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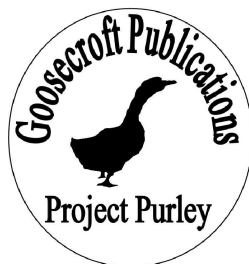
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A Memorable Return to Holland

by Ted Williams

Ted was a senior estimator for Trenthams and lived in one of the Trentham's Cottages at the foot of Long Lane. Here he recalls his visit to Holland to follow up his war experiences. He wrote this for the Trenthams Staff Magazine in 1984; but it is only part of the story.

On the night of June 22nd/23rd 1943 I was the bomb-aimer on a Lancaster flying operation over the Ruhr (or "Happy Valley" as it was known to the air-crews of those far off days).

Flying over Holland on our way to the target, we were attacked by a German night fighter and set on fire. The disastrous result of this attack saw me baling out over the town of Nijmegen and spending the next two years in a POW camp in Germany and my fellow crew-mates all killed when the Lancaster crashed some eight miles away in a field in Beuningen.

The coincidences which resulted in my return almost 40 years later to the scene of my wartime experiences are almost unbelievable but, nevertheless, this is what happened.

I had never before taken a holiday abroad, but last year decided to take the plunge, and my family and I went to Majorca, where we met a Dutch couple.

During our conversation I mentioned the fact that I had been



A Lancaster Mk III Bomber of the type Ted flew in. This mark was also used for the famous Dam Busters raid led by Guy Gibson [M070125]

shot down over their country during the war. Amazingly, they told us that they were originally from Nijmegen and, although now living in Helmond, they ran a bakery in Nijmegen at the time of my unscheduled visit in 1943.

The coincidence of meeting two people from that town on my first visit abroad was so fantastic that we met again on two other occasions before the end of our holiday to discuss our various wartime experiences.

We corresponded frequently over the months after our holiday when I supplied them with further information regarding the night of 22nd/23rd June 1943.

Armed with this further information, Tony Las (our Dutch friend from Majorca) set himself the task of tracing the details of my wartime exploits. First of all, he rediscovered the house and garden into which I had parachuted, and what was even more amazing was the fact that his own bakery at that time was a mere 500 yards from where I had landed. The present owner of the house was living there as a boy of 12 when I parachuted into his garden and remembered well the events of that night.

With this starting point, Tony progressed further by tracing the man who was brought from a house opposite to converse with me in English, as no one else could speak our language. Tony's discussions with this man brought out the fact that I had received attention from a Dutch doctor.

Arrangements were now put in hand for me to revisit Holland and meet again with all those people whose lives were intertwined with mine on that night so long ago.

I suppose that not having experienced the dreadful indignities of an enforced occupation, we cannot fully comprehend what a thankful release it was for the Dutch people when the British and American forces liberated them from the tyranny of the occupying Germans.

My first and most important pilgrimage was made on our arrival in Holland, when we were taken by our hosts to a small British War Cemetery in Uden. This was the most moving of all my

experiences, for it is here that my six former crew-mates lie buried.

The following morning we were taken to Nijmegen and I stood once again on the spot where I parachuted almost 40 years previously.

The welcome we received from Mr Janssen (the occupant of the house) was out of this world. Although unable to speak any English, we had no difficulty whatever in establishing a rapport with each other.

We were then taken to meet the doctor who attended me that night. He is now 78 years old and retired some many years from his medical practice.

We met the man who was brought from a house opposite to act as translator. Until he was called that night, I had little idea of where I was, and thought I had landed somewhere in Germany. I heard with some relief therefore, that I was in Holland.

The next visit was to the small township of Beuningen, where our Lancaster had crashed. This place holds a particular importance for me for a very special reason. From what I have been told, the crashed Lancaster had been quickly cordoned off by the occupying Germans but, during a lapse in their sentry duty, a Dutch farmer and some colleagues managed to spirit away one of the damaged propellers which was then hidden in a meadow for the duration of the war.

On the cessation of hostilities, it was decided by the Burgomaster and the inhabitants of Beuningen that this propeller should be used as a monument to the memory of my six crew-mates, together with those brave Dutch people who also lost their lives in the fight against the Nazis.

In 1950 the propeller, still in its bent and buckled state, was erected in front of the Municipal Buildings and a plaque bearing the names of my six former crew-mates was duly unveiled.

My recent visit to see my old propeller, therefore, was a very moving experience. It stands there still, on a lawn, surrounded by a bed of flowers, cared for and revered by all the inhabitants of Beuningen.

After visiting the propeller we were invited to spend the evening with the Burgomaster of Beuningen and his wife at their nearby home.

After a toast, and with great formality, I was presented with a book commemorating the ceremony of the inauguration of the propeller, together with a plaque bearing the Coat-of-Arms of Beuningen as a mark of gratitude from the inhabitants of the township.

Each year, on the day the Dutch people commemorate their final liberation from their occupation a ceremony is held at Beuningen and fresh flowers are placed around our propeller by the local school children as they remember those six young men.

