died in 1886 aged 76

Out-going Mail

Until around 1878 both incoming and outgoing mail was handled by local post offices, but after that the incoming mail was dealt with by

postmen operating from delivery offices which in our case was Pangbourne. The local offices dealt with the outgoing mail and began to take on other services such as parcels which had previously been a preserve of the local carriers and the railways. The Purley office did not provide money orders or telegraph facilities and Pangbourne was noted as the nearest place providing these services.



Lichfield Cottage when used as a Post Office

William Pocock was appointed as Sub-postmaster at Purley on 20th April 1886. His salary started at £14-2-0 and over the next twenty years he had occasional increases, reaching £16-18-8 on 1/5/06. He ran a shop at what is now Lichfield Cot-

tage on Purley Rise. He was still there when he died in 1924 and in 1928 the position was filled by his daughter Miss Amy Pocock. She retired around 1956 and died in 1967.

The local offices sold stamps and dealt with such matters as registration as well as providing a place where letters could be left to be collected by a messenger and fed into the system.

Harold Gutch took over as Postmaster soon after Amy Pocock retired. He was a nurseryman who lived in the Garden House (on the corner of Purley Rise and Winston Way). He ran a small shop together with the Post



The Garden House as a Post Office

Office in his living room. He died in 1976 and was succeeded for a short while by his wife Honor, although she was not qualified to hold the position which was formally filled by a temporary clerk from Reading

The Post Office franchise moved to the Purley Rise Stores when Christine and Roger Jones won it after Honor Gutch had given up in 1977. They sold the business to Eugenie and Roger Robinson later in the year. They in their turn sold out to Mrs C M Jenkins in 1986, after a fear that Purley would lose its Post Office entirely. Finally it came into the hands of Ruchi and Gerbit Sandhu. Over the last twenty years or so many of the services provided by local offices were centralised or withdrawn making quite a dent in the financial viability of the office.



The Post Office at Purley Rise Stores

Purley Postmarks

In the very early days all outgoing mail had to be marked with its origin so that the clerks at the General Letter Office could calculate how much the recipient had to pay. In our case the letter was first stamped 'Penny Post' to make sure the extra penny was charged and then the Reading Postmaster would stamp READING 42 on all letters. This saved the clerks having to look up some of the distances as the 42 represented the distance in miles from Reading to London. They still had to look up the destination address.

After 1840 the problem was to make sure that stamps could not be re-used so an obliterator was used. This stamped a black maltese cross on a black penny stamp which was not very effective so they changed the system and used an obliterator in the form of an office number and changed the colour of the stamps to red. Later they reverted to obl iterators which incorporated the office name in a circle which also included the date and time of posting.

Purley's first obliterator was a steel stamp issued on 13/2/1856 and had the name PURLEY above two concentric arcs. These were



Three of Purley's handstamps. The one on the left is a rubber one badly distorted, the middle one is a first day cover for the Coronation and the one on the right was in use until around 2000

very expensive to produce, costing several pounds and the Post Office later decided to produce rubber stamps which cost only about 3s. Purley's first rubber stamp was issued 26/6/00 and had the words 'PURLEY Reading' surrounded by a circle. Further stamps were issued 26/05/12, 22/3/13, 19/11/14 and 22/4/19 with slight modifications so that they can be readily distinguished.

The rubber stamps were not successful and were phased out in the early 1920s. By 1937 Purley had a double circle steel handstamp inscribed 'Purley, Reading' with broad bands. This was later replaced by a series of smaller single circle steel handstamps variously inscribed Purley, Reading Berks and Purley Reading. In latter years these have been used exclusively for counter work as now all mail is now postmarked at the Swindon Mail Centre.

For many years Purley had a small posting box set into the wall of the old rectory stables in Purley village. There was a considerable outcry when this was removed in 1981 and replaced by a larger box on the corner of Lister Close. Attempts were made to purchase the old box as a memento



A traditional pillar box on the Oxford Road

but the Head postmaster reported that it had been returned to the general pool of boxes and was already being reused elsewhere. For most of the boxes in Purley there have been two collections on a week day and one on a Saturday, Sunday collections having been dropped many years ago. Now however we are down to one collection timed at 09:00 for most boxes but 17:15 for the one outside the post office.

