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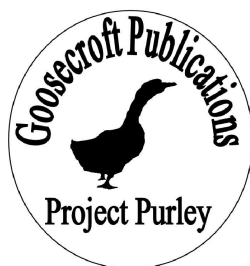
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Purley Parish Council Part 1

by John Chapman

Parish Councils are by far the oldest form of local government. In this two part article we look at the background to parish government and then in January to the achievements of Purley Parish Council in its formative years.

Government comes from two directions: down, from a central authority such as the King or a parliament who tell people what to do or what not to do: or up from the grass roots who decide the rules for their community. In Saxon times communities were governed by a gathering of all eligible villagers at what was known as the Witangemot or Moot which met when decisions needed to be taken. One of the key decisions to be taken every year was what crops to grow and which strips each villager would use in the Common field.

After King Edgar decreed in 939 that tithes on the fruits of the land were to go to the church, pilgrims and the poor and required each church to agree with its neighbours which piece of land went with which church it soon became clear that some sort of organisation was required which assigned roles to individuals. This was essentially the start of the Parish system which was quite different from the Manorial system. In Purley's case this meant settling the boundaries of the parish taking into account the pieces of land in which Whitchurch and Sulham had an interest. This boundary enclosed lands from four manors, Purley Magna, Purley Parva, La Hyde and Lething.

In order to allocate responsibilities an annual meeting was held around Easter time which became known as the Parish Vestry. Initially the two chief roles to be allocated were People's Warden to represent the interests of parishioners and Vicar's Warden whose key job it was to look after the parish church and represent the interests of the clergy. Gradually throughout medieval times decrees were handed down from on high for other roles to be covered. These included Constables and Tithing Men, Haywards, Surveyors of the Roads and Overseers of the Poor. In addition the running of the parish required the appointment of Clerks, Vergers and Sextons

By the 19th century there had been many changes, for instance

constables were being absorbed into the police force and surveyors' duties taken over by Turnpike Trusts. The Parishes Act of 1884 was what triggered the start of the present parochial system which tends to be very confusing as it differentiated between Civil and Ecclesiastical functions. Parishes which started out the same soon became different as for example the order of 1897 which left odd bits of land with Sulham and Whitchurch outside the Ecclesiastical Parish but transferred most of them into the Civil Parish.

By this time there were other bodies taking over various duties. Purley was part of the Bradfield Union which administered the Poor Law. It was also part of the Bradfield Sanitary District which looked after health and sewerage matters. These had been formed in the mid 1800s and eventually overseen by Berkshire County Council formed in 1894 who took over education and highways.

The Parish Meeting

When Parish Councils were introduced in 1898 following the 1896 Local Government Act there was an option for smaller parishes to have an Annual Parish Meeting to transact business and to appoint two Overseers to look after things for the rest of the year. It was this option that Purley took and the Lord of the Manor, Anthony Morris Storer assumed the role of chairman of the meeting, continuing to exercise his dominating role until he died in 1902 after which the Rectors assumed the role of Chairman. The meetings were held regularly except in 1902 following the death of Major Storer and 1914 because of the outbreak of war.

Effectively one overseer acted as clerk and was paid an honorarium and the other represented Purley's interests on the Board of Guardians of the Bradfield Union Workhouse.



Anthony Morris Storer II who was Lord of the Manor in 1898 and assumed the role of Chairman of the Parish Meeting [M050271]

Formation of the Parish Council

In 1927 there were considerable reforms in Local Government being debated and it was felt that it was about time Purley had its own Parish Council. This was agreed by Berkshire County Council and the new Parish Council met for the first time on Monday March 28th 1927 at the school. The Rev C H Coe was elected Chairman and Horace John Turner was appointed as Parish Clerk at a salary of two guineas per annum.

At first the Parish Council had only 5 members. This was increased in twos to 13 but while Purley is entitled to go to 15 it has stuck at 13. However it was becoming increasingly difficult to persuade people to stand for election and existing members were usually left to co-opt people to the Council.

Next time something about the achievements of Purley Parish Council

A History of Purley Memorial Hall

A story of a remarkable community

By John Murphy

To set the scene: In 1946, the country was still in economic crisis following the war, -

Austerity as we know it today is nothing to the hardships of that time - money was in very short supply; rationing still controlled. Almost all you could buy at that time, was mainly food - a piece of meat the size of a mobile phone was one person's meat ration for a week - and clothing; the shelves in the shops were mostly bare. The main diet of the time was bread and potatoes!

