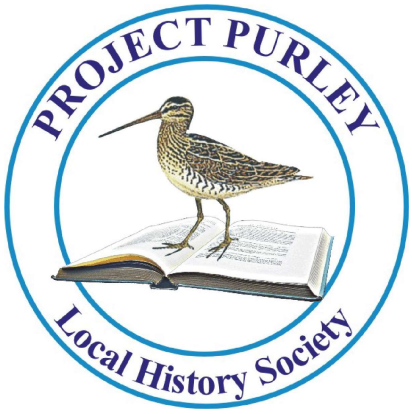

Project Purley

The Local History Society for Purley on Thames
in the Royal County of Berkshire

Publication L0045

A Village History

The story of Purley on Thames

by John Chapman

Part 2

Stuarts to Victorians

Project Purley Publication L500045

Contents

Introduction

Purley on Thames in the Royal County of Berkshire began as an obscure Saxon village, probably in the 7th century. It lies about four miles to the west of Reading and has been in its shadow for nigh on 1500 years. The village gave its name to a part of Surrey to the south of London and has frequently been confused with it. By the Millennium it had grown to a parish of around 5000 souls with a strong local identity, albeit without a centre or any visible industry and very little commerce.

In writing its history I have drawn on the work of many people who have been researching the subject for many years. We have been staggered by the volume of ancient records which document that history, at least in parts. It first gets a mention in Domesday, like so many other similar villages so for the earlier days I have had to draw on a more general history of the area.

I have used the several dynasties which rule England from the 11th to 19th centuries as a framework. A few topics have slipped either side of these rather artificial boundaries for the sake of convenience but on the whole the framework does indicate the significant changes in attitude and social changes which have transformed the village from a typical Saxon settlement scraping a living from the soil to a vibrant community earning its crust from technology and commerce and fairly high in the league table of affluence.

The history is told in three parts, First from prehistoric times to the end of the Tudor period, then from the Stuarts to the Victorians and finally from Edwardians to the Millennium.

5 The Stuarts 1603-1714

Historical Background

The 17th century brought saw the continuation of the bitter religious controversies which culminated in a civil war. There followed periods of austerity and hedonism, revolution and counter-revolution and the final transition from the mediaeval feudal system to the foundation of a class based system where everyone knew their place. The execution of King Charles I brought the concept of absolute monarchy to an abrupt end and the experiments with republicanism under Cromwell convinced the English that this was not for them. In the Restoration settlement of 1660 the relative powers of Monarch and Parliament achieved an uneasy balance which was to be made more or less permanent in the Glorious Revolution and Bill of Rights of 1688. The reign of Queen Anne saw the end of the Stuart dynasty and the union of Kingdoms to from the United Kingdom. It also saw the end of tithes as they had been known for centuries.

The Impact on Purley

Outwardly the pattern of life continued as in mediaeval times but fields were gradually enclosed and most of the land was managed by bailiffs rather than by a resident lord, the process seeing the emergence of local yeoman farmers.

For most of the period the manor of Purley Magna formed part of the possessions of the St John family of Lydiard Tregoze in Wiltshire. Purley Parva changed hands to become owned by the Lybbes of Hardwick. The manor of Purley La Hyde evolved into Purley Hall, occupied for the most part, quite co-incidentally by a new (catholic) family of Hydes.

Again, almost all the religious upheavals affected Purley. The changed attitude to worship in the Laudian period saw the church rebuilt to reflect the new ideas. In the 1650s Purley had a congregational minister, Daniel Raynor who was also ejected, this time as a result of the settlement brought about by Edward Hyde, Lord Clarendon who had strong Purley connections.

The Manor of Purley Magna

When Walter St John died in 1597 the estate went to his brother John. He became a baronet on 22nd May 1611, being one of the founding members of the order. He was Member of Parliament for Wiltshire in 1624 and he too preferred to live at Lydiard. However he seemed to have been living at Purley in 1627 as it was then that his brother-in-law Sir Allen Apsley was staying at the time of his illness It is also likely that it was at his house in 1632 that his niece Anne Hyde, the wife of Edward Hyde, future Lord Clarendon, was brought to die after she had contracted measles en route from Wiltshire to London. Edward had her buried in Purley Church and erected a memorial to her memory.