Incoming Mail

For a while after 1878 the service remained very much as it had done with the messengers, except that all the people concerned were now employees of the Post Office. In 1894 the Pangbourne postal service was revised and an allowance converted into the wages for an auxiliary Sub-Office postmaster. The person appointed was Henry James Cliffe who resigned on 10/5/1899 to be replaced by Harry Owen Gray whose appointment took effect on 14/5/1899. He lasted until 1/4/1905

In 1896 the Purley allowance was converted into wages for a rural auxiliary. On 6/9/96 Horace Pocock applied for the job and in September 1896 was appointed on a wage of 11s per week. This was redefined on 1/4/1897 as being 9s/7d for weekdays and 1s/5d on Sunday. He operated from Pangbourne and delivered letters in the Purley area twice a day. Two years later the service from Pangbourne was extended to the Roebuck and Horace's wages revised effective 10/10/98. He now received 11s per week plus 1s/6d for working on Sunday, The following year the service to Mapledurham was extended and letters taken to the lock, the auxiliary's wages were again raised to 12s/3d per week plus 1s/6d for working on Sunday. He resigned 9/3/1907 and his duties absorbed into the general work from Pangbourne.

The Purley service was later allocated to George Shepherd who had done his military service from July 1894 to October 1903, presumably serving the latter part of this in the Boer war. He joined the Post Office at Wisbech St Mary on 4/4/1909 moving to Beenham 20/8/1911, to Reading 23/3/1914 and to Pangbourne 9/8/1914. He received his Post Office certificate 1/1/1920 for which he received a

small increase in pay. He also received a cycle cleaning allowance of 1s per week. Incoming mail was brought to a delivery office (Pangbourne) by a messenger who then sorted the mail into routes for postmen to take out and deliver.

Just before the First World War the establishment at Pangbourne was given as ten Postmen, with seven cycle cleaning allowances of 1s per week. There was a part time charwoman who earned 5s/6d for 14 hours work in winter and 4s/3d for 11 hours in the summer. There were also two auxiliaries allocated, one for deliveries to Upper Basildon and one for the town. The Rural Postmen operated to Purley, Ashampstead, Buckhold, Sulham and Checkenden. The first of the Sulham Postmen was William Cox who was appointed 18/9/92 as an auxiliary and promoted on 9/8/95 after serving for a few months as an Acting Postman.

These arrangements continued until well after the Second World War when, after there had been a lot of building up Long Lane, the Parish Council suggested that a better service might be obtained by delivering part of Purley from Tilehurst. Thus the area bounded by the Oxford Road and Long Lane became part of the Tilehurst Postal Zone. The postman started along by the Roebuck, came along the Oxford Road and then proceeded up Long Lane and back to Tilehurst.

When Postcodes were introduced this became zone RG3-6 as opposed to the rest of Purley which continued to be served from Pangbourne and became RG8-8. This has continued to be a source of complaint because of the confusion between Postal addresses and the parish name. As the area grew it was split and now we are RG31-6.

There were two deliveries for many years and for a while it is believed there were three. The two deliveries were to be made sometime between 07:00 and 09:30 and between 10:00 and 12:30 depending on where in the postman's walk the house is. Nowadays however we have only one delivery a day and the postman comes from the west Reading sorting office on Portman Road.

*Meeting Reports****Members' Evening - Birthdays***

Project Purley's September Meeting held on the 18th was a Members' Evening themed around birthdays. The talks began with three speakers all focused on national or local celebrations of the Queen's 90th Birthday in June of this year. John Chapman was first up, to talk about attending the Royal tea party in the Mall, dressed in what he described as his ceremonial gown for the occasion - waterproof clothing! His humorous talk, accompanied by a good number of photographs, described the pageantry of the day, and the considerable care and commitment shown by the members of the Royal family present to try and talk to as many of those present as possible, interspersed throughout with reports of what the weather was doing. Afterwards John showed the contents of 'the hamper', some

*The hamper*

items still untouched, and the varying souvenirs he had acquired. Catherine Sampson followed with a brief photographic introduction to some of the street parties held around Purley before introducing Lee Hall who talked about Singing for Fun's indoor street party and how the group started. Jean Chudleigh finished

the Purley celebrations with photos and an overview of the festivities at the church on the Saturday evening, which culminated in the lighting of a beacon, and the special church service held the following morning.