There were endless government regulations and orders over all aspects of living. The military historian, Correlli Barnett, had summarised the situation with brutal clarity: "the post war British people had 'the psychology of the victor although their material circumstances approximated more to those of a loser'".

It was a desolate time. But in desolate times communities do bond and pull together and this is the story of the making of the Purley Memorial Hall.

It was at a Parish meeting that the villagers of Purley decided

they wanted to create a war memorial to remember those soldiers of Purley who did not come back from both the Great War and the Second World War, but also to build an amenity for those that did, to enjoy.

The driving force for this memorial was a wee Scots lady, Mrs Florence Goodwin, a lady with drive and determination, immense energy and vision for what could be done. It was at her house, Wakering Cottage in Westbury Lane, that the idea of the village hall was first discussed. She was untiring in her efforts and dedication towards the building of the hall. Bert Nicholls remembers her saying in her broad Scottish accent, "We've got no money, don't know where it's going to be", "But she got a committee together; she was the driving force to getting the hall started".

I have in front of me a small A5 minute book; I opened the red cover with "July 1946" handwritten on the front. The heading on the inside cover in Florence Goodwin's handwriting was "Purley War Memorial"; the words were underlined. The first page started.....

Mrs Florence Goodwin

After a Parish meeting was held in the schoolroom on Monday July 15th at 7.30 p.m. to discuss ways and means of obtaining site or buildings for hall or playing fields, the Committee elected was as follows: Miss Scott Stokes (Chairman), Mrs Goodwin (Secretary), Mr J Melville, Mr H Tidbury, Mr J Warwick, Mr Fothergill, Mr Halsey

It was agreed that suitable premises or land be sought for a village hall and this was left in the hands of the Committee to report at the next meeting to be held on Monday July 22nd at Mrs Goodwin's house.



*Florence Goodwin who was one of the masterminds behind the Memorial Hall
[M010569]*

So started a story of this remarkable community, and the village hall they built; the hall which spanned seven years from conception to its grand opening.

Miss Scott-Stokes, also of Westbury Lane, a highly educated lady with a beautiful trained barrister's mind, was elected the Hall Committee's first Chairman. She was also the Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council. She did much work in London for the underprivileged for which she received the OBE. It was Miss Scott Stokes who steered and focused the Hall's Committee impeccably throughout the build.

The village needed a hall badly, the servicemen certainly deserved all the amenities that could be given to them and it was decided that somehow or other they would raise the money from within the village. The idea was received enthusiastically by the nine hundred or so villagers of Purley and everyone became very busy raising funds by organising events such as fetes, whist and beetle drives and dances: concerts were given by the then Purley WI choir, anything else the villagers could think to do, they would. A house-to-house collection - the "Penny a Week Fund" - was started and this brought in from thirty shillings to two pounds every week.

The Committee decided very early on that a "playing field" would not serve the needs of ex-servicemen, so a hall it had to be. The Committee looked at a number of sites around Purley but very soon they set their eyes on a plot of land attached to the north east corner of the new Glebe Road.

A special Committee meeting was called to consider the purchase of the land. The Committee were unanimous in their vote that "the land was admirable for the village hall, with lovely views of the Chiltern Hills." Mrs Goodwin was tasked to approach the owner, to ascertain if the land could be purchased. The answer was in the affirmative and a price was agreed at £120; the Committee had their land.

Miss Scott-Stokes guided the Committee through the purchase. At that time, a charitable trust was to be formed called "Purley Memorial Hall". On the 15th October 1947 the conveyance of the land was completed and the Trust set up. The first Trustees were

Miss Scott-Stokes, Mrs Goodwin and Mr Melville.

Also in these very early months the Committee were deliberating on the type of building for the hall; they considered buying an ex-army hut from Aldermaston as a temporary hall but very quickly decided a new build hall was the best option.



Bert Nicholls [M010563]

The village was fortunate in having among its residents the architect, Mr Lewis

Trevers, and he offered to design the hall. To build a new hall at this time, a building licence was required and the plans had to be approved. Mr. Trevers undertook all this work for the Committee. The first plans were rejected but revised plans were re-submitted and approved. All through the build Mr Trevers visited the site weekly to give advice and, if anyone wished to consult him during the week, he never failed them - a fine voluntary effort for a busy man.