The Dutch people will never forget them, and neither shall I.

A Bit More About Ted Williams

by Mike Adnett

Mike knew Ted well and he and his wife Pam wheedled more of the story out of Ted.

We moved to our present house in 1988. Two years later the house next door was sold and Ted, his wife Pam and their daughter Bridgette moved in. Ted was a Senior Estimator for G Percy Trentham who at that time were a major construction contractor with their head office located in the parcel of land between the bottom of Long Lane and the Oxford Road. The family had been living in a cottage at the bottom of Long Lane but had to leave it as the land it was on was owned by Trenthams and was being redeveloped.

My wife Sheila and I got to know the family well but there was part of Ted's past we did not know about. Ted was a very likeable man, always smartly dressed, a keen bowler and easy to talk to but he never spoke about the war. We only became aware of this part of his past the more Sheila got to know Pam and we found that Ted was still suffering effects from his wartime experiences. After Ted's death in 1991 Sheila spent most Friday evenings chatting with Pam and we gradually learned more about his wartime experiences.

Ted grew up in Caerphilly but had found work hard to come by after he left school at the age of seventeen. He enlisted in the RAF

before the war and wanted to be a Spitfire pilot until an order went out calling for bomber crews to be urgently formed.

Ted was a bomb aimer in a Lancaster Mk III bomber, LM325 SR-J, on the night of 22/23 June 1943 which took off for a bombing raid on Mulheim, Germany. They were carrying a total bomb load of approximately 10,000 lbs. They were attacked by a German night fighter on the way to the target and the Lancaster crashed close to the town of Beuningen in Holland. They managed to jettison their bomb load before the order to bale out was given. Because he was close to the escape hatch Ted was able to escape when the order to bale out was given. On the way down Ted suffered injuries to his ears from the parachute harness before he landed in a garden in Nijmegen.

Ted wrote a letter on 19 October 1945 to a relative of one of his crew members describing the events when they were shot down:

“We were attacked somewhere over Holland. I was in the bombing hatch at the time preparing for our run over the target. I can't really say for certain what hit us, but I heard a noise like cannon fire and although I never saw it, I'm almost certain we were attacked by a night fighter and as neither of the gunners, Ron and Vince, said anything over the intercom. It must have come up underneath us from the rear, because that was a blind spot, where none of us could see it coming.

Anyway a few seconds after we were hit the aircraft was on fire, and Roy (the pilot) gave us the order to prepare to bale out, so I jettisoned the front emergency hatch, then I asked Roy to open the bomb doors, because I was afraid the incendiary bombs were on fire and I didn't want to risk having the 4,000 lb bomb exploding with the heat before we had all jumped clear. I then jettisoned all the bombs and Roy then gave the order to bale out. I didn't see or hear Ted after we were hit, in fact the only ones who spoke over the intercom were Roy, Jack Osborne and myself and the only two I saw before I jumped were Roy and Jack and they were both OK. You see May, from my little compartment in the nose of the aircraft, it was impossible to see the centre or the rear of the “kite” so I can't really say whether or not Ted was OK before I jumped. After Roy had given the order