Next it was the turn of David Downs to talk about a very special 100th birthday celebration. Bill Lloyd, the uncle of Project Purley member Marion Downs, was born during World War One and celebrated his 100th birthday on August 13th, 2016. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1936 and served throughout World War Two, including taking part in the 1944 D-Day landings. As a Flight Sergeant he and his ground crew were responsible for recovering crashed Allied aircraft and airmen, often behind enemy lines. He was awar-

ded the French Legion d'Honneur in 2015 as one of the surviving participants of the D-Day invasion. Several celebrations were held to mark his centenary. Of course he received the traditional 100th birthday card from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (the next one she will send him will be for his 105th, then every year thereafter), and was guest of honour at a huge family party in Sherfield on Loddon, his home village, on the Saturday of his actual centenary. He received over 80 birthday cards from family, friends and neighbours. He was also treated to a celebration lunch at the R.A.F. Club in Piccadilly and entertained as guest of honour at the Annual Dinner of the R.A.F. Association (Basingstoke Branch) at The Red Lion in the town. Bill still drives – he has just renewed his licence which will take him up to 103, still runs his own house and garden, and leads an active social life. In short, an example to us all!

Catherine Sampson and David Downs

Douai Abbey and Western Monasticism

On October 21st Abbot Geoffrey Scott of Douai Abbey came to talk to us about western monasticism and the history of the Order of St Benedict. He managed to fit nearly 2000 years of history into an hour of fascinating chat.

He explained how many early Christians felt the need to develop communities in cities where they could live together, pray together and do good works together, while others wanted to seek the isolation of desert places to pray and worship alone, like St. Antony of Egypt. The movement soon led to the establishment of monasteries where people lived in a community and we were shown a 5th century Coptic monastery in Egypt.

From Egypt the movement spread to Gaul and to north Africa which had a flourishing Christian Church. By the 6th century monks found it necessary to write down and preserve the teachings of the early monks in written Rules. We were shown Hatton 48 Manuscript which is the oldest surviving copy of the Rule of St Benedict (8th century) which has been miraculously preserved at the Bodleian in Oxford.

We learned about the foundations of Benedict and his sister

Scholastica in Subiaco. Then came the move to Monte Cassino where Benedict and Scolastica's tombs were about the only survivors of the Allied bombardment in WW2.

We moved on to the influence of Irish monks and to the foundation of monasteries on Iona and Lindisfarne and we compared the different styles of illuminated manuscripts of which the most famous, the Lindisfarne Gospels, ended up in the British Library after it had been at Durham Cathedral during the Middle Ages and at the Dissolution of the monasteries entered the collection of Henry VIII.

After the crowning of Charlemagne in 800 as Holy Roman Emperor and the Synod of Aachen in 817 all monasteries in the Holy Roman Empire were obliged to follow the Rule of St Benedict. During this period many of the monasteries were the property of large and influential landowners. However an Abbey was founded at Cluny in 909 which attached itself directly to the Pope and enjoyed great influence. After the destruction of monasteries during the Viking invasions, monasticism revived and this revival in England was led by three Benedictine monks, Dunstan, Aethelwold of Abingdon, and Oswald. Reading Abbey was founded in 1121 and used the customary of Cluny but it was very much the child of the Norman Henry I, continuing the trend for English monastic houses being closely aligned to the monarchy as in the later Anglo-Saxon period.

The 11th century saw the rise of orders of hermits, eg Carthusians and Cistercians who were more enclosed than the Benedictines and sought a return to the literal sense of the Rule of St. Benedict.

The 13th century saw the appearance of the Friars such as the Franciscans and Dominicans who had no fixed place of abode and travelled the country begging and preaching.

All this came to an end with the Dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII and English men and women wishing to lead the monastic life travelled to the continent to form English communities in France, Spain, the Low Countries, and Italy. The various English Benedictine monasteries established on the continent in the 17th

century were united in Paris in 1619 as the revived English Benedictine Congregation. One of these was the monastery of St. Edmund, King and Martyr, founded on the Left Bank in Paris in 1615, from which the present Douai Abbey descends. The Community's church was where the tomb of King James II was located and the monastery became a centre of the Jacobite Movement. After the French Revolution and imprisonment, the monks decided to move to Douai in northern France, a town which had had strong English links for centuries. The monastery there had been built in the 1770s by a Berkshire Benedictine, Augustine Moore from Fawley Court, on the Berkshire Downs. Moore had installed a weather vane reading N E S and W instead of the French N E S O. Once the Paris English Benedictines had been established in Douai, they commissioned the architect, Augustus Welby Pugin to design a new chapel in the early 1840s.