The Committee had the job of finding someone who would be willing to take charge of the actual building operations - for even building of the hall was to be done by voluntary labour. They approached Mr. Bert Nicholls who lived in Glebe Road. He was a bricklayer and a foreman in the building trade. He readily agreed to undertake the work and find volunteers to help him. From 1948 to 1953 he devoted most of his spare time to the work.

And so it was that in November 1948 the village turned out to watch Bert Nicholls and ten helpers start digging the foundations

for their very own hall. Bert spoke highly of his pals who had helped him, especially Ron Winters (Bert's shadow as he was known) who had been with him all the time. Mr. Nicholls had been the only skilled man on the job but he said his helpers have been quick to learn, (in all, Bert had up to 40 "apprentices"). At a later stage Bert recalled these early days and said "It was a Saturday night when we were putting down the foundation concrete. We hadn't finished by 8p.m. so I asked for a few volunteers for 6 o'clock on Sunday morning. I needn't have worried; ten men turned up and we completed the job by 9 a.m.

At this time the Committee realised that, although the fund raising was going well, they would need more money to complete the hall so they made an application for a grant from the Ministry of Education. This proved a protracted negotiation but was, in the end, successful.

The whole village was always enthusiastic to see their hall being built and to help out where they could. Over all the years the building work continued. Mrs Fitchew who, with her husband, owned the newsagent shop, provided refreshments for the workers throughout the build to keep their energies up.

As the build continued the young boys and girls of the village



[M010562] - Villagers at work on the new hall - [M010561]

(when the builders were at their day-job) would play hide and seek or cowboys and Indians around the emerging wall (their fort) with no fears; certainly no thought of the unheard of “Health and Safety” but even these young children wanted to help with the build.

When the London Brick Company delivered a fresh supply of bricks, they would be there to help unload the bricks and pile them where Bert required them, and to their delight, the driver rewarded them by giving them a ride in his lorry to the end of Glebe Road.

Mrs Goodwin said “There had never been lack of feminine support, and now the hall was nearing completion, the enthusiasm was even greater.” She pointed with pride to the window frames and the girders in the roof. “The womenfolk couldn’t do the bricklaying, but we did paint those before they were put in.”

Bert said “The only non-voluntary work has been the putting in of the gas pipes and the roof lining – the latter is rather a specialist job. We have done everything else including the plumbing; and young Mr Harris, who is an electrician and lives in the village, did all the wiring for us.”



The hall as finally built [M010567]

It was 1952; sadly King George VI died and Princess Elizabeth ascended to the throne; knowing there would be a Coronation, this set a date in everybody’s mind and work to complete the hall was stepped up a pace.

The County architects had inspected the hall and, other than minor details to be adjus-

ted, the hall was all in order. The hall was ready and in use for the Queen's Coronation, along with the many other celebrations. Bert Nicholls said "We worked 'tooth and nail' to get it ready for the Coronation" and at 5 o'clock the day before the Coronation, he walked out of the Hall and said "There you are".

Among the many celebrations in the village the Committee arranged for the Co-op to bring a projector and big screen and many villagers gathered into the hall to watch the Coronation.

At the AGM in October 1953 following the Hall's opening Mr Theobald, (who was now the Hall Committees Chairman) was able to announce that the Committee had been fortunate to buy an adjoining piece of land to the west of the hall for £200. This enlarged the site to as it is today.

It was Wednesday 14th October, the day of the official opening - the hall had been used for many functions already. The hall was officially opened by Mr Anthony Hurd, MP for Newbury. Distinguished people were present including his wife, Mrs. Hurd, Hon. Humphrey Legge, Chief Constable of Berkshire and Miss M McCullough, HM Inspector of schools for Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

