



Project Purley

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

Publication L500046

A Village History

The story of Purley on Thames

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Part 3

Edwardians to the Millennium

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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.

Chapter 8

Awakening 1901-1914

Introduction

For Purley the deaths of Queen Victoria and Major Anthony Storer occurring within months of each other, set the scene for profound changes. Major Storer had made it very plain that he did not want to be succeeded by a male heir and took elaborate steps to ensure it was his granddaughter who took over, but she was not in the least interested in village affairs which left Anthony's wife effectively in control. She in her turn was content to leave things to the rector and focussed on more charitable activities.

King Edward VIII had waited in the wings for a long time and was xx when he succeeded. He had had many affairs and reigned in a very different way from his mother. New fashions emerged and the changes in local government a few years before began to make an impact. For Purley the South Berks Hunt taking over at Belleisle meant both a lessening of the impact of the Sherwoods and the emergence of three new figures, Cecil Aldin at the hunt, Mortimer Menpes at his fruit farm and Hodgkin at Purley Lodge.

Purley Hall continued to be occupied by short term tenants including the future wife of Robert Baden-Powell.

Development began with the construction of Kennel Cottages and Menpes Cottages and gradually large plots were sold off for new houses on Long Lane and Oxford Road.

Technology and public services were joining forces to introduce the people of Purley to significant improvements in their standard of living. This included the first bus service and an airfield.

Perhaps the greatest impact however was the First World War. Many men from Purley joined up and many gave their lives. For those who returned however the opportunity to see other countries and other parts of England was eye opening and when they returned things would never again be the same. Instead of just working in the village or perhaps just over the border, it was now possible to seek employment in Reading or other large

towns and move away.

The South Berks Hunt

The South Berks Hunt moved to Purley in 189x when they rented Bellisle Farm from the Purley Magna estate after it had been vacated by the Sherwoods. One of their first acts was to build a row of cottages to accommodate their workers. They maintained a large pack of hounds in kennels situated roughly in the middle of what is now Long Lane School's playing field and stabled their horses in the 18th century barn which had been moved from its site next the church. Just after the turn of the century, after Major storer died, they were able to purchase the site and establish a more permanent presence.

Cecil Aldin was appointed as Master and lived in the main house. He was a well known artist specialising in paintings of dogs and hunting scenes many of which were used for Christmas cards. Cecil and his wife became very involved in village affairs until he fell ill and moved away to warmer climes where he died in 1935.

Their son Dudley was killed in the First World War as he was supervising the building of trenches beneath Vimy Ridge. His death greatly affected Cecil.

The hunt remained at the site until 1950 when it passed to Trenthams.

The Purley Scandal

The First World War

When the war began some sixteen men from Purley were already serving in the army or navy. Within a few weeks many more joined up and even more served after conscription came in 1915.

A group at the church began a Friday afternoon work party to make comforts for the troops, like socks and garments and bandages.

Purley's biggest contribution however was when the South Berks Hunt set up a remount depot under Ceceil Aldin. This was a scheme to make use of the vast number of riding and other horses which had become redundant because of the war. They were collected from all over the country and even

some were brought from Canada. At Purley they were groomed and equipped for a variety of tasks ranging from officers chargers through pack horses to hauling large guns. When they were ready batches were handed over to the army for deployment.

Owing to the shortage of men, Cecil had to employ many women, especially from the gentry who were used to dealing with horses. He also employed his friend Alfred Munnings who was a noted artist and who used to ride over from Calcot each day to act as the vet.

After the war ex-soldiers took up the government's scheme to set up small holdings and several were established in the parish.

Artists

Purley was home to and associated with several noted artists. We have mentioned Cecil Aldin but there was also Mortimer Menpes who lived in Pangbourne but who ran a very prospereous fruit and carnation farm on the east side of Long Lane. He too built a string of cottages on Long Lane to house his workers, or at least a tiny fraction of them as he employed around one hundred people. He was a friend of Whistler and specialised in writing large illustrated guide books in conjunction with his daughter who wrote most of the scripts with prints of Mortimer's painting inserted. Unfortunately few of these books have survived as dealers removed the prints and scrapped the text.