Having not gained approval by the French government in 1903, the Community was offered a school site in Woolhampton and moved to England to some very cramped accommodation. By 1933



Douai Abbey and Monastery at Upper Woolhampton

they began building a new Abbey Church but quickly ran out of funds and it was not until the 1990s that the Abbey Church was completed, albeit in a very different style. Meanwhile, the Benedictine Order spread to many other sites in England. A similar problem for the Benedictines had occurred in 1878 in Germany and German monks moved to Buckfast in Devon but it was not until 1962 that these joined the English Benedictine Congregation of which Douai is a member.

In answer to a question from the audience on the word 'Douai', the speaker explained that when John F. Kennedy took the oath of office as President, he swore it on a Douai (or Doway) Bible which had been translated from Latin to English at Douai and which served as the principal Catholic Bible in English.

John Chapman

My Zambia

Project Purley met on Friday 18th November for a talk by Ben Viljoen, illustrated with his photos and entitled 'My Zambia'. Fifty years ago, Ben met his wife Dorothy in Lusaka, the capital of the then newly independent Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia). This autumn they made a return journey to enjoy Zambia again and to rediscover their lost youth. Ben first shared with us a little about his family history in southern Africa and his father's career as a civil engineer in central Africa. After completing his education, Ben was employed as a statistician by the Zambian government.

Their recent trip began with some time in the Taj Pamodzi, a beautiful hotel in Lusaka, to recover from the long flight from the UK and to look for some of the places they knew fifty years ago which included the Longacres Lodge where they had first met, and Lusaka Cathedral which was built in the early 1960s and is reminiscent of Coventry Cathedral. Ben also renewed his taste for the traditional food of the region including nshima, a stiff porridge made from ground maize.

They next moved on to Mfuwe and the South Luangwa National Park where they saw plenty of wildlife around the Luangwa River including hippos, elephants, leopards, lions, crocodiles and buffalo.

Ben and Dorothy were keen to revisit the Victoria Falls UNESCO World Heritage Site, and found them sadly depleted due to low water levels at the end of the long dry season. These Falls mark the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe. After a short stay in a hotel situated on the banks of the Zambezi in a small game reserve close to the Falls, they returned to Lusaka, this time renting a house via Airbnb.

They found that although Lusaka has changed a lot in fifty years, the house they were renting and the staff that came with it reminded them very much of the life they once knew. The audience learned that, in a tropical climate, if you see a tree that has mud spread on the trunk, you can be sure you have termites! The termites use the mud covering to protect themselves against the searing heat of the climate.

Ben summed up by telling us that Zambia is still a very poor country, nevertheless the warmth of the Zambian people was evident despite the economic and health problems that the country continues to face.

Jan Brown

The Hound of the Baskervilles

The game was afoot in The Barn on Friday evening, December 9th, as Rain or Shine arrived to present their spoof-like version of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic thriller, "The Hound of the Baskervilles." There was a surprise for the capacity audience even before the play began, as welcomed onto the stage was Maidenhead resident and former Reading Evening Post reporter Clive Baskerville, who is a distant relation of Henry Baskerville. Henry was Conan Doyle's coachman when the doctor was travelling across Dartmoor, and his surname was the inspiration for Baskerville Hall, where much of the action takes place.

But the play begins in Sherlock Holmes's study at 221B Baker Street, where Doctor Watson, played with obvious relish by Anthony Young, and who is on stage virtually throughout, meets the cross-dressed Dr. James Mortimer, who describes the strange goings-on at Baskerville Hall.

Much of Act One is down to exposition and explanation, but the pace and the comedy, both spoken and visual, really increases as the setting moves to the Hall and the misty, spooky, atmosphere of the Great Grimpen Mire. Act Two sees the enthusiastic Watson and the more cerebral Holmes cavorting across the somewhat rickety though atmospheric stage set – what a pity that modern day fire regulations would not allow us to use dry ice to create the Dartmoor mist – as they attempt to track down the escaped convict and the legendary hound.



The hound caught by Sherlock's glass

Of course everyone was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the hound itself and, as he bounded, or should I say emerged on stage, he did not disappoint. Appearing as a diminutive hand-held glove puppet, he snarled and growled at the actors and the audience in a style reminiscent of a Basil Brush or a Roland Rat, and was not averse to take an extra bow or two even after his demise!