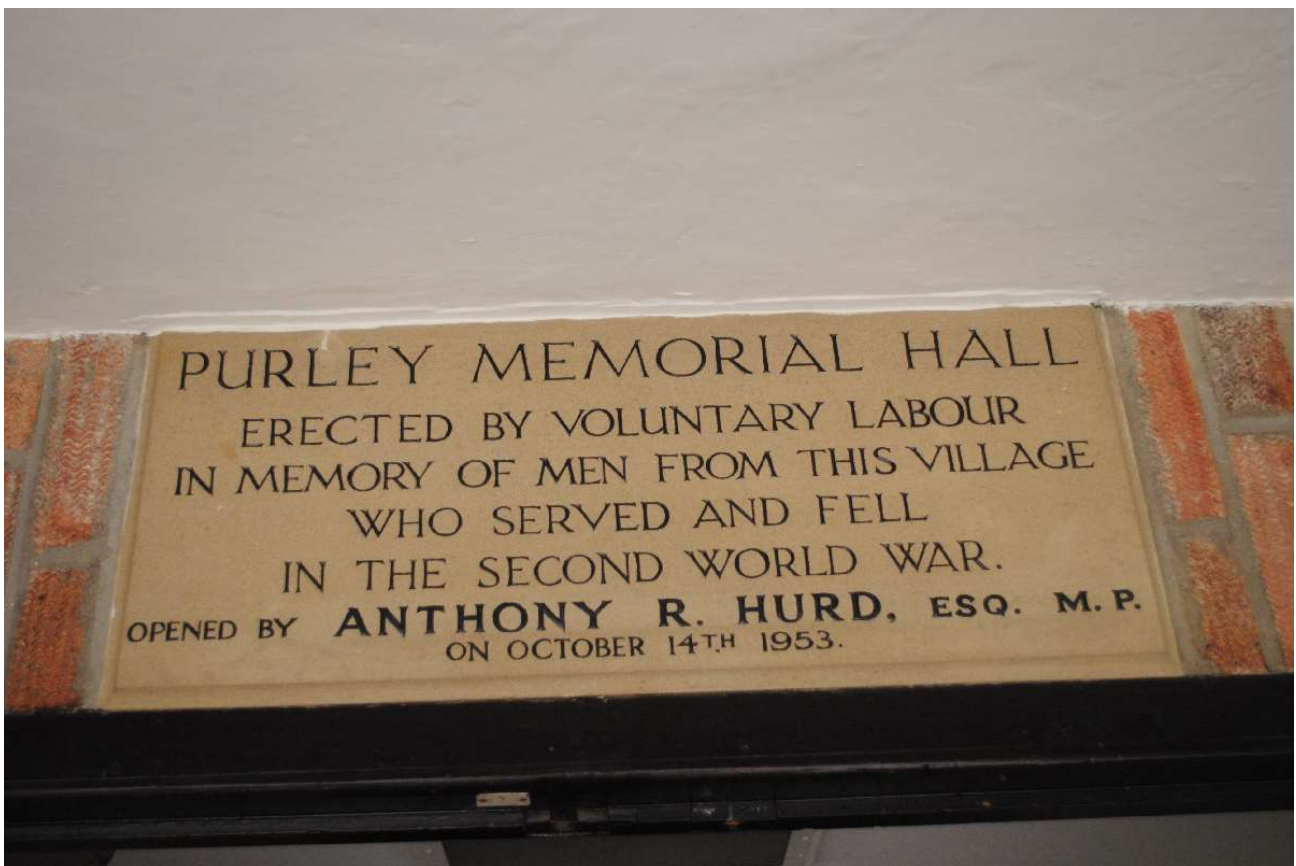
The hall was packed with villagers. In his speech Mr Hurd - whose pleasure in taking part in Purley's "great day" was very evident - said "This is indeed a great day for Purley and I am glad to be here to share in your joy at having built this for yourselves. It is a great achievement and I congratulate you, you have done something fine. This is a voluntary effort, and at a time when we are accustomed to look to the Welfare State to provide a great deal of the things we want, It is all the more worthwhile." He went on to say "The village will find fuller enjoyment in life by having its own social centre. It is a good thing to keep alive and foster the community spirit."

A vote of thanks to Mr Hurd was proposed by Miss Scott-Stokes, These speeches were reported with pictures in the national press and The Reading Mercury and Reading Standard, who both started their article with the phrase "'The finest village hall built by voluntary effort since the war'".

