



## *Account of Purley on Thames*

# Westbury Farm

R200135 by John Chapman

For the farmhouse see R200349, for the Vineyard see R200217 for the Barns see R200216

Westbury was once the centre of the Manor of Purley Parva which goes back at least to Domesday and probably some considerable time before that. After the Conquest it was included in the lands of Theodoric the Goldsmith but it soon became part of the lands of the de Siffrewast family who held lands all across Berkshire. Towards the end of the 12th century Isabella de Siffrewast donated a half virgate of land to Reading Abbey which was roughly the present area between Purley Lane and Glebe Road and between the main road and Purley Lodge. This land remained outside the Purley manorial system until it was severed in 1840 by the railway and the southern part, Westfield, became the home for the Sykes family with connections to Basildon Park.

In the 14th century it was in the hands of the Malynes family. Henry Buskres de Malines was a Belgian merchant who came to England around 1300. After a gambling debt in 1462 it fell into the hands of the Norris family.

Around 1630 after the death of Lord Norris it became part of the Hardwick estate across the river owned by the Lybbe family. It was about this time that the oldest part of Westbury farmhouse was built. By this time the rest of Westbury village had disappeared and it is now classed as a Deserted Mediaeval Village. The farm remained part of the Hardwick estate until fairly recently when, after Bernard Theobald died, it was sold to the owner of Springs Farm. For a while in the 1920s, there was an airfield on the western part of the farm used by the Rose family of Hardwick.

On the east wall of the farmhouse are two firemarks. These signified that the building had been insured so that, should it catch fire, the local fire brigade could extinguish the fire knowing the insurance money would pay, but no sign - no fire brigade!!

Bernard Theobald was brought up in Tokers Green and joined the Royal Navy. During the war he met and married Gwen and after the war he took a lease on Westbury Farm and moved in to be a small mixed farmer. He had 40 cows, pigs, turkeys, ducks, chickens and even guinea fowl. On the arable side he grew wheat, barley, oats, maize, kale, mangolds, potatoes, linseed and lots more beside. One of his early specialities was tobacco which he dried on wires hung across the stalls where the cows were housed. He smoked it in his pipe, saving himself a lot of money.

In 1970 he had a herd of 120 cows milked by himself and one dairygirl but it had all got a bit too much like hard work so he embarked on a completely new line and planted some vines in his garden. Within a short time he had 15 acres of vines grown on the double Geneva system whereby the vines are trained to grow sideways along two parallel wires running horizontally instead of the more usual vertical arrangement. Bernard always claimed that this gave the grapes more sunlight. He was one of the first English growers to grow grapes for red wine.

One of his barns was used to hold the equipment necessary for crushing and storing the wine. One time when the crusher broke down he and his assistant disinfected their Wellington boots and trod the grapes. He remarked it didn't take any longer than the crusher but it was damned hard work.

He converted the Tudor barn to be a lecture room and used to entertain parties of visitors and show off his wines. He was quite popular with Women's Institutes as he always had a twinkle in his eye for

the ladies.

Another venture was his trout lakes. He dug several of these to the north of the farmhouse and had to remove vast quantities of gravel in the process so for several years the residents of Westbury Lane were subjected to a procession of heavy lorries up and down the lane. One suspects he actually made more money from the gravel than from selling fishing rights. The lakes were fed from the West Brook which runs to the lock but one year after flooding some pike got in above the wire fence across the stream and had a feast day.

Bernard was one of Purley's Councillors on Bradfield Rural District Council and served the first term of Newbury District Council from 1972 to 1976 being Chairman one year. He held his reception at Greenham House, the American Club at Greenham Common (now demolished) and showed off his wines. He was Chairman of Purley Parish Council for many years.

He had many other enterprises at