During the civil war Sir John St John was a staunch Royalist and three of his sons were killed in the fighting. He died in 1648 being succeeded by his grandson John who himself died unmarried in 1657 leaving the manor to his uncle Walter. Sir Walter made a settlement of the manor in 1673 and died in 1708.

The Manor of Purley Parva

In 1601 Francis, Lord Norris acknowledged by Fine his lordship of several manors including those of Westbrook, Westbury and Purley (presumably all the same manor, ie the manor of Purley Parva) At the same time Sir Edward Norreys released all his rights and interests in th

In 1623 Lady Bridget, Countess Dowager of Berkshire, held a court Baron for Purley Parva on 1st October.

By 1630 the manor had gone via Francis Norreys to his daughter Elizabeth and her husband, Edward Wray. Two years later in 1632 they gave 5s to a Mr Pecoke for copies of Fines and a Recovery suffered by the late Lord Norris.

It is not clear how the estate came into the possession of the Lybbe family but one would assume that it had either been sequestrated or sold. However in 1653 it is referred to as having formed part of the estates of the late King and a receiver, Gabriel Taylor summoned the lord to attend the Bear Inn in Reading on 24th April to pay 40s for the two years ending Michaelmas 1650 as his dues for Castleguard rent at Windsor Castle. A similar summons was received by Anthony Lybbe in 1671 when he had to pay £6 for 6 years rent.

When Richard Lybbe died in 1653 he was succeeded as Lord of the Manor by his grandson Anthony, his son having been killed in 1514. Anthony dealt with the manor by Fine in 1659. It is believed that he in his turn was succeeded by his son Richard who was dealing with the manor by 1707.

The Manor of La Hyde

King James and King Charles 1602-1643

Civil War 1643-1649

The Commonwealth 1649-1660

The Restoration 1660-1680

The Glorious Revolution 1680-1702

Chapter 6 The Georgian Period 1714-1833

Background

The eighteenth century was a time of great change and contrast in England. Commerce was beginning to lay the foundations of Empire, the power of the old order was beginning to wane to be replaced by men more concerned with money than people. It was a time of great wealth and great poverty of lives of ease and of grinding exploitation. Men like Charles Wesley were trying to stir the conscience of the nation to what was going on and having little success. It took a century or more before the fruits of their labours began to be seen.

Religion sank to its lowest point ever. The established church was full of complacent clerics, mainly pluralists who paid curates derisory wages to do their job for them. In the towns furtive groups of non-conformists were trying to keep their ideals flourishing in the face of official disapproval and Roman Catholics were meeting in each other's house to keep their faith alive. There was great intolerance of all groups to each other and great indifference to the plight of others.

Great houses were being planned and built all over the country while the poor lived in indescribably poor conditions, cold and overcrowded and deprived of many of the ancient privileges which had heretofore enabled them to survive. There was a flight from the country to the towns to seek new jobs created by the industrial revolution. When the century opened William of Orange was on the Throne to be succeeded by Anne, the last Stuart. By the time the century closed the Hanoverians represented by George III had triumphed over the Jacobites but had lost the American colonies. The next thirty years saw the rise of the power of parliamentarians against a background of fairly ineffective kings and the Napoleonic wars.

The Manors

Two of the three manors of Purley were to change hands. In the case of La

Hyde it was purchased by the Wilders, who were a well established family in neighbouring Sulham, although technically manorial rights had ceased. Purley Magna went out of the hands of the St Johns who had been Lord for four hundred years and eventually formed the seat of the Storers who had made their money from sugar in the West Indies. Purley Parva remained in the hands of the Lybbes although the succession in 1722 passed via the female line to the Lybbe-Powyses.

The Church

This is the first century for which a continuous copy of the Parish Register is available. In it various rectors recorded items of interest, about disputes, about floods and other snippets.

There was a national development in 1703 which was to profoundly affect the finances of the Church of England. This was the establishment of Queen Anne's Bounty as a fund to augment the livings of the poorer clergy. A central fund was established into which the payments of First Fruits and Tithes were paid. These were payments originally made by the clergy to the Papal Exchequer consisting of all the profits of the living in the first year of an incumbency and one tenth thereafter. They were not the same as the tithes paid by the laity to the clergy. Since the Reformation these had been paid into the royal coffers but Queen Anne decreed that the proceeds should be used to augment the pitiful incomes of many of the clergy. Purley was not overmuch affected as its living was worth more than the minimum for augmentation and the livings changed hands only on six occasions. It was assessed in 1707 with the First Fruits assessed at £12/17/3½ and the tenth at £1/5/8¾.