Another artist was Eliot Hodgkin whose father lived at Purley Lodge. He specialised in painting plants and flowers.

Then there was xx Pryor who had purchased the old rectory after she had been widowed. She was very gifted as a painter but did not achieve the national profile of the others.

Agriculture

For much of this period there six farms in Purley. Home Farm was located in the corner between Purley Village and New Hill and farmed land to the west of Mapledurham Drive. Westbury Farm was located at the end of Westbury Lane and was owned by the owners of Hardwick House. Scrases

Farm was adjacent to Westbury and had lands to the west. Marsh Farm was to the north of the Reading Road in what is now Pangbourne, Home Farm Sulham was to the west of Sulham Lane and extended to the east of Sulham Woods and Kirton's Farm was at Yew tree cottage on Reading Road (now Purley Rise).

There were three quite different modes of farming. Almost all the farms had cattle and were usually both dairy and beef with chickens, geese and pigs. There were large tracts of arable land although this was not very fruitful once you got onto the upland slopes to the south of the Reading Road. Finally there was meadowland alongside the River Thames and Sul Brook

There were many small holdings ranging from one to ten acres. We have mentioned Menpes fruit and carnation farm to the east of Long Lane but there was also xx farm between the railway and tje Reading Road with a second small holding operated by the Venners between it and Westbury Lane. In the grounds of Westfield was the garden house.

Public Services

Water

In 1894 the Tilehurst, Pangbourne and District Water Company had been established to provide piped water for the area. It was established under the Water Orders Confirmation Act of 1894 to 'construct and maintain waterworks and to supply water in the Parishes of Sulham and Purley and parts of Tilehurst, Pangbourne, Tidmarsh, Whitchurch and Englefield.

This was taken over by the Reading Corporation Waterworks in 1930 , by a new Water Board in 1958 and is now part of the Thames Water Authority. When the takeover by the Reading Waterworks occurred both Pangbourne and Purley Parish Councils were alarmed and sent a joint deputation to the Parliamentary Committee of Reading Borough to seek assurances that this move would not result in undue charges. They were assured that future charges would be in line with what had been charged previously.

The water supply comes from an artesian well at Pangbourne which is disguised as a house on the Tidmarsh Road. The water is then pumped up to a reservoir on top of Kentwood Hill and on up to the water tower which

was built by Reading Corporation in 1931-32 to provide adequate water pressure. From here it flows down through a series of main pipes to distribution pipes for each house.

Refuse collection

At first the organisation of a refuse collection service was left to the Parish and Pangbourne started their service around the turn of the century. Refuse was dumped on a site at Marsh Farm, roughly where the Bourne Road estate now is. They applied to Bradfield RDC for permission to renew their arrangements in April 1908. This was later taken over by Bradfield RDC and extended to serve Purley. The cost of collection was borne on the rates but householders were required to provide their own dustbin.

At first open lorries were used but these were soon superseded by the covered lorry. The cover was in the form of a half cylinder with sliding panels which were raised in turn so that refuse could be tipped in. There was usually a small trailer towed along behind for waste paper and most dustmen used to hang sacks on the back of the lorry in which any valuable item that were spotted could be kept. This practice known as totting was a valuable addition to the dustmen's income.

The most popular items were those containing lead and copper for which the scrap merchants would give a good price. There were however rich pickings to be made for the dustmen with the sharpest eyes.

The Church

The sale of Purley Magna

Development

The Parish Council

Chapter 9

The Second World War 1938-1946

Introduction

The Second World War was to have a profound effect upon Purley. It saw a transition from an essentially feudal village to a modern suburb with the influx of many new residents.