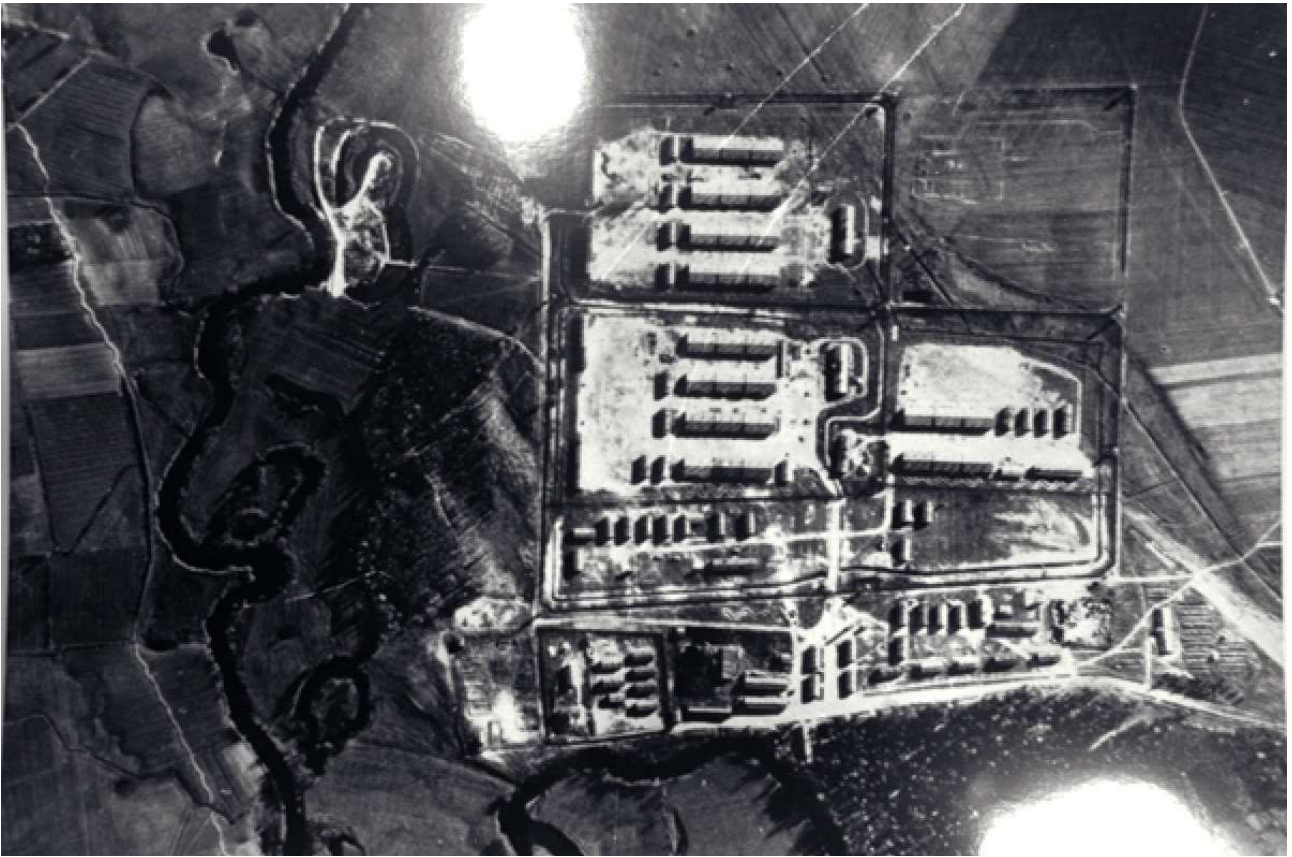
to bale out, I grabbed my parachute pack and I had to beat out a small fire that had started on it before I strapped it on, then I jumped for it.

I landed in the back garden of a house in Nijmegen, and after I had been treated by a doctor for various burns and cuts, I was taken away by the Germans. (Nijmegen at this time was a German garrison town)

The next night I was awakened by my guards and was told that my aircraft had been found and that the rest of the crew had been killed in the crash. Of course for obvious reasons I had to deny that it was my aircraft they had found, so seemingly to prove their words and convince me that they were right they showed me identification discs and marks etc of all of our crew, all except Tomkins but even though they could not produce any identification of PO Tomkins, they seemed definite in their statement that six bodies were found in the aircraft, and from the five identification discs etc. they showed me, it seems that this terrible news is true. Of course not being shown the bodies, I can't



Stalagluft VI was near Heyderug in what is now Lithuania. The prisoners are hanging out their washing [M070126]



An aerial view of Stalagluft VI in mid 1944 when Ted would have been there.

[M070127]

swear to anything, but all that I do know and all that was told me by the Germans I've now told you in this letter."

Ted's injuries were treated by the local doctor before he was captured by the Germans. Several days of interrogation and torture followed before he was sent to Stalagluft VI. He was subjected to further torture which resulted in the complete loss of his sense of taste and also affected his health for the rest of his life.

Ted was in Stalagluft VI for two years before there were rumours circulating that the allies were getting close and the prisoners were force marched away across Germany. At times prisoners were shot by the Germans and Ted concluded that as this might be his fate he would try and escape and when the opportunity arose he jumped behind a pig shed and hid. An Australian friend had also done the same thing and when they were convinced the Germans were far enough away they moved in a direction which they thought might take them to the allies. The Australian became unwell and convinced Ted that he must go on alone which he did until he eventually met a column of British Sherman tanks. After the tank

commander had satisfied himself of Ted's identity he was handed an 'April' Christmas pudding by one tank crew. Eventually he was able to make his way home on a Dakota cargo plane.

Ted met Pam in 1972 and married her on 23 June 1974 which he considered a lucky day. We learned that Ted found it tough to get over his war experiences both physically and emotionally. He never left the country again until the family booked a holiday to Majorca in 1983.

Ted's account of what happened next on this holiday he wrote for the G Percy Trentham staff magazine in 1984

Reminiscence

Purley Lodge

by Edna Bint

Purley Lodge originally consisted of the house, stable block, barn, kitchen and flower gardens and an orchard.

We moved to Purley in 1959 to live in a caravan outside the stable block which was being converted by Tony and Pat Edwards and which would become the Coach House. I remember going to see it before they started and seeing the actual stables and hay loft and the lovely cobblestoned approach that continued on into the stables. In the garden at the back was what remained of a huge greenhouse with steps down underneath presumably for underground heating. We parked our car in the barn next door which was reputed to be circa 1760 and many a night after coming home late we would see a barn owl on the wall, picked out in our headlights. The barn was eventually sold to a Pangbourne couple, Don and Greta Hearne. They converted it into a beautiful house and we had lost a beautiful garage.