These were lovely speeches but the limelight throughout the

meeting was directed particularly on three people who gave between them untold hours, and without whom the hall would never have been created – Mrs Florence Goodwin, Mr Bert Nicholls and his “shadow,” Mr Ron Winters. Mrs Goodwin was presented with a brooch as a token of the village’s gratitude; Bert was presented with an escritoire (and a vociferous “for he’s a golly good fellow”). Ron received a barometer.

It was a memorable occasion. So too was the party held within the hall that night for all the villagers. The population of Purley in 1947 was c900 rising to c1000 by 1953. These Purley villagers, by all their efforts, collected £2,500 which equates to £56,625 at present day values. The total cost of the hall was £3,733 which included a £733 Government grant and a mortgage of £500. When added up, the total cost for the materials to build the hall at present day (2013) values would be £84,552. Of course the value of voluntary work is priceless.



The plaque of dedication by Anthony Hurd MP - it had had to be changed quickly when Dame Florence Horsburgh was unable to attend. [M010589]

*Meeting Reports****Purley Walkabout 7th July 2018***

Our tour of the old village of Purley started and finished in Purley Village. With the weather being so hot we didn't walk very far or very fast, but nearly all of the Project Purley group visited bits of the village that they hadn't seen before. Certainly we all learned something new (or rather old) about the village.

Catherine's introductory talk was illustrated with old photographs of the area from the early 1900s, and described how the geography of the village has changed over the years.

The old road into Purley (known then as The Street) came down from the main highway at the Roebuck, round towards the church, and back up to the highway past Purley Lodge via Westbury Lane. The owners of Purley Lodge later diverted it away from their front door in a sweep round what became their orchard. New Hill is just what its name says – new. It was built after 1800 when the landowners on the east side (the Storer family) demolished all the houses along that part of the Street to make a picturesque park for their new house, Purley Park, leaving just a footpath for the villagers to reach the church – appropriately called either Church Walk or St Mary's



Purley Lodge [M040215]

Walk. The Purley Park estate was sold off in sections in the 1920s and from 1935, following a further resale, a section of land, to the north of Church Walk running down to the river, was sold off in individual plots for camping and caravans. Church Walk gradually developed into St Mary's Avenue with vehicle access.

We then split into four groups, led by Catherine Sampson, Ben and Dorothy Viljoen, Jean and Ron Chudleigh and Marjorie and Roger Butler. Our group went along Purley Village, with vivid descriptions from Catherine of the old rectory on the site of Lister Close and of Ivy Cottage (or Cottages as it was), the oldest building in the village. The tour then went down a private gated track (part of Home Farm), to a field that runs behind the allotments. Very few of us have ever been along here, with rare views of the backs of the cottages, and of the houses now built in what was Purley Lodge orchard. The garden of Rita Denman's house, extends in a meadow right down to the track. We were welcomed there by Rita herself, who showed us through the wildlife meadow to see the old shed,



recently relocated from the Church, beautifully restored and now upgraded to the status of a cabin.

Back on Purley Village, we were given tours of the Gatehouse and Purley Lodge, once one big house, and now two unusual and very interesting houses, with huge old fireplaces, original decorative plasterwork, and quirkily-

Rita Denman's cabin rescued from the churchyard
[M040220]

shaped spaces from the separation. Next, after a very short walk along the road, we were privileged to be shown into The Cottage, once The Cottages - two cottages, now carefully opened up and extended into one house, with many of the original beams and features still visible. Hemington, Purley Lodge Cottage and the sites of the Rogers' old thatched cottage and Corner Cottages were viewed from the outside, again supported with old images until finally, a fascinating trip round 1 Jasmine Cottages. The house has been renovated and extended, and some wattle and daub, in really

good condition still, has been left exposed. It is now a comfortable and original home, including a large cellar (but definitely no secret passage) and with none of the original building fabric compromised.

At the end of the tour, half of us were treated to tea at Purley Lodge, and half at 1 Jasmine Cottages. Huge thanks go to the owners of the houses who allowed us to tramp through their homes - Rick and Val Jones of the Gatehouse, Nick and Anne Honeyman of the Cottage, and additional special thanks to the owners of Purley Lodge, Lynne and John Heslop, and 1 Jasmine Cottages, Sue Yates and Tracy Averies, who provided the teas for some very hot and weary - but extremely grateful - people. We are also very grateful to Tim and Vicky Metcalfe of Home Farm, who opened their farm track to us.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon on what was almost certainly Project Purley's hottest occasion.