The war had been looming for several years and after Chamberlain's visit to Hitler in Munich in 1937 everyone thought the fear of war had gone for ever. The Parochial Church Council went so far as to resolve in September ' That as the crisis is now over, an appeal can now be asked for a thank offering to God for the blessing of peace' They launched the appeal for funds to repair the organ and raised £49.

Air Raid Precautions

Preparations had begun some years earlier when the Baldwin Government issued the first circular on 'Air Raid Precautions' in September 1935 and local authorities were charged with the responsibility of protecting their public. The main threat was seen from the air and the popular belief was that the rain of bombs from the heavens would utterly destroy everything on the ground and anyone who did survive would be killed or crippled by poison gas.

In a lecture given in January 1939 however an expert, Commander Dawson, gave his view that it would be quite impossible to rase Reading to the ground as was popularly feared. It took a long time to get things organised and the first effect on Purley was not until March 1938 when they received a circular from Bradfield RDC on the subject.

The Air Wardens Service was created in April 1937 and organised on a County basis. Major L P Paget was appointed as the Berkshire Air Raid Precautions (ARP) Officer, but he resigned in April 1938 to be replaced by Sir Archibald Campbell of Flowers Court in Pangbourne. Sir Archibald

resigned in January 1939 to go to Jamaica. By May 1938, 1897 men and 916 women recruits had joined up, the number swelling to 3510 men and 2707 women by December 1938 of whom 2811 were described as fully trained.

Sir Archibald was replaced by Major General R J Collins but he resigned in July 1939 to take up his duties with the Territorial Army. His place as Berkshire's ARP Officer was taken by Lt Col Edgar Galbraith and as ARP Controller by Sir George Mowbray, Chairman of Berks County Council. The Assistant ARP Officer for the County was initially Purley's County Councillor, Colonel J N Norman Walker. He resigned in Feb 1940 to be replaced by Mr Cary-Elwes.

Pangbourne was the centre for organisation in this area and the appointment of Mr C L Stock as Head Warden was made. Purley Parish Council was asked to nominate a Chief Warden for Purley and Mr Stockley was nominated in October 1938. In January of the next year he reported to a meeting in the Pangbourne Council Chamber (which was also being used at the HQ for the Fire Brigade) that there was general organisational chaos, his appeals for warden's equipment had gone unheeded and they still had not yet had their full issue of civilian gas masks. What was alarming however was the local reaction which ranged from apathy to downright hostility, shown very forcibly to the ARP volunteers when they went from door to door. The ARP were finding sites to dump materials such as sand and fencing posts, finding sites for trenches in the local villages and compiling a register of who had a telephone.

A first aid post was established in Purley but this was closed down in April 1940 and the people of Purley were told they would have to go into Pangbourne for treatment.. The shortages of equipment were causing great resentment and, also in April, Bradfield RDC resolved to purchase an additional 98 helmets for the ARP at a cost of 12/6 each

Mr Stock resigned in July 1941 and when a woman, Miss Ashlow, was appointed to replace him, all the other wardens protested to the County's ARP Controller that she was only an administrator and should never have been appointed as Head Warden. The County promptly dismissed the complaint and the wardens resigned en-bloc. Purley was informed that Mr Sims had been appointed to replace Mr Stockley and all equipment that had been issued to the other wardens was to be returned promptly. The Parish

Council was so alarmed at developments that it asked for all the facts to be put to the County Controller, Sir George Mowbray. Attempts were made to get the wardens to withdraw their resignations but only Mr Webb did so. By March 1942 the service had resumed its activities under a new Chief Warden, Mr Skidmore

Other arrangements made included the installation of a platform above the police station in Pangbourne by Messrs Carter in February 1939 for the air raid siren. This was electrically controlled from within the station and could easily be heard all over Purley. This helped the Parish Council to come to a decision as they were asked by the county to make a local determination whether they would rely on the sirens or send a warden out into the streets when a red alert was received from the RAF's Fighter Command Alert centre.