In the early part of the century there were a number of disputes involving the rector. The first in 1707 was when George Blagrave sued the rector for not keeping a bull for the use of parishioners. The second was in 1711 when the rector sued George's mother Mary on the grounds that she had refused to pay the tithe on a second cut of clover. In 1723 the dispute centered around who had ownership of the pew next to the pulpit and it was determined that it belonged to Westbury farm.

During the century much of the church plate was replaced. It is presumed that the earlier plate had been lost in the Civil War.

Some time in the middle of the century there seems to have been work on the tower of the church but there was little if any other major developments. For the most part Purley was served by curates standing in for absentee rectors.

There was a pre-occupation with identifying Roman Catholics, probably as a result of the several Jacobite rebellions that occurred from 1715 to 1745.

The ancient rectory was replaced between 1724 and 1728

Transport

Two main transport arteries passed through Purley. The most important was the river Thames down which were carried both people and freight. The other was the main highway from Wallingford to Reading which ran from Pangbourne to the Roebuck in an almost straight line. There were also many side roads and paths but the distinction between any one road and another was a matter of usage not purpose. Foot passengers, coaches, farm carts, horseback riders would travel the paths at will, diverting and broadening the carriageway when the way became obstructed. Responsibility for the roads was technically with the adjacent land owners and each year the parish vestry appointed a Surveyor of the Roads to make sure that the work was done. In practice of course it was one of the Sherwoods or another principal land holder who was almost always appointed and they were not as assiduous in their duties as they might have been.

It was down the main highway that most of the heavy and foreign traffic passed. Foreign in 18th century terms tended to mean traffic not originating or destined for the parish. The road was used for the embryonic coach services providing a rudimentary public transport system. It was also used by the long waggon trains which carried goods around the country. These would consist of a large wooden wheeled waggon drawn by up to ten horses working in pairs. These would plod very long distances hauling quite large loads. Lighter traffic was handled by the carriers who worked from their home village to Reading once or twice a week, taking produce for local farmers who had not the time to travel themselves and fulfilling shopping orders for which they charged a small premium. By the middle of the century the road was reported as being 'in a ruinous condition and

incommodious to passengers' As a result the first act for the Shillingford, Wallingford and Reading Road Company was passed in 1763 and the Turnpike came to Purley. The trustees of the turnpike included representatives from each of the parishes en route and great efforts were made to improve the surface of the road and widen it where needed. Charges were levied on vehicles passing along and any profits were shared between the parishes on the basis of the proportion of the mileage in each parish.

The river carried huge amounts of bulk cargoes as well as passengers. Generally freight was carried on barges towed by horses and these needed to be winched though the flash lock going upstream and flushed through going downstream. This was a very difficult and hazardous procedure and the flashes could be opened only according to a strict timetable which ensured that generally water levels in the river were high enough to sustain navigation. One of these barges 'The King's Arms' sank by Purley on 3rd March 1727 carrying malt from Abingdon to London. In order to control affairs on the river the Thames Commissioners were created in 1751. They set about surveying the river and increased many of the charges. By 1777 the charges had been raised so many times that the bargemasters held a protest meeting in Reading. In the same year the Commissioners opened the first pound lock in Purley. This was cut through headland on the Purley side and should have resulted in the lock being renamed Purley Lock but the old name for the flash lock was too deeply ingrained and Mapledurham Lock it remained. The old flash lock was closed in July and a toll was levied on all barges going upstream of 3d per ton which included a free return passage.

The commissioners wanted to extend the towpath from Purley to near the Roebuck but Philip Worlidge, the then lord of the manor refused to allow passage past the manor house. As a result in 1794 they had to install a horse ferry which ran from the end of what is now River Gardens to the other side of the river. The ferries carried the tow horses and the towpath switched to the north bank of the river. It returned by another ferry by the Roebuck.