The land next to this which had been part of the orchard came up for sale so we bought it and had a house built, moving into it on Remembrance Sunday 1963. I remember it well as we observed the minute's silence half way down the drive having to put down the furniture we were carrying from the Coach House where it had been in store and where we had lived after I had my first baby.

The only new building here when we came was Quince Cottage



Peter Mosley with his dog outside Jasmine Cottages [M010555]

next to the land where our house, Stirrups, is now. The garden of The Gatehouse was also part of the orchard. I think this is shown on one of the maps as separate little trees. I think too that St Ouens and The Folly (on Purley Lane) were also built then on land that was the vegetable garden.

There was a boundary wall around the whole of the estate, most of which is still standing. It included an odd feature in our garden of an arch placed in the bottom of the wall. Several suggestions have been made for this but nobody seems sure as to its original purpose.

The Lodge was sold in two parts. In The Gatehouse lived Peter and Olga Mosley. Peter was the nephew of Sir Oswald Mosley who led the British Fascists in the 1930s. I did not realise until much later that Oswald Mosley had actually bought it. They had two cars, one an American Rambler estate and a Mini, also two dogs: a dalmation called Rambler and a scottie called Mini.

In the other half, still called Purley Lodge was an airline pilot and his family. I remember them investigating an unaccounted for area on the plans and actually discovered a small room which appeared to be some sort of chapel as it has a small font in it. There also appeared what seemed to be a priest hole. They later made it into a bedroom. There is a small font in The Gatehouse too so, at some time, had it had something to do with the church?

There have been several people of interest living here. Tracey Edwards, the skipper of the all-female crew of Maiden on the Whitbread Round-the-world yacht race spent her early years at the Coach House. Tony, her father served with the Royal Berkshire Regiment in Burma in WW2 and was later a noted disc-jockey and rally driver. Richard Cole was the next owner of The Barn. He was the manager for the pop-group Led Zeppelin (That was interesting as the lead singer of another group, Ian Gillan, lived on Nursery Gardens). Mrs Last who lived in Thornwood, at the north side of the Lodge was one of the Jacksons of Reading (remember Jackson's Corner!)

So much has changed since we came here - Mr Gutch's lovely nursery garden is now all houses, the farm, where Farm Close now is, has moved. I can remember having to wait for the cows to cross the road on their way to the meadow. - Happy days!

Meeting Reports

World War 1 Battlefields Tour, 10th - 14th September

Project Purley's most recent, and most adventurous, trip left Purley early on the Sunday morning with 24 members aboard a Leger Tour Coach. After an easy five hour journey via the Channel Tunnel Shuttle service we arrived at the modern Novotel in the centre of Ieper, or Ypres, very close to the Menin Gate and the Grote Markt. There was plenty of time to settle in and have a wander before dinner around the town centre which had been carefully reconstructed after being completely flattened in 1914-18.

Monday was an early start as we headed south stopping at the Royal Berkshire's Cemetery at Ploegsteert, the first of the beautifully



*Showing the new Berkshire flag at the Berkshire Cemetery near Ploegsteert.
[M010559]*

kept cemeteries that are found all over the landscape. We also had a first look at the new Berkshire County Flag which we held for a special group picture. From there we wended our way south via Arras and Vimy Ridge to the Somme where we spent most of the day. At some stops we searched out the graves or memorials to those Purley men who died here. At each of these one of the group gave a short speech about their life and death, another read a short poem and a minute's silence was followed by the laying of a wreath.

We made a total of 10 stops; some were tiny cemeteries surrounded by fields or woods – others, such as Thiepval, a great monument to the missing and dead. It was strange in a way – the scenery is quite similar to parts of Berkshire and there is almost no sign that a dreadful battle was waged across the land for four years. Only the presence of the neat cemeteries with the rows of graves were a constant reminder of that awful time.

Tuesday was more relaxing – a late start and a visit to the wonderful “In Flanders Fields” Museum in Ypres followed by drive around the Ypres Battlefield. We made several stops including the Tyne Cot Memorial, where wreathes were laid on three memorials, and the German Cemetery at Langemarck. In the evening we attended the very moving “Last Post” Ceremony at the Menin Gate.

On Wednesday, the bulk of the party took the coach to Bruges for a day of sightseeing while the rest stayed in Ypres to do some exploring on their own. In the evening, the whole group joined up to have a very good dinner at The Anchor on the Grote Markt in Ypres.

We left the next morning and were back in Purley around 3 pm. On reflection it seems strange to report that the trip was enjoyable – but it was, and the group got along famously. Was it depressing? In places certainly – but overall it was more an occasion for reflection, thought & memory.

Rob Wallace

Treasures beneath our feet and the Watlington Hoard

15th September - talk by James Mather:

It's a real fairy-tale story – enthusiastic metal detectorist and amateur archaeologist finds treasure trove, which turns out to be not just beautiful but historically very significant! Luckily for us, James Mather is now channelling some of his enthusiasm into talking about the long years of searching and the magic (and quite frightening) moments of his amazing find. Perhaps just occasionally it's good to be out in the cold and the wind!