Gillian Wallace



The Cottage [M040213]

Much Ado About Nothing

The year 2018 is one for anniversaries. It is one hundred years since the Armistice was signed at the end of the Great War and twenty years since Rain or Shine Theatre Company was formed. The two dates coincided as Rain or Shine performed William Shakespeare's best loved comedy, "Much Ado About Nothing," set not in the Elizabethan era, but in November 1918 as the men and women of the British military forces are returning home. Indeed the opening medley of songs featured a collection of World War One favourites such as "Pack up your troubles" and "Keep the home fires burning."

The performance in The Barn was notable for several reasons. The cast was larger than usual, including three newcomers, Jasmine Raymond, Jamie Littlewood and Peter Smith. It is always a pleasure to welcome fresh faces. Jasmine and Jamie are not long out of drama school, but Peter has already acted in 16 Shakespeare plays and he stood head and shoulders – figuratively as well as literally – above the other actors. The Royal Air Force uniforms were accurately designed and made by Jayne Lloyd, who also took the part of Leonato. Sadly this may be her last stage role with Rain or Shine, as she confesses that she finds it harder to learn lines as she enters the veteran stage of her career.

Anthony Young, a company regular, displayed a hitherto unheard excellent singing voice, Rob Keeves hammed it up for all he was worth as the constable Dogberry, John Cooper-Evans was an enthusiastic cross-dressing nurse, and Pippa Meekings flowered as the fiery Beatrice. It was a delight to see the interaction with the audience as the actors made all their entrances and exits via the main hall.

The set was minimal, just a brick wall and a rather shaky shell-blasted tree which wobbled every time somebody bounded on stage and when Benedick was dodging up and down behind it. But the cast worked so hard – marching in step and saluting one moment, Morris Dancing the next, faultless in their projection in the long blank verse scenes, changing costumes, accents and emotions with

rapidity as well as subtlety, that they fully deserved the lengthy applause they received from an appreciative audience.

I am grateful as always to Project Purley members who assisted in any way in preparing for the production and to the members of the audience who spent a warm spring evening supporting the event and donating so generously to the leaving collection. Your kindness has enabled us to raise £500 for Launchpad, a charity based in Merchants Place in Reading, and which not only provides temporary accommodation for the homeless but helps them to find employment.

Rain or Shine will return to The Barn on Friday, November 30th when the company will present a specially written play merging two classics. Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson will return in "The Curious Case of Doctor Jeckyll and Miss Hyde."

David Downs

Project Purley Barbecue 15th June 2018

There was lovely weather for the Project Purley barbecue, in one of the loveliest gardens in Purley. A team of people brought all the elements together at the right time – gazebos, tables, barbecues and food preparation – and the hospitality of Dorothy and Ben Viljoen gave us a beautiful setting. The barbecue skills of Ben Viljoen and David Green, and the food provided by the members, gave us an excellent meal in excellent company.

Gillian Wallace

Project Purley Visit to Salisbury, 24th May 2018

Project Purley members and guests travelled to Salisbury to see just a few of the historic buildings in the city. We visited three very beautiful and very different buildings all within a few yards of each other in the Cathedral Close: Arundells, Mompesson House and the Cathedral itself.

Arundells and Mompesson House are outwardly quite similar in size, style and proportions, but inside there is a world of difference.

Mompesson House is a Queen Anne style townhouse built for Sir Thomas Mompesson, MP for Salisbury in the late 17th century, and now owned by the National Trust. The house has lovely wood panelling and decorative plasterwork, which would be worth the trip on their own, but the National Trust, which inherited the house unfurnished, has spent much time and money furnishing and decorating it in period style, with some really interesting pieces of furniture and artwork.