There were other ferries operating on the Thames. The usual practice was for there to be a post with a bell and when someone wanted to cross they rang the bell to summon the waterman who would row them over. There were such ferries between Mapledurham and Purley and between Pangbourne and Whitchurch. It is also believed there was a third between

Hardwick and Westbury. The Whitchurch ferry was replaced by a bridge by an act of 1792 which established a 'company of proprietors' which included Richard Southby representing Purley.

Crime and Civil Suits

The 18th century seems to be notorious for the amount of crime committed. Perhaps this is because of better records rather than any great increase in crime rates. There was also an increase in the amount of civil litigation. A number of cases are reported which affected Purley.

The most serious crime was the murder of farmer Giles Blagrave on the road between Purley and Reading on 31st Jan 1738.

Land and Land Disputes

Beginning 1738 Francis Hawes of Purley Hall and William Dench went to court several times over a piece of land which Hawes had originally leased to Dench in 1735. This include the fields known as Beer Close, Broom Close, Little Moors and Upper Herridge which had been let on a five year lease for 20s per annum. Hawes alleged that Dench had torn down fences, stolen gates and grubbed out 200 yards of hedges. He failed so in the following year he sued Dench for a debt of £60.

The People

Purley's affairs were dominated by the Sherwoods who eventually came to occupy all the Parish Offices and farm virtually all the land

Chapter 7 The Victorians 1832-1901

Introduction

It was 1837 when Victoria came to the throne but 1832 is a somewhat more significant date as being when the Reform Act was passed. So we will start this period then. As a result of this act the first electoral register for Purley was published, listing who was entitled to vote rather than who had actually voted as had happened previously. Three people were listed for Purley.

A few years later in 1835 the Bradfield Union was formed to take over responsibility for Poor Relief and the following year Purley, along with the rest of Berkshire was transferred from the Salisbury Diocese to that of Oxford. The period also saw the coming of the railway, the formation of the postal service as we know it today and the introduction of education for all children.

Purley saw its Enclosure Award in 1856, Tithe Award in 1840 and in 1875 the Turnpike Trust was abolished so that the main road from Reading to Wallingford became an ordinary highway. The Church was rebuilt in 1870 and a new school opened in 1875. A County Council was established in 1892 and parish powers split between the former Church Vestry and the New Parish Meetings, the latter dealing with purely civil matters.

The improved transport opportunities, more democratic governance and a general rising in prosperity occasioned significant social changes in the country, but on the whole they had an opposite effect upon Purley as the landed gentry retained their almost feudal hold over the villagers and the enclosures deprived many of the small parcels of land which had been their lifeline.

Education

For most of Victoria's reign education was a privilege for those who could afford it. A few charities tried to identify bright children and give them a chance at a good education but for the vast majority, including most of the children in Purley, the best you might be able to get were a few lessons from the rector or someone similar to teach the very basic elements of literacy and numeracy.

The first attempt to provide State education occurred in 1833 when £20,000 was allocated by the government to supplement private subscriptions for the erection of school houses for the poorer classes. This allocation continued until 1839 when it was increased to £30,000 but on condition that all schools which were recipients of grants had to be inspected regularly.

Almost invariably the only people in a position to act as inspectors were the clergy. Both the amount of grants and the levels of inspection increased steadily over the years until it reached £2,000,000 by 1862 when an entirely new basis of allocating grant was established. This new system could be described as payment by results. Reading, writing and arithmetic were defined as 'grant earning subjects' and individual pupils were examined in these on an annual basis. The amount of grant was then calculated by a very complicated formula.

While this had a dramatic effect in raising standards of attainment, the effect was that poor students were ignored as they could not be brought up to a level which would earn the school a grant and other subjects like geography and history were given very low priority as they did not attract any grant at all, although religious education was given high priority because of the background of most of the inspectors and the origins of the school.

By 1871 the inadequacies of the system were fully recognised and the local authorities were charged with providing education directly. Thus there arose the 'Board School' with lay inspectors and a much wider range of subjects. These however tended to be found only in the urban areas, with the rural parishes, such as Purley left to the churches for provision.

There have been vague mentions of the rector providing classes for the local children at the rectory. Charles Manesty had reported in 1818 that he had a small day school for 20 of the younger children and from a study of the parish registers, noting who were able to sign their names rather than merely making their mark, we can deduce that something like it had been going on since around 1760.