The wonderfully illustrated talk gave us lots of background to the lonely hours spent in the fields, with information on the rules and regulations covering where metal detectors can be used, the reporting of any finds, and the equipment that is used. We also had details of the find itself, the scary three day wait before the local archaeologists could arrive on site, and pictures of the excavation of

the bulk of the hoard, which was taken out in one big lump of clay and flint to be separated out in the workrooms of the British Museum.

The range of sites that can be searched with metal detectors (with the landowner's permission) is surprisingly wide, including ploughed land, pasture, forests, building sites, beaches, and spoil heaps. In Reading (for a £10 fee) you can also search in the council parks, which is apparently quite unusual. But then Reading is still searching for Henry ...

Subject to the quite precise conditions of the Treasure Act of 1996 (more than one coin more than 300 years old, gold or silver; more than one artefact of prehistoric date, and so on), any finds must be reported to the coroner within 14 days, and the penalty for not reporting a find can be three months in prison or a fine of £5000. We were assured that the rules are rarely broken, and that it's not an occupation that pays more than a tiny hourly rate overall, so the joy must be all in sharing the knowledge and publicising the finds.

The Watlington Hoard, of coins, silver ingots, and jewellery, found just two years ago in October 2015, has certainly had plenty of publicity. It is the first Viking hoard to be found in Oxfordshire, and only the 17th to be found in the country. The place of its discovery, and the mint condition of the coins, suggest that it may have been part of a payoff by Alfred the Great to the Vikings to refrain from the usual slaughter after a battle. The 200 Anglo-Saxon coins, from 875 to 880 AD, also shed fresh light on the relationship between the Anglo Saxons and the Mercians, as some of the coins show both kings, Alfred and Ceolwulf II, together. It gave the historians plenty to think about! The Hoard is now on display at the Ashmolean museum, after donations from the National Lottery, the Art Fund and the public contributed to its purchase.

To my mind, one of the best bits of the story is that the big find came after 25 years of small finds, and many, many shotgun cartridges, ring pulls, bits of barbed wire and horseshoes. If the big hoard had been found early on, would the following years all have been a bit of an anti-climax?

The talk was greatly appreciated by the 59 Project Purley members and guests who attended the meeting, many of whom stayed on to view some of the coins and artefacts that James brought along, which he has dug up over many years.

Gillian Wallace

English Calendar Customs

October's meeting of Project Purley welcomed Jameson Wooders as speaker, who gave Project Purley members and guests a time travel trip through a year of English Calendar Customs filled with Morris dancing and mythical beasts.

The trip started on 12th Night - 5th January - continuing to the Feast of Epiphany on 6th January. This is one of the earliest recorded celebrations of its type, recorded by Samuel Pepys, and a procession with wassail singing and colourful characters. Here, as in all the festivals, there is no evidence of pagan rites, only a set of characters and customs that change through the years according to the tastes of the time, and probably using whatever costumes could be begged, borrowed or made. This is currently celebrated annually at the Globe Theatre, where a King of Beans and a Queen of Peas, are elected each year.

Plough Monday follows, on the Monday after 12th Night. Originally a church-led custom to collect money to bless the ploughs, it was banned at the Reformation, but morphed into a festival with straw bears and Molly dancers (like Morris dancing by ploughboys in big boots) collecting money for the ploughmen themselves. Beware the law of unintended consequences. Plough Monday is mostly observed in East Anglia, having been resurrected in the early 2000s after effectively dying out in the 1930s.

Easter brings more dancers, including the Britannia Coconut Dancers of Bacup in Yorkshire, followed by Hocktide in Hungerford, with its 'Tutti men', currently dressing in top hats and tails, collecting penny rents from the town's commoners. May Day is celebrated widely, with Morris dancing, Jack in the Green characters and hobby horses in many places. Whitstable has a Jack in the Green festival, and May Day for Padstow is 'Obby Oss Day', with

two competing hobby horses.

Whitsun brings cheese rolling in Gloucestershire, with ambulances and mountain rescue teams stationed at the bottom of the hill, which tells you all you need to know about the custom. Lancashire and Yorkshire still celebrate Rush Bearing at the end of summer, with ceremonies for the new rushes (and Morris dancing of course), and Abbots Bromley in Staffordshire has a horn dance (lots of antlers – and Morris dancers) on Wakes Monday, the first Monday after 4th September.

An Act of Parliament in 1606 stipulated that Bonfire Night MUST be observed, and while most towns and villages have their own fireworks and bonfires, Lewes in East Sussex takes it seriously. It has about seven different bonfire societies who parade through town and each has their own bonfire and effigy to burn. Ottery St Mary in Devon just makes it seriously dangerous. They carry burning tar barrels through the streets! Boxing Day celebrations bring the year to a close, with sword dancing in Grenoside, and other places in Yorkshire – perhaps not something to try if you have overindulged on Christmas Day.