Mompesson House [M040217]



Arundells, the former home of Sir Edward Heath [M040214]

Arundells is a much older building, with bits dating from maybe the 14th century, but with a Queen Anne frontage added on. It was also owned by the Mompesson family for some time, but is currently best known for being the home of Sir Edward Heath from 1985 until his death in 2005. The house and the garden were put, at his request, into a charitable foundation for the enjoyment of the public. This house, although lovely in itself, is all about the contents, which have been left as they were during Sir Edward's lifetime. They show off his love of sailing, music, art and politics, and since the house was his retreat from the world, politics gets a very poor showing in fourth place! The entrance hall has scale models of all his yachts - Morning Clouds 1 to 5 (it was in Morning Cloud 1 that he won the Sydney to Hobart race in 1969). He was a very talented musician and conductor, and the music room at Arundells is full of

photographs and memorabilia from many years of making music, along with his stunning black Steinway grand piano. Everyone spotted treasures, but my favourite (being a good Mancunian) had to be the set of batons given to Sir Edward by Sir John Barbirolli, the legendary conductor of the Hallé Orchestra. The pictures on the walls of the house include paintings by John Piper, L S Lowry and Winston Churchill, to name just a few, and an amazing Japanese mural on the main staircase. The evidence for Sir Edward's political life is just in his study, with its view down to the river, the garden carefully landscaped to block potential snipers' sightlines from the opposite bank! But the art collection does include some great political cartoons, and the fact that they are on his walls shows a sense of humour that was rarely on display in public.

Salisbury Cathedral is a different world. This spectacular Gothic construction has the tallest spire, the biggest cloister, the largest Cathedral Close, the oldest working clock, and much more. But it isn't just big, it's really beautiful, and at the time of the visit had a flight of white origami doves floating above the nave. The Chapter House is a destination just in itself, with glorious windows and ceiling, but it also houses the best of our four remaining original Magna Carta manuscripts and some great modern technology to display and translate it.

It was a very full day and, despite the appalling weather forecast, the rain held off just long enough for most of us to make it back to the coach with spirits only a little bit dampened. Many thanks are due to Jean Chudleigh, who organised the trip.

Gillian Wallace

Nature Notes

by Rita Denman

13th April 2018 - A couple of sunny days at the end of last week were followed by a mournful Sunday morning with grey skies, grey misty hills and bare trees the only movement being a flock of black rooks flying across the fields. In the early part of the week skies were so overcast that it didn't get properly light until midday. On the plus side there has been less rain and forecasters are telling us that there will be a return to spring next week. At Home Farm, Tim says that the fields are still very wet and the grass so lush that it is not a good time to let the cattle out from their winter quarters. They have been restless and there has been some noticeable bellowing lately. With the better weather on the way hopefully they will soon be out in the fields.

20th April Sunday early. The valley is shrouded in mist. The emerald green of Oak Tree Field is a perfect foil for the dazzling whiteness of the swans that have settled there. With every passing day the brown crowns of the field maples are slowly turning to summer green.

The music of sweet birdsong is constant although from time to time the harmony is broken by the harsh sounds of a rook or jay and the percussion of a woodpecker. There is an all pervading stillness encouraging deep breaths and time to stand and stare. A sudden swift movement betrays the presence of a squirrel and I catch sight of it as it flicks its tail and scampers along the branches.

The Black Angus cattle are a welcome sight in Pond Field. Thursday was the hottest April day for 70 years. Following a couple of days of above average temperature for the time of the year nature has made up for lost time and overnight there is a multitude of flowers in bloom.

27th April The exceptionally hot weather for April eventually brought heavy rain and thunderstorms as the air from a cooler direction met the wall of heat. It reached Purley late on Saturday and rumbled on through the small hours. Morning revealed a drenched world with a rising mist that turned golden as the sun rose

sending long rays across the fields and catching the raindrop prisms as they hung from every leaf and bough.

The week progressed with typically English April weather, sunshine and showers but as time passed it grew much colder until it was as though we were back into winter. In the brief warm interludes there were bumblebees and worker bees flying and one or two brimstone yellow butterflies.

4th May The last day of April dawned grey and cheerless with high winds showers and very cold. Everyone complained that it was back to winter; but over the following night the band of weather cleared away and May Day appeared with a clear blue sky and bright sunshine enhancing the beauty of the trees in blossom and fresh green foliage everywhere. Despite the cold, nature has been getting on with the spring season. There are cowslips in the meadow and cow parsley in the hedgerows seems to have grown almost overnight. Bluebells and forget me nots are a focal point in the garden. Cows with their new calves are in the pasture field behind the meadow.