Charles Manesty's report was in response to a questionnaire relating to an enquiry into the education of the poor. He reported:

> Q8 What schools, not supported in whole or in part by charitable endowment exist in your parish?
>
> A8 One day school to which I send the younger children and the

> elder children I send to a day school in the adjoining parish, although I consider the poor of this parish to have sufficient means of educating at least part of their families.

Richard Palmer became rector in 1844 on the death of Charles Manesty and continued the school as was reported in Billings Directory for 1854:-

> Here is a small free school built and supported by the Rector. School Mistress Mrs Mary Herridge.

Mary remained schoolmistress until 1869 living in half of one of the cottages in Purley Village, assumed to be Hemington.

In 1870 the Elementary Education Act was passed. This had been preceded by considerable debate, questioning why the poor and labouring classes needed education in the first place and why the more affluent classes should be required to pay for it. The debate was won and the education act required that there must be an elementary school in every district And that new ones must be set if if none existed. Richard Palmer, the then Rector, rose to the challenge and engaged Joseph Morris to design and build a new school for 55 children on the same site as the free school. The plan was that the school should be supported by voluntary contributions. Richard had inherited a large sum of money from his brother in 1872 and had moved to the family home at Holme Park in Sonning. But he died there in 1874 when the building works had just begun. His sister Susannah who inherited the house and money after Richard, however continued to fund the project and the new school was opened on the 9th February 1875.

The new rector, Charles Henry Travers suddenly found himself embroiled in a legal battle to establish who should run the school. It had been assumed that there would be three trustees, the rector and the two churchwardens. However the two churchwardens were Major Anthony Morris Storer and Thomas Barnes. Richard must have been very aware of the attitudes of Anthony Morris Storer who, as Lord of the Manor of Purley Magna, ruled the village like a feudal lord. Richard was determined that he should have no say in the running of the school and had specified that the Rector and his successors should be the sole trustee. Thus in a deed enrolled in February 1875 Richard's wishes were enshrined in law by his sister. This was to cause some difficulties for the Diocese about 100 years later as they had assumed it would become church property which the bishop could dispose of at will and so when they tried to close it down they found

themselves without powers.

An inspection in April 1875 revealed that there was a common path to the toilets, situated in an outhouse in the grounds of the school and recommended:-

> I would recommend the Managers to have separate paths to the boys and girls offices, and a barrier or partition preventing access from one office to the other.

Relations with the Storers seemed to be cordial however and Mrs Storer was often noted as visiting the school and providing materials for needlework or presenting prizes. Although the school had been built to accommodate 55 children in two classrooms, there were only 48 when it opened and for most of the rest of the century numbers rarely exceeded 40. Children were often reported as being absent, either because of sickness, or because they were required to work on the local farms to help with the harvest.

The school was inspected annually, usually by a member of the clergy appointed by the Diocese. On 29th April 1877 The Rev E Barber reported:-

Religious knowledge is good. The writing out of the catechism was exceptionally accurate and is much commended. Writing is generally good, arithmetic fair. The children need not be afraid of speaking out.

The Railway

When the period opened, coaching services were at their zenith. The Turnpike which had opened in 1763 had transformed the main road from little more than a dirt track to a reasonably smooth highway along which a significant amount of traffic passed each day. As well as purely local traffic a number of coaching services were operating. There were coaches to and from Highworth and from Brighton to Oxford and a Sociable which conveyed passengers between Streatley and Reading. In addition there were numerous carriers which trotted from their home village to Reading to take produce to market and return home having shopped on behalf of their clients.

But things were about to change. The railway was coming. Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the engineer for the Great Western Railway had, at first, planned to tunnel under Purley but when the Great Western bill passed through parliament in 1836 a deep cutting was specified. Work started in

1837 and four over bridges were built to carry New Hill, Purley Lane and Westbury Lane plus the extension of the village street which linked the village to Westbury Lane. There were three under bridges, At Purley Park to link the house to its parklands and the church; The Fiddlers bridge to link the two halves of the Further Common field which was to be severed and finally a bridge to cross the Sul Brook in the far west of the parish.