Refugees

The County Council were very concerned about the responsibilities that were placed upon them, especially the potential problems that would occur if large numbers of school children were to flow in as refugees. They earmarked 4 of their schools, including Pangbourne Council School, for use by the authorities in case of emergency, but members were insistent that any arrangements should not upset the teaching.

The Home Guard

The Local Defence Volunteers was an initiative of the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, when he announced in May 1940 - 'Now is your opportunity. We want large numbers of ... men ... between the ages of 15 and 65 to offer their services ...'. This was renamed the Home Guard in July. The local force commandeered a Rolls Royce and spent many happy hours driving furiously around the area in it. One of their number Stan Pocock was killed by in an accidental explosion near Highclere in 1942 and is commemorated on the Purley War Memorial.

A rather silly dispute broke out in 1943 about the colour of uniform. It had taken some time before any form of uniform at all had been issued, initially all that was issued was an arm band, but gradually army type

uniforms were issued to the Home Guard and a deep blue uniform to the Civil Defence. By 1943 many members of Civil Defence had transferred to the Home Guard or had joined both organisations. Before a certain date all such Civil Defence personnel were issued with a khaki uniform which they wore when on Home Guard duty. After this date however it was decided they should continue to use their blue Civil Defence uniforms. This resulted in a very motley appearance and after a great deal of argument it was decided to adopt a District approach with all Civil Defence personnel wearing either blue or khaki. It was not clear which districts wore blue and which khaki

Civil Defence

In 1940 Civil Defence was reorganised by the County into six areas. That covering Bradfield Rural District had its reporting station in Sulhampstead at what is now the Police Training College.

The County announced in 1941 that a Local Defence Committee was to be established and on August 25th the Parish Council set it up with Messrs Hodgkin, Pocock, Harvey, Bucknell and Tidbury, with powers to co-opt.

Just after war broke out there was a public outcry for better protection and local ratepayers demanded that a shelter be built at the Purley School. The rector, Mr Skuse, was appalled by the idea and vigorously opposed it. He claimed that the village had been declared a reception area and therefore could be presumed to be safe from attack. He had called in the experts to examine the arrangements made at the school and they had pronounced them satisfactory. In May 1940 the Board of Education at Whitehall sent out a circular which advised that rural schools need not be provided with shelters in the same way that urban schools were, but that all children should be rehearsed to take shelter within the school, if bombs were falling in the neighbourhood, keeping away from windows and if possible lying on the floor. Under no circumstances should they attempt to leave the school and go into the open.

The Parish Council considered the matter and decided on July 16th 1940 not to support the demand but to ask instead that 5 stirrup pumps be provided. Eventually the County Council agreed in April 1941 to the spending of £307 to provide a shelter in Pangbourne to accommodate 110

persons, but this was little comfort to the people of Purley.

It would seem that Mr Skuse was right as the nearest Purley got to being bombed was when a stick of incendiaries were dropped on Thames Avenue in Pangbourne on 17th November 1940 and a further three bombs dropped in the fields between Long Lane and Sulham Woods, aimed no doubt at the Searchlight battery which was established in the quarry there.

In the statistics which were published after the war Bradfield RDC came off very lightly. Prior to 1/6/44 no buildings were demolished, 4 were damaged beyond repair, 44 were seriously damaged and 103 slightly damaged. No building damage was reported after that date. Bombs were counted as:- 46 in Q3/1940; 86 in Q4/1940; 15 in Q1/1941; 16 in Q2 1941 and 12 in Q1/1944. All other quarters had no bombs.

There were incidents in Purley 28/10/40 and 19/11/40; in Pangbourne 16/11/40, an incendiary bomb in Pangbourne 17/11/40, three unexploded High Explosive bombs in Sulham 5/11/40 and one in Pangbourne Meadow 15/11/40.

Refugees

The arrangements for refugees had been announced as early as January 1939 by the Home secretary, Sir Walter Elliott. The programme was aimed principally at children but it accepted that parents (but only as 'helpers') and teachers would probably need to be evacuated as well. The Government were prepared to pay 5/- a week to accommodate a helper or teacher and 10/6 for the first and 8/- for subsequent children. They called for people in the designated reception areas to volunteer to go on the register in case their accommodation was needed.