11th May Bank holiday Monday was warm with a rosy dawn. The many ash trees in the area, yet to come into leaf were silhouetted against the sky highlighting the delicate tracery of the tree branches. A thick mist along the river seeped into the fields. A gentle twittering of small birds in the hedgerows was suddenly broken by the harsh call of a crow and the squawking of a flock of geese heard but unseen in the mist. The monotonous cooing of wood pigeons took up the chorus as they joined the morning rush exuberantly clapping their wings over their backs as they rode the warm air over the meadow.

The drumming of a woodpecker echoed through the valley to be outdone by the roar of the approaching engine of an early flight out of Heathrow. The spell was broken and another busy day began.

18th May Happy days! We have blue skies and warm sun and the roses are blooming around the door. The meadow is heavenly with hawthorne blossom and cow parsley.

The cattle wandering along the farm track are very friendly and want to know what we are doing in the meadow and watching Benjamin cut the short grass paths.

25th May Early morning is magical with a rising sun over a quiet valley. The grass is growing and the cattle are grazing contentedly in the pasture field. There is a light mist over the hills and a lively breeze agitates the trees. The rooks in the ash tree chatter among themselves. Although the soil is like concrete it will be a good gardening day. Tim says that although there was bad weather earlier the grass has recovered well and the silage will soon be cut at Home Farm.

9th June At 4.30 am the valley is bathed with that special early morning light, before the world is really awake. Thrushes and blackbirds begin their chorus and the air is cool before the heat of the day. Foxgloves, roses, perennial geraniums and pinks are all in bloom waiting to enchant the early visitor to the garden.

The garden pond is full of life with tadpoles, newts, pond skaters, and water boatmen and delicate waterlilies opening their faces to the sun. The past week of fine weather has enabled farmers to cut the hay. Home Farm is decorated with hay bales ready to be collected. Sunsets have been dramatic, shedding a rosy glow overall and late evening is pleasantly warm; but tubs and containers need daily watering due to the lack of rain.

15th June Although the air has been heavy and thunderous there has been no rain for some time and smaller trees are shedding an alarming amount of leaves.

Storm Hector from Ireland didn't affect us much but there were some gusty winds which hastened the June drop of apples. The sun rises a crimson ball the signal for a flock of rooks to descend on the recently cut hay field which is already showing the green of new growth in the golden stubble. The cattle graze quietly and contentedly.

This year Tim is growing a new variety of wheat, named Skyfall, it has awns like the ancient varieties.

29th June After waiting so long for Spring to arrive it seems hard to believe that the longest hours of day light have passed. It continues to be a year of weather extremes. Mid summer coincided with a heat wave and gardens are flagging in the heat but evenings couldn't be more balmy or beautiful and are the kind that we think of on winter

nights or as a dream of childhood days sitting out and watching the rooks fly home to roost chattering among themselves as they fly. The grass in the meadow is long and full of seed waving gently in the summer breezes. Butterflies are numerous and untold numbers of insects are busy in their world of grass. It is a good year for slow worms and grass snakes; but I didn't hear a cuckoo and I haven't seen any bats.

13th July The UK is experiencing its hottest summer since 1976. I can't remember the last time it rained. The soil has been like a rock for some time and it is impossible to plant anything directly into the ground. I have resorted to 'front dressing' with tubs and containers, but of course they all need watering. So far there is no hosepipe ban, but gardeners are very aware of the serious situation and trying not to get too upset about the poor state of the gardens.

20th July Due to the extraordinary weather 2018 will be a landmark year in the UK. Skies have been tropical blue and endless or blue with billowing clouds.

On overcast days they are grey and hold the heat down. A big butterfly count is being held similar to the RSPB bird count. Recently butterflies have been more numerous toward evening. There have been a few white species but not the usual number of meadow browns. There are always numbers of Gatekeepers on the oregano in the garden. Grasshoppers are chirping in the meadow and after a long absence I have heard a few pheasants. Red Kites are calling frequently and showing off their flying prowess.

27th July. There is still no significant rain in the Purley area just a few rumbles of thunder and a heavy shower or two. Temperatures continue to be in the high 20s or low 30s °C.

Cloud thwarted the possibility of seeing the sky spectacular of the century when a blood moon was in eclipse and Mars was at its closest point to earth. The countryside is tinder dry and great care is required when out and about. There are wild fires raging in many parts of the world. The UK hasn't escaped and there is no apparent end to the heat wave.