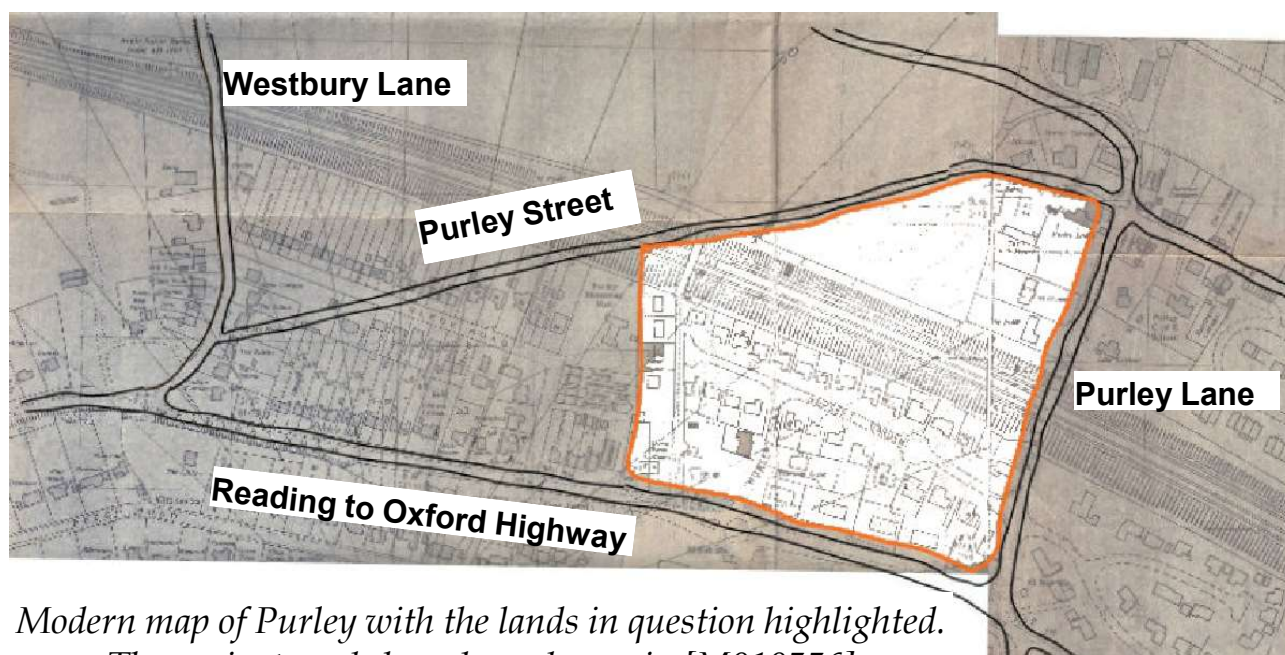
We are all grateful to Jameson for his fascinating talk and photographs, opening our eyes to an aspect of English culture that was almost lost in the mid twentieth century, but is being enthusiastically resurrected in many parts of the country.

Gillian Wallace

The Lands of Reading Abbey in Purley on Thames

The November talk was about a strip of land in Purley, once part of the holdings of Reading Abbey. It is a small piece of land, about 15 acres, to the West of what is now Purley Lane, extending East and South roughly to the Beech Road turn from Purley Rise, opposite the Post Office on Purley Rise. Its title of which can be traced back almost one thousand years.

The land was part of Purley Parva, one of the four Purley manorial holdings listed in the Domesday Book, and it was shown as the inheritance of Isabella, the widow of Simon de Siffrewast



*Modern map of Purley with the lands in question highlighted.
The ancient roads have been drawn in [M010556]*

whose family owned land in Purley from the 1100s. She gave the land, officially half a virgate in the measurements of the time, to Reading Abbey. around 1195 Interestingly the title seems to have been in dispute for around 50 years, apparently all related to women's property rights – whether Isabella held it as part of her marriage portion, or whether it was part of her widow's portion.

It remained in the hands of Reading Abbey until dissolution in 1538 when it was sold to the Earls of Shannon but what the Abbey did with the land is shrouded in mystery although there are many speculations about it. The land passed through the hands of several families, with what was probably the first Purley Lodge being advertised to let in the Reading Mercury in 1776.

When the land was cut in half by the Great Western Railway in 1838, the Southern (uphill) half of the land was sold off to the Sykes family, who owned Basildon Park, and they built Westfield, a new house here, where Nursery Gardens is now. On the North side of the railway line, Purley Lodge and its barn and coach house, and the remaining land were eventually split up into separate properties.

It is rare for any piece of land to have such a detailed history, and John gave us a very interesting history of the passage of ownership through the years of a significant piece of our own village.

Gillian Wallace

Dracula, or a Pain in the Neck

“Fangs ain't what they used to be” could have been an alternative title for Rain or Shine's production when they visited The Barn on Friday evening, December 8th. Tom Jordan's inventive direction involved modern and original elements such as Dracula making his first entrance on a skateboard, some well-rehearsed ad-libs, e.g. “And don't call me Shirley,” and malapropisms such as “you, living in your irony tower.”