The three players alongside Doctor Watson perform a variety of roles and clearly enjoy themselves as they change costume, character, voice and posture. The actual story seems secondary to the slapstick, but the tale is neatly concluded as the final scene returns us to Baker Street, where the legendary detective is playing his violin and explaining the twists and turns in the drama to his faithful supporter and companion.

My sincere thanks to all those who came to watch, and especially those behind the scenes, as well as the families who provided overnight accommodation for the cast. A most enjoyable occasion for all concerned, and most important of all, we have been able to raise the sum of £600 to be donated to Blind Children UK, a charity based at the Guide Dogs for the Blind Centre at Burghfield.

David Downs

The Christmas Party

For the last time in 2016 the members of Project Purley gathered together in the Barn, on this occasion for the Society's Christmas Party. This was a jolly event with more members than ever before attending and, after John Chapman welcomed everyone, all tucked into the food which fast disappeared.

With Christmas music in the background, sounds of chatting and laughter filled the Barn until the Christmas quiz was produced. Then silence reigned as members tried to identify the twenty photographs of images connected with Purley. Finally, when all the answers had been checked, there was a draw between three tables and tie breakers were produced until, at last, a winning table emerged and chocolates were distributed to the successful participants.

Eventually it was time to pack up the Barn for another year and cries of "Happy Christmas" and "see you next year" echoed round the hall; so ended a very enjoyable evening.

Ann Betts

Purley Park Trust

Before the start of the September meeting, a cheque for £450 was presented to Larry Grady, Chief Executive of Purley Park Trust. This was monies raised by the Society earlier in the year at a performance by the Rain or Shine Theatre Company.

Biography

The Last Letter Home

of Robert James Henry Nash 1894-1916

Amongst the names read out in November's annual remembrance service was that of Robert Nash, who was born and grew up in Mapledurham, one of at least thirteen children born to Arthur William and Agnes Jane Nash. His father worked on the farms in and around Mapledurham, sometimes as a carter, sometimes as a general farm labourer and, after leaving school, Robert joined him working on the land.

John Chapman summarised Robert's First World War army service in his article on Purley's War Memorials in The Journal in

June 2014, but as a recap: before war broke out, Robert had enlisted with the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and served with the 1st Battalion in India. The Battalion was later deployed in Iraq and was part of the force defending Kut-el-Amara on the Tigris, 100 miles south of Baghdad. During a five-month siege the garrison was starved into submission by the Turks before they eventually surrendered on 29 April 1916. Several harrowing oral accounts of the siege conditions have been preserved in the Imperial War Museum's archives. Those that survived the dysentery, beriberi, malaria and enteritis which swept through the garrison, were reduced to what their commanding officer would later describe as 'mere skeletons of their normal selves'. Yet their suffering was only to increase at the hand of the Turkish soldiers, who despite their weakened states, herd-marched them across the Syrian Desert in the blazing heat to various destinations in Syria and Turkey, inflicting appalling brutality on their captives on the way. Even the German liaison officers attached to the Turkish Army were appalled and protested in vain.



Robert Nash

Robert died on the 25th September 1916, probably of disease or heat stroke, one of two-thirds of the British forces at Kut who never returned home. He was initially buried in the Adana Cemetery in Turkey, which suggests that he had ended up in the Adana Prisoner of War Camp/Hospital. Relatively little is known about the Turkish POW Camps in the First World War although other Kut survivors are also known to have been incarcerated at Adana, which is believed to have been a working camp for the Baghdad railway. Few photographs survive of the Turkish camps, if they were even taken in the first place,

but those interested can view photographs of what remained of Adana and its hospital in 2010 at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/-50074978@N06/sets/72157625382067978>. For copyright reasons we are unable to reproduce the photographs here.

After the end of the war, a number of scattered cemeteries and grave sites across what was then Mesopotamia were cleared and their occupants reburied in the Baghdad North Gate Cemetery, the Adana Cemetery and Robert included. Baghdad's North Gate Cemetery is unfortunately one of several surviving CWGC cemeteries in Iraq which the Commission currently struggles to maintain to their normal standards, unsurprising really given the difficulties of recent years, and as an interim solution CWGC's Maidenhead headquarters also has a temporary memorial register remembering those commemorated on the memorials.