The village became a reception area for two quite different groups of people. The first official evacuees arrived on 4th September 1939. The party consisted of some 50 children from the Islington and Holloway areas of London of whom 8 were below school age. Some mothers accompanied them and all were found billets. Kennelgates (Bellisle) was nominated as a reception hostel despite the advice of the local fire brigade that work was needed to be done on the fire escapes.

The other group were people who had bought plots on the River Estate and who came down to live on their plots. By September 1939 some 100 children of school age had come to live on the estate on their parent's

initiative and the numbers were putting severe pressure on the school. A second teacher was appointed on the 2nd October to cope with the additional children. One of these refugees later recalled his experiences in the PP Journal of May 2008

Many refugees did not stay very long as the expected devastation did not occur and parents resented the different cultural environment in which their children found themselves. When the bombing began again in earnest there was a second wave and in April 1940 Bradfield RDC were told to take 700 unaccompanied evacuee children Purley being allotted 20 of them. In June 1940 24 children arrived from 'dangerous areas' but they were accompanied by two teachers who were able to help out in the school.

The numbers of children in the school fluctuated considerably. In July 1940 there were 68, by August the number had dropped to 54 of whom 30 were evacuees, In June 1941 the numbers were back to 68 of whom 14 were local, 21 were self-evacuees and 33 Government evacuees.

By September the numbers had dropped to 64 but only two teachers remained. Thereafter the numbers declined steadily until by April 1945 there were 34 children of whom 10 were local.

At a County level there were 8500 government evacuees in Sept 1939 and 2850 self evacuees. By 3rd November the numbers had fallen by over 2000, almost all government evacuees and the County made arrangements to send back teachers who were no longer needed, to their home areas. At the end of February 1940 the numbers had fallen to 4782 Government- and 1139 self-evacuees. By July 1940 the totals had fallen further to 4158 government- and 901 self-evacuees against a native Berkshire elementary school population of 18306, ie an extra burden of some 28% which was considerably less than the peak of 62% in Sept 1939. By Sept 1943 there were 2915 government refugees still in Berkshire schools with a native population of 18679.

The War Effort

As well as children being evacuated a number of companies and other organisations moved to the area. Westfields became the offices of the exam department of the Royal Society of Arts and Purley Park was bought by May and Baker's, a chemical firm, who established their Head Office there and later used it as a centre for packing cosmetics.

Purley Garage, which had been bought by Charley Edwards just before the war, had built up a small engineering capability with two machine tools. He successfully tendered to build parts for Spitfires which were being assembled at Woodley. His son John recalled some memories in the PP Journal of September 2001. Some information about the Woodley airfield came out in a talk to Project Purley - see Journal January 2009.

There was also a concerted move to decentralise and disperse many major industries. This caused companies to look for industrial sites in what would otherwise be most unsuitable areas and such was the concern expressed by many Local Authorities that a Joint Industrial Planning Board was set up in early 1940 to deal with the problems being caused.

During the war everyone was exhorted to make the most of what they had and to make sure that nothing was wasted. Several lectures were held in the village on subjects such as 'Fruit Preservation' and 'Horticulture' and a Fruit Preservation Centre was established in Reading which offered practical courses which were attended by people from Purley

'Digging for Victory' was a national slogan and everyone was exhorted to use every scrap of land possible for growing food. People were expected to dig up their lawns and to seek allotments wherever possible. School playing fields were turned into gardens and special lessons on gardening given to the children. It was suggested that highway verge land should be used but the County Council ruled against this in May 1940 on the grounds that there was too big a danger of disturbing underground cables and services. They were no doubt keenly aware of the important nature of the telephone cables in the war effort.