The traditional elements of Bram Stoker's Gothic horror story, written in 1897, were there too, as Professor Van Helsing tried to prevent the infamous Count from sinking his teeth into everyone. The audience were treated to comedy, slapstick and energetic chaos, as well as Dracula being confronted by sunlight and the crucifix. Of the four-strong cast, playing a variety of roles, company veteran Anthony Young excelled as Dracula, hamming it up for all he was worth, with a widow's peak, long flowing cloak and terrible teeth, which he forgot to remove on one occasion as he switched to the character of Doctor Seward.

Those who were looking forward to the more bizarre elements of the tale were not disappointed either. The lunatic Renfield appears behind the bars of the asylum as well as in a vertical coffin on stage, and clever special effects enable Dracula to feed Mina Murray with his own blood so that he can control her. A hovering bat makes a brief but comical appearance, and Dracula eventually dies in smokey London after relocating from darkest Transylvania, a stake having been driven through his heart – a metaphor for an early version of Brexit perhaps!

So the adapted version of Stoker's tale excited as well as amused the 120 strong audience, whose support and generosity at the leaving collection means that £400 can be donated to Reading Street Pastors (reading@streetpastors.org.uk) the charity to benefit on this occasion.

My sincere thanks to all those involved with the event, especially those who helped prepare The Barn and refreshments, and the families who hosted the actors for their overnight stay in Purley.

Rain or Shine will return on Friday, June 8th to present Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing." Until their next visit, it is a case, as Dracula might have said, of "Fangs for the memory."

David Downs

Christmas Party

On the evening of Friday, 15th December, society members gathered in the Barn for the annual Christmas Party. The Barn had been decorated and looked very festive with a Christmas tree and table decorations and Christmas music put everyone in the mood for a good time.

The food tables were laden with all sorts of good things to eat and soon everyone was munching away happily. Then it was time for the usual quiz and this year members were asked to identify images of local bridges and arches. After much head scratching and racking of brains, the answers were finally disclosed. The joint winners were announced and Jackie Brown and Richard McDonald each received a bottle of wine as their prize.

At the end of the evening Christmas cards were exchanged, Chairman, John Chapman, wished everyone a Happy Christmas and members left to go home hopefully having had an enjoyable evening.

Ann Betts

Nature Notes

by Rita Denman

5th August 2017. The jet stream remained south of the UK for some time and consequently the weather was changeable mainly from wet, to not so wet and with a few sunny spells here and there.

11th August. The weather is so confusing it's a job to know where we are. A day of warm sun and then a couple of days of heavy rain and much colder.

On Tuesday of this week it rained for 24 hours. Some work in the meadow has been possible on relatively dry days and despite the lack of sun the blackberries are ripening. Last week's harvest of

blackberries, apples and damsons has been made into jam. The first picking of the runner beans, St George variety, were tender and delicious. The dunnock family that comes to the feeders in the front garden are thriving. Flo sits on the window sill watching them and I watch Flo. She makes little noises at them and talks with her ears. When they are flat she is annoyed. One ear up and one down is a puzzled look and both forward she is very interested in something.

18th August. Without some control the meadow would be full of brambles. When we made the first clearance we left one bush which has been half trained and this is the source of the blackberry harvest. The apple harvest is very good. Everything is naturally grown. The fruit is not supermarket perfection but it looks beautiful on the trees. The crab apples as always are prolific and conference pears doing well. Sybil Pryor gave us a walnut tree sapling soon after we planned the meadow and it is now a sizeable tree. The nuts are the same colour as the leaves and difficult to spot but the squirrels know exactly where they are and always get there first. Sometimes they bury them, favouring pots and tubs. where the seedlings emerge.

The geese are beginning to fly about. I saw a couple of hundred in two large formations fly eastward along the river. They could be residents on a day out, flying back in the evening.

8th September. Not a lot to report. The weather has been mixed and very dull, but Wednesday was brighter and from early morning there were geese flying overhead.

The Angus cattle contentedly chewed the cud in Oak Tree field, knee deep in fresh pasture.

15th September. Autumn is here and the leaves are beginning to turn. It has been a confused year weather wise. At present there is cold rain or warm sun, storm clouds or blue heavens, heavy rain, hail and strong winds. Early morning light revealed a blue sky suffused with red and as the sun rose trees and fields were burnished with gold, every leaf on the trees glittering in a stiff breeze. Dozens of geese take part in a morning commute from west to east or east to west and in the evening they all return.

24th September. The weekend of the Equinox. The forecaster explained that this is the day when light and dark are actually equal. It has been a busy week in the meadow.

The hedges have been trimmed and trees tidied and the millennium oak has had the lower branches removed. Grandsons have cut the long meadow grass.

Early in the year there was very hot weather and the plant life put on a tremendous amount of growth and then it was checked by cold weather and frost. This was followed by more seasonal weather and everything got going again. In effect we had two seasons of springtime. Colours in the garden are intense with red berries and late roses which are particularly attractive as the light fades. It is the time of year to slow down, take stock and just sit and stare.