Following November's remembrance service, one of Robert's surviving nephews, Ian Nash, mentioned in conversation that he had recently come across the last letter sent by Robert to his sister Agnes. He has kindly now given a copy to the society for its archives. Agnes, like so many young girls of her generation went into service after leaving school, initially in Mapledurham and then by 1911 to the Wiggins family at Allanbay Park, a prominent Binfield family. By 1916, however, she was in North Finchley, where she received Robert's short letter apparently in the August. Describing himself as a prisoner of war, Robert was writing from a Turkish hospital, probably that at Adana.

In 1915, the year before his death, Robert's parents had moved from Mapledurham to one of the cottages of Scrases Farm. In his letter to Agnes, Robert frets that he has been unable to write to his mother to inform her of his fate, as he cannot remember her new address. It appears to have been his main concern, and one suspects that he knew that he was likely to die imminently and did not want to do so in a Turkish POW camp without being able to get a final word out to his family to let them know where he was. Whilst he mentions that he has been ill, and presumably continues to be given that he is still in hospital, he is careful to not over-alarm Agnes. Indeed, there is absolutely no mention of the horrors that Robert and his comrades had and continued to endure. For the Nash family, now settled in Purley, the news though of Robert's capture must

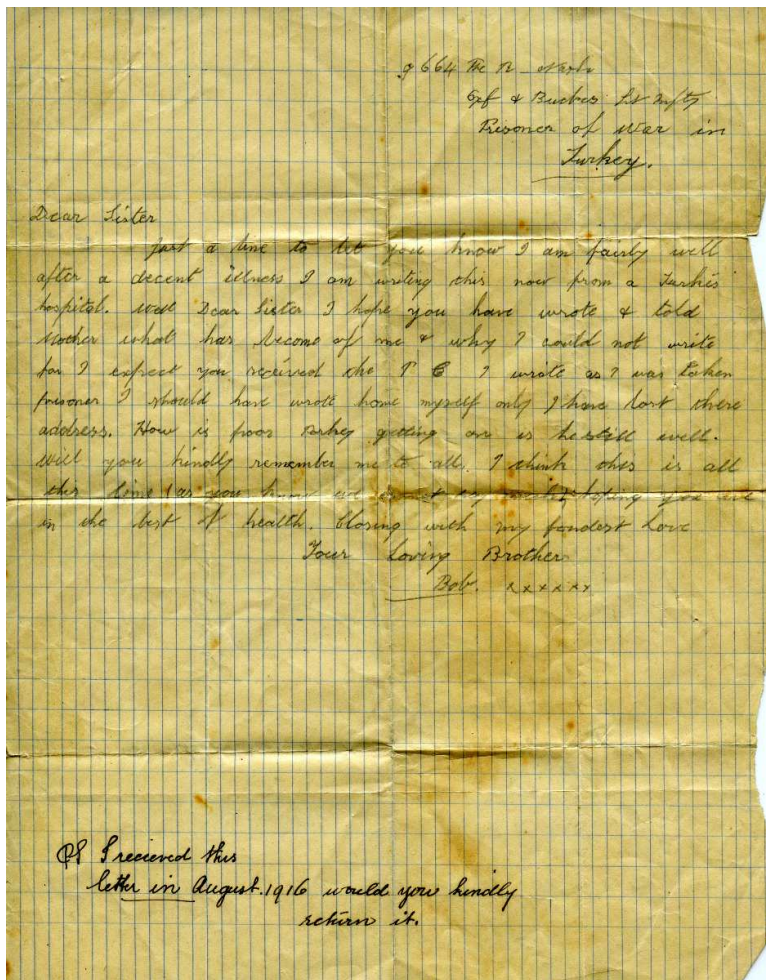
have been devastating, especially coinciding as it did with the report of the death of his brother William, on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

“Dear sister

Just a line to let you know I am fairly well after a recent illness. I am writing this now from a Turkis hospital. Well dear sister I hope you have wrote and told mother what has become of me and why I could not write as I expect you received the PC I wrote as I was taken prisoner. I should have wrote home myself only I have lost there[sic] address. How is poor [unreadable] getting on is he still well. Will you kindly remember me to all. I think this is all this time I as you know are [unreadable] really hoping you are in the best of health. Closing with my fondest love

Your loving brother Bob xxxxxx”

Sad, sad times.