The railway had been given powers by the Bill to acquire land by compulsion which was bitterly opposed by the principal landowners, the Storers, the Wilders and the Powys-Lybbes. Major Storer was given a gold medal entitling him to travel first class on the GWR for his lifetime, but so opposed was he to the whole concept that he never used it even once. In addition all the tithes on the parcels of land purchased by the railway were redeemed for a single cash sum. Luckily the Parish Vestry was smart and Edward Sherwood, the parish surveyor, got quickly off the mark as they realised that the railway was liable to pay rates and got the line assessed at £1950 per mile but when Pangbourne and Tilehurst tried to follow suit the railway beat them down to £600 per mile. Purley eventually had their assessment reduced to £1200 which brought in £30 on a rate of 6d in the pound.

The line finally opened on the 1st June 1840 with a station at Pangbourne. Tilehurst station was not built until 1882. After the opening the railway sold off the extra land they had bought on either side of the track to adjacent landowners and Charles Manesty, the rector bought all he could personally, even though it had been glebe land which had been sold originally.

One of the problems the railway encountered was that there was a continual drainage of water from the hill tops in Tilehurst down to the river. This made the cutting very humid and special steel had to be used to stop the rails from corroding.

There were several cases of vandalism. Henry Hunter and George Fuller abandoned a trolley near the Roebuck on the 12th May 1851. They were navvies working for a contractor and were sentenced to one months imprisonment after an engine was damaged crashing into it. Earlier George Hamblin aged 13 was convicted of placing an iron bar on the railway but as he was unable to pay the fine he got six weeks in prison.

The Pangbourne/Purley area were about four minutes behind London in time, but for convenience the railway used London time throughout. Thus is you went to catch the 9 am train and arrived at two minutes to nine you found the train had already left. This began the process whereby all of Britain used Greenwich Mean Time.

Soon after the line was opened the Manchester and Southampton Railway got a bill through Parliament which gave them running rights over the railway through Pangbourne and Purley, but using standard gauge rather than Brunel's broad gauge. This resulted in the main line between Reading West curve and Didcot being laid with dual gauge track, making pointwork very complex. Eventually the GWR lost the gauge war and by 1891 all the track had been converted to standard gauge only.

The amount of traffic being carried by the railway was increasing steadily and in 1890 a second pair of tracks was laid through Purley, to the north of the existing lines. This necessitated purchasing more land and extending all the bridges leaving Purley with the four overbridges exhibiting the loading gauge of the broad gauge as designed and built by Brunel, to the south and almost identical arches, but with a standard gauge profile to the north.

The effect of the railway was to kill off all of the coaching services and long distance road freight traffic, but the carriers were used by the railway to link all the outlying villages to the system carrying both people and parcels

Local Administration - County and Parish

For centuries local administration was at a parish or hundred level with justice administered at a county level. Administration was based mainly on custom and usage and juries were used to determine what rules applied in each parish, rather than what was right or wrong, By the 1830s manorial and hundred courts had virtually ceased to function and parish officers were appointed by the Easter vestry to administer the matters which had been laid down by law. Such officers were required to present themselves to a Justice of the Peace to be sworn in before taking up the job. Many of the jobs were both onerous and put a considerable strain on the office holder's pocket and so were to be avoided if possible. There were severe penalties for failing to carry out the office properly and usually mutual arrangements

were made between parishioners to share the load and the misery. There was an upside however in that having taken up an office was generally regarded as proof of settlement if the person later fell on hard times.

The churchwardens were charged with looking after the people's part of the church building, ie the nave. They also looked after the monies in endowments and collected tithes and rates.

Haywards administered the open fields, settling disputes and determining crop rotations. They also had to deal with stray animals and ensure fencing was adequate.

Surveyors were charged with looking after the roads in the parish. In some cases maintenance was the responsibility of adjacent landowners and the surveyor had to ensure they did it properly; but for main roads the surveyor had to organise the work himself, often at his own expense. They were also used to set the rateable valuable of land They had to be persons of substance, ie owning lands worth £10 or occupying lands worth £20

Overseers looked after the poor. They had been established in 1572 and could require a rate raised to cover their costs. Usually their work entailed maintaining a parish house and finding work for the inmates do do which brought in some money. The parish house was for the elderly who could no longer look after themselves or for those with a settlement in the parish who had nowhere to live.

Constables had been in existence since the 13th century and had been appointed by the lord of the manor. By an Act of 1842 the Easter vestry was ordered to make the appointment and they were required to maintain law and order.