1st October. A wet early Sunday morning. Boughs are weighed down and puddles on the patios indicate recent heavy rain. The grey sky is opaque and a mist over the hills shrouds the outline of the trees. A small flock of starlings is flying excitedly in all directions. The cattle are grazing quietly on the far side of Oak Tree Field. The rumble of an approaching airliner is the only sound and as it passes and fades away into the distance, silence returns. The end of the year garden is untidy but last roses are a reminder of the Summer glory. Large brown leaves from the ash tree litter the grass. So much to be done. For the local pigeons it is a good day as the pyracantha berries are ripe and ready to eat.

An imperceptible movement of air sets the heavy hydrangea heads nodding as though in agreement in some private conversation. There is little movement in the village just an occasional car passing through. On what errand? A much anticipated day out, or merely a Sunday 'shop' at the supermarket. Soon the spell will be broken.

The 'plane schedule will gather momentum. Sunday walkers will be coming through the village and strangers will marvel at the tiny corner of Purley's history that has managed to survive and the normal bustle of village life will resume.

6th October I enjoy October's final flourish of the year with flame coloured leaves, autumn fruits, hedgerow berries, fungusand spiders ! It is time to use a spider stick to clear away the elastic silk webs that are across the path, an unseen hazard for the unwary.

Hurricane Maria crossed the Atlantic venting her dying throes of anger on the southern counties of the UK

13th October The weather for the week has been dull, bright, warm, drizzly and windy. Forecasters have promised an exceptionally warm weekend in the south but the end of hurricane Ophelia which is making her way up from the Azores arrives soon and will affect Ireland and the west coast of the UK with high winds expected inland.

There hasn't been much wildlife activity in the meadow except for a lone crow and squirrel undulating its way across the grass.

20th October The promised weekend of warm weather with temperatures reaching the mid 20s centigrade was eagerly anticipated. The sun was out early on Saturday morning but soon disappeared. Sunday began dull but quiet and was unseasonably warm. Monday dawned grey with dappled skies which gave way to bright sun and a gentle breeze but around mid day the light levels dropped dramatically, the wind got up and the sky turned an ominous yellow with a very eerie atmosphere. We later learned that this was all due to hurricane Ophelia collecting sand from the Sahara desert and ash from the wildfires burning in Portugal.

It is 40 years since the UK experienced the hurricane that destroyed thousands of trees and devastated well known public gardens in the southern counties.

27th October. Up and about early on Wednesday I made a cup of tea and sat in the dark waiting for the dawn to break. The blackness gave way to deep grey nothingness.

Very slowly the outlines of hills and shapes of trees that I know so well took form. Without a sound the sun rose and the nothingness changed to infinity. My mind took flight into the unknown, the great force of nature and the unanswerable questions. Gathering myself for the hum drum day that lay before me I found that my tea had gone cold. The day turned into a wonderful autumn celebration as I worked around the garden and meadow. In the ash tree a rook was rehearsing its trills and calls clucks and chuckles. Rooks seem to have an endless repertoire. It was a very warm day which brought out damsel flies, bees and butterflies and ended in a glorious sunset

which set the autumn colours afire.

November 3rd Fog hung about for two or three days and affected the main motorways causing a number of accidents. When the fog did clear the sun was very pleasant and highlighted swans flying along the river.

November 10th Variety is the best way to describe the week's weather. Sun and blue skies, rain and cloud, fog and for the first time this season frost in the Reading area with temperatures dropping to around -4°C The leaves fall in continual showers and although the gardens are looking very untidy there are still blossoms on many of the summer perennials. A rosy glow at sun up and sun set still lights the autumn scene.

November 17th The long mild autumn continues with many trees still dressed in their magnificent colours. However frost is forecast. With the evenings drawing in and the clocks changed to GMT it is getting dark at 5.30pm and it feels as though winter is just around the corner. Betty and Flo are getting their winter coats and are spending more time indoors .

November 24th It is the season when the birds feed up for the winter and the cotoneaster berries growing on the garage wall have been a great attraction. From dawn to dusk there is a continual procession of birds arriving. Blackbirds are congregating to take their share of the feast. They perch on anything handy and fly at the bush despite the really vicious thorns. Blue tits disappear entirely into the centre and the fat wood pigeons waddle about very cautiously. Field Fares have joined in the fun. Red Kites patrol the fields for anything that has met an untimely death and the swans continue to fly nearer to the river. So far they have not been attracted into Oak Field neither have the geese. In fact the geese have been very quiet. The small flock of starlings is still in this area of Purley and appears from time to time. There are a few magpies and I got as far as 1 for sorrow 2 for joy 3 for a girl and 4 for a boy.

Postscript

Congratulations to John Devine on his election as Villager of the year for 2017. John has been a Parish Councillor and chairman of the Memorial Hall committee for many years..