The last letter

Robert and William Nash are commemorated on Purley’s War Memorials in the church and Memorial Hall and also on Mapledurham’s War Memorial. Agnes remained single until her mid-thirties when she married Albert Strange, a bricklayer from Caversham. The marriage took place in St Mary’s Church, Purley, and a copy of their wedding photograph appears on page 54 of Purley in Old Images.

Catherine Sampson

*Obituary****Darrell Hicks***

We have only just heard of the death from heart failure of Darrell Hicks in February of this year. Darrell and his wife, Christine, remained members of Project Purley following their move to Sutton on Sea but ceased to be members two years ago when ill health prevented them visiting their friends in Purley. We first met Darrell and Christine when they attended an exhibition put on by Project Purley in The Barn. Darrell was interested in the section on the River and disappeared to reappear with a photograph of Fred May, a past lock keeper, which he gave to the Society. Following that, they became members of Project Purley and, as they lived in Colyton Way and were affected by the floods of January 2003, I asked Darrell if he would write something about their experiences of the flooding for the Journal. He said he didn't really think he could and I thought no more of it. Then, a fortnight later, Darrell was on my doorstep with an illustrated article for the Journal which appeared in the May 2003 edition. Later Darrell served on the Executive Committee and he and Christine were valued members of the Society. It was with very real sadness that I heard from Christine that Darrell had died and we wish to extend to her and their family our condolences at their very sad loss.

Ann Betts

Nature Notes

by Rita Denman

5th August. There has been a good deal of sunshine and pleasant heat. The garden is full blown and it is an almost daily task to deadhead and prop up the heavy plants. Tomatoes are ripening in the greenhouse and there will soon be some runner beans ready to pick - if I can save them from the pigeons.

12th August. Summer time and the living is easy. There is sun and blue sky and a carefree feeling encouraging lazy days. There has been no rain for a couple of weeks and the ground is beginning to be like concrete. There have been many butterflies in the garden. Hunter dragonflies are beginning to appear and there is a constant

hum of bees.

19th August. Over night, Sunday to Monday there was a full moon and a sky full of stars. All was quiet except for the sound of water rushing at the lock. The calm was suddenly shattered by a scream. The raw sound of nature punctured the air with the last cry of some small creature a victim to prey. It was a reminder that in the clear calm beautiful night there are battles of life and death, survival or failure going on unseen.

26th August. The hot weather continues with temperatures frequently around 30°C and another hottest day of the year recorded. There have been a few showers but not enough to make any impression and the ground remains hot and solid. Purley has escaped the heavy storms but nights have been uncomfortable making sleep elusive.

2nd September. The meteorologist's autumn begins on the 1st September but we ordinary mortals prefer to wait until the equinox which this year falls on the 22nd September. The month began with a traditional mist on the hill and along the river. Tim and Ian at the farm have been hedge cutting. The garden is looking sorry for itself in the dry heat but we will soon be picking apples and pears from the meadow. After an absence the squirrels are making themselves seen and heard so the hazel nuts must be ready too and crab apples will be plentiful. The acorns are looking very handsome on the millennium oak tree and will attract the jays who in turn will bury some in the meadow and if nature took its course there would soon be a young oak forest there.

9th September. There has been heavy rain overnight. Daytime temperatures have been above normal with the prevailing humidity. The farm fields are being tilled and dressed.

17th September. The weather is the same old subject of conversation but one that is forever changing. Until Thursday we were still sweltering in unusually high temperatures and humidity when it came to a dramatic end. Having completed shopping at Waitrose, when we returned to the front of the store we discovered that there had been a deluge and the car park was awash and rain still falling in sheets. As we drove home a full orange sun was in our view

which looked very strange behind a curtain of heavy rain. It was at about 2.30 am that the storm really broke with sheet lightning and near apocalyptic thunder. I still count from the flash of lightning to the roll of thunder to see how far away the eye of the storm is. As it came closer the lightning was so intense that it was blinding even with closed eyes and drawn curtains. As the storm came overhead the lightning was continuous and the thunder alarming. The result was that in the area railway cuttings were flooded, roads blocked, power down and half of Purley had no internet connection.

22nd September. We have arrived at the autumn equinox in the northern hemisphere and the weather has settled down to a more seasonal feel. Morning mists, pleasant sunny days with cooler evenings and nights make for much more restful sleep. A few trees on the hill are beginning to change colour otherwise everything is still very green. Red kites are often heard and are just about visible flying high in a blue sky. Geese and rooks are beginning to be active and noisy early in the day and towards sunset.