The Parish Clerk did all the administrative work on the part of the parish. He arranged weddings and baptisms and collected all the tithes, dues and rates on behalf of the churchwardens or other officers.

The Sexton was the parish labourer, he had to dig graves, clean the church and do all the odd jobs that occurred from time to time. Usually the job was combined with the office of verger. The latter's responsibility was to act as usher and ring the church bell to summon people to services.

Over the Victorian period many of these offices were either abolished or transferred to another authority. The administration of Poor Law was the first to go by the Poor Law Act of 1834 which transferred responsibility to

the new Unions (see below) Policing became a County Council responsibility in 1888 and they appointed a parish constable thereafter, Ernest Spratley being the first appointment for Purley.

Prior to the 1886 Local Government Act the next tier of administration was at county level. Each County had a Sheriff who presided over the magistrates (Justices of the Peace) who sat in their local courts to administer justice, swear in officials and settle disputes. The Magistrates were almost exclusively drawn from the lords of manors and wealthy landowners and saw their responsibilities in fairly narrow terms.

The 1886 Act established the County Council who first took office in 1888. Members were elected from groups of parishes known as 'Divisions' Purley was part of the Pangbourne Division and our first councillor was James Burbridge. At first the County Council merely assumed the administrative roles of the magistrates together with policing but gradually education and licensing came under their jurisdiction. Highways came under their control from 1902 but that is another period. A further role was in administering parishes and districts, settling boundaries and supervising elections.

The next change occurred in 1892 when the functions of the Parish Vestry were split between 'Civil' and 'Ecclesiastical'. The Civil side could be administered by either a Parish Meeting or by a Parish Council. Purley, being relatively small opted for the former and an annual parish meeting appointed a Chairman to act, Overseers to administer and Guardians to represent the parish at meetings of the Union. Naturally the first Chairman was Major Storer, The first overseers were T Pocock and P Symonds and the Guardian of the Poor was the Rector, the Revd Matthew Powley.

The civil functions included looking after the Parish Clock, looking after the roads, collecting rates and could include burials although in most rural parishes this was left in ecclesiastical hands as was the case in Purley. The vestry was reduced to only matters to do with the church.

Part of the 1892 arrangements were for all the parcels of land belonging to Whitchurch parish, south of the Thames to be transferred to the new Civil Parish of Purley although they remained as part of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Whitchurch even though no one lived there.

Local Administration - Union and District

By 1832 the cost of administering the Poor Law was being regarded as excessive by those who had to pay. The average cost had risen to 13/3 per head of the population but it was being paid by a tiny minority. In Purley the last rate levied before the Union took over was 3/- in the pound. For the next several years no rate was levied and when rates were resumed they had dropped to 6d in the pound. The poor rate assessment for Purley was £1581 and rather than spending £193 on the poor, Purley's contribution to the Union dropped to £60 pa. The ratepayers were well pleased.

The new legislation required a groups of parishes to form Unions and build a workhouse to provide for the poor and indigent. Purley became part of the Bradfield Union which included all the parishes of the former Hundred of Theale plus those of the Hundred of Reading which were not within the Borough. The first meeting took place on the 12th March 1835 with the Edward Sherwood and the Reverend Charles Manesty representing Purley.

Samuel Kempthorne was engaged as architect to build the new Union Workhouse which was located at Southend, Bradfield. It was designed for 214 paupers. The regime in the workhouse was very severe and conditions were closely controlled by the Guardians who made a great effort to ensure that the diet of the most able paupers was significantly less than what the least paid labourer could afford for his family. The result was near starvation as wages in the area were among the lowest in the country. Matters came to a head when the Commissioners who supervised the Unions refused to sanction a dietary regime proposed by the Bradfield Gaurdians in 1850 on the basis that

It was decidedly less nutritious than those of other Unions

Another function of the Union was inoculation. Since Edward Jenner discovered that immunity could be achieved by injecting dead germs many local doctors had been offering the service. Dr Monkton who lived in Purley had been doing it for free for residents within three miles of Pangbourne where he practised since 1776 and it is believed the service had been carried on by his successors. But in 1840 responsibility was handed

over to the Unions. From 1836 they were also required to register all births and deaths in their area.

The Church

Public Services

Purley Magna

Tithes and Enclosures