School children were encouraged to play their part and there were several campaigns for the collection of medicinal herbs and other plants which were primarily aimed at the children. Drying centres for foxglove leaves were established at Reading and Bucklebury and there were centres for the collection of horse chestnuts and rose hips. In February 1943 the County Council reported that 86 tons of horse chestnuts had been collected for which the manufacturers paid £12/-/- per ton, raising a total of £1032. Of this £7/10/0 per ton went to the collectors. 4 tons, 14 cwt and 26 lbs of rose hips were collected at £20 per ton to the County Council. Collectors were paid 16/- for a complete hundredweight or at a pro-rata rate of 14/- per cwt for smaller lots. The children did not usually get their hands on the

money however as it was usually 'donated' by the schools for such purposes as the 'Spitfire Fund'. Also in 1943 the Ministry of Education urged Local authorities to release older children from school to perform seasonal work on the land. This applied to children over 12 and they were paid at the rate of 4d an hour.

Recycling and saving

In July 1940 the Ministry of Agriculture sent out a reminder that the 1919 Act (on the destruction of rats and mice) should be rigorously enforced as they were destroying too much food. Wood Pigeons had been protected under the Wild Birds Protection Act of 1880 and in May 1940 the County Council resolved to ask that they be exempted. This was granted by an Order from the Secretary of State dated 31/5/1940. The exhortation on rats and mice did not seem to be very effective however as on the 6th Feb 1943 the Ministry of Food sent out a circular stating they were not satisfied with progress and intended to deal directly with District and Borough Councils and they also imposed obligations on the owners as well as the occupiers of property. In October the County Council finally relinquished their powers and delegated the problem to Bradfield RDC.

In April 1942 the Bishop of Oxford sent out a circular to his clergy telling them how to respond to requests from the authorities for the removal of iron railings from Church Yards. Materials of all sorts were desperately needed for the war effort and many houses had theirs removed. It does not appear however that any of the railings round any of the graves in Purley churchyard suffered this fate.

Bradfield RDC gave up collecting refuse in July 1941 and concentrated its efforts to collect salvage. The Sanitary Inspector, Mr T H Windle, had been appointed Salvage Officer and he devised a scheme for separating waste which became a model adopted by all other Rural Districts in the country. There were two lists, the A list of items to be collected for salvage and the B list of items which would not be collected. In the A list were :- Rags, Bottles and Jars, Paper (subdivided into Newspapers, Magazines, Cardboard and other), Bones, Scrap metal, Broken glass and Tins. At the last minute rubber articles, excepting bicycle tyres was added. These had to be separated and boxed for collection on the usual collection date which in Purley's case was every other Thursday. The system started on 14th July

1941 and before long the Ministry was sending other councils to see how Bradfield did it.

On list B were: Ashes, Garden refuse and Kitchen waste. It was recommended that ashes be sifted and used for filling sandbags, Garden refuse made into compost heaps and kitchen waste used to feed pigs and poultry. These arrangements continued until May 6th 1946 when normal collections were resumed.

Officialdom seemed to be full of questions and Purley Parish Council were asked frequently to provide information. In March 1940 they were asked where bodies might be accommodated and recommended that the recreation hut on the River Estate be used as a temporary mortuary. In March 1941 the questions were about alternative water supplies and the clerk was instructed to send off a list of wells in the village.

Purley's Sacrifices and Memories

Many men from Purley either volunteered or were conscripted into the armed forces and five lost their lives. The most well known of these was Major Hugh Lister who used to live at the Old Rectory and who had been ordained as a priest just before the war. He joined the Welch Guards as a combatant however and earned a reputation for great daring and courage. He was awarded the Military Cross for a particularly ferocious attack on a German gun emplacement but was killed in action in Belgium in 1944. Articles about him and the esteem in which he was held in Hechtel, where he was killed can be found in the PP Journals of January 2005 and May 2004.

Edward Reed was taken prisoner by the Japanese and died in Siam in June 1943. Ronald Rawlins joined the Royal Armoured Corps and was killed just after the crossing of the Rhine in the closing days of the war. The other two names commemorated on the War Memorial are Dick Warburton and Stanley Pocock.