1st October. News from EESA of the demise of the Rosetta Probe was quite emotional. What an amazing project it was. Back on earth Tim and Ian have been working by headlamps late into the evening. The ploughs and attendant tractors made a light show of their own.

9th October. It is Sunday morning at sunrise. The busy week is over and there is time to take breath and stand and stare. The leaves are taking on their autumn colours and the sun burnishes newly trimmed hedgerows and trees. White glistening gulls float over the fields which are already tinged with the new green growth. The early grey sky lightens with the promise of a fine autumn day crisp and golden. A small flock of black rooks flap lazily across my view and a few pigeons fly more hurriedly to a new feeding ground. A red kite circles in majestic flight and the black Angus cattle lumber slowly into sight contentedly grazing setting the mood for the day.

16th October. Traditionally the October full moon is called the 'hunters' moon' because in times long past it was easy to find deer and game in the bare fields. This year's 'hunters' moon' was also a supermoon when it comes close to the earth and we were fortunate

to have clear skies in Purley to view it.

22nd October. The beautiful summer weather is now becoming a memory with the shortening of days and colder nights. The trees near to the river are very green but the many specimen trees around Purley are in glorious autumn colour. I found a plume moth in the house. A beautiful insect that looked like a tiny glider with an amazing black and white geometrical design on its wings.

29th October. The year is fast running out and this weekend we alter the clocks. The weather has been mild and dry with misty mornings and sun later in the day. Roe and muntjac deer are coming to the meadow and gulls are a frequent sight skimming over the fields. There are many ladybirds looking for winter quarters. Unfortunately some of them are the unwelcome harlequin species which are threatening our natives.

4th November. The culmination of the year is an artist's palette of colour and a feast for the senses. The distant trees are sombre shrouded in mist but under the nearby hazels there are carpets of crisp yellow leaves. Graceful arching branches of red and gold combine with red berried and yellow fruited bushes. The russet coats of the deer are a perfect camouflage blending into the hedge rows. Clusters of toadstools and delicate fairy rings have appeared overnight and foliage is garlanded with lacy webs. The heavy silence is broken only by the harsh rattling call of a magpie.

11th November. The nation remembers the sacrifices made at the Somme 100 years ago and all those who lost their lives in WW2 and military action since.

From my vantage point with an early morning cup of tea I have an oblique view of Oak Tree Field. A backdrop of trees ranging in autumn colours from yellow to brown and grey appears to arch round encompassing a green arena. A field maple in all its autumn glory is at the left hand side and two Lombardy poplars almost devoid of leaves are on the extreme right. Just off centre at the back is a beautiful specimen tree with a copper head and silver barked trunk that catches the sun and eye. Performing on the arena is a large flock of gulls constantly gliding low from left to right and right

to left their white wings glistening in the sun. Occasionally a solo gull rises above the rest displaying a full wingspan. The brown feathery branches of the poplars sway rhythmically in a slight breeze adding silent music to the performance. Dramatically a flock of pigeons swoops in from the right briefly resting on the maple tree then completing a circuit of the arena leaves in graceful flight. The gull chorus continues in the mesmerising gliding and falling. A band of black rooks is next on stage, swift and menacing mingling with the gulls before regrouping and leaving as suddenly as they arrived. In the background small flocks of river birds fly purposefully up or down stream. The performance ends as the gulls gradually leave until the arena is empty. A few moments in time but a lasting memory of nature's ballet.

18th November. In the Purley area we have been fortunate to hang on to autumn weather although in the north and as far south as Manchester we hear that there has been a fall of snow. Despite some gusty winds the Purley trees are still resplendent in their gold and russet colours and the millennium oak tree in the meadow is looking glorious with a golden crown but as heavy rain and wind is forecast I am making the most of a particularly spectacular autumn while it lasts. Everyone was anxious to see the super, supermoon, the closest it will be to earth until 2034, but for Purley residents it was not to be as the area was covered with cloud.

25th November. In the past few days we have experienced what the weather forecasters have called transitional weather. Although we are almost into December the lingering autumn is still casting a golden glow over the valley but there has also been a hint of winter with dense fog and frost. Four swans in oak tree field have increased to eight. I was fortunate to catch the moment when they arrived. Their flight approach was a graceful glide to touch down. In flight they are huge birds and when they take off a few together with the sun shining on their wings it is a moment to savour.