Members of Project Purley recounted their personal memories of the war (reported in PP Journal May 2005)

Eileen Goddard came to live in Purley in recent years. Her husband Edmund was part of the crew of one of the X-craft which were sent to sink the Tirpitz - this was recounted in an article in PP Journal of September

2007

Catherine Butcher's father was taken prisoner of the Japanese - she spoke to Project Purley about his experiences - see PP Journal of May 2008. John Sykes, who was a member for many years, was also taken prisoner in Hong Kong and survived to tell the tale.

The Military Effort

The military were very active in the area. The meadows near the lock and between Purley and Pangbourne were a great training ground for the Royal Engineers who delighted in practicing the building of temporary bridges and launching landing craft. The Canadians used to do it all with muscle power, unloading the pontoons from their lorries (there were four pontoons per lorry), getting them into the water and laying the decking. When the Americans arrived they came fully equipped with cranes and heavy lifting gear but in a competition the Canadians had two tanks across the river before the Americans had even got the decking on.

The Americans were mainly from the 181st Engineer Heavy Pontoon Battalion who were disbanded in Germany after the war. There exists a military history of the battalion which includes many photos of their operations around Pangbourne.

The Canadian troops were stationed at Basildon Park and Wollascot House in Whitchurch and there was another camp at the top of Whitchurch Hill. Mostly they were from the 39th Field Company of Engineers and used to return to Purley to drink at the Social Club on Wintringham Way. After a goodbout they would often fire their guns into the air much to many peoples annoyance. The unit took part in the Dieppe raid and many of them were killed or captured.

The Royal Engineers had used Pangbourne Meadows as a training camp since the 1920s. In October 1939 the troops there were from the 51st Highland Division Engineers and the Engineers GHQ (Kent) They had all moved out by the time the Americans arrived.

Later a detachment was based in a camp by Purvey's old quarry which was situated behind Kirton's farm and between Long Lane and Sulham Woods. There was also a searchlight battery and camp to the south of the Oxford Road and west of Purley Park Lodges. The searchlight was one of

the outer ring around London.

A defensive pill box was constructed on the Oxford Road near the Purley/ Reading border. Other pill boxes are to be found in the area and form part of the plans for holding the Thames as the main defensive line for German troops attacking from the South. The plan was for these pill boxes to delay the Germans sufficiently to allow all bridges to be destroyed.. An article about these defences was in the PP Journal of January 2007

For most of the war Sulham House was occupied by the father and family of Air Marshall Sir Charles Portal who was Chief of the Air Staff from 1940 to 1945. He probably was rarely able to be there but his family remained at the house until 1953, by which time he had been made Viscount Portal of Hungerford (where he had been born in 1893)

After the Americans came into the war Bradfield RDC sent out a circular to explain to the locals how to entertain American troops if any were to be stationed nearby. Many of them were stationed at Basildon Park before D-Day and the role of the Park was recalled in an article in the PP Journal of January 2005. The Park was later used as a German Prisoner of War camp and several of the prisoners were sent to work on farms in Purley This is recalled in an article in PP Journal May 2008.

Victory

Victory came in 1945 and on May 8th and 9th there was a two day holiday to celebrate VE day. As the news was received the church bells across the country were rung. In Purley the bells were none too safe but they were rung with gusto all the same. The sound of the bells from all the nearby churches, especially from Mapledurham, could also be heard in the village and as the trains ran through the cutting the engine drivers sounded their whistles to add to the noise. It was a day of euphoria, and as one of the residents remarked 'we will never forget today - because Fred came out of the church after ringing the bells and fell over a tombstone in his excitement and broke his leg' Fred Rawlins was the sexton at the time.

Celebrations to mark the end of the war with Japan had to be delayed until August following the dropping of the first atomic bombs. The world and Purley would never be the same again.

It took a long time to dismantle all the bureaucracy and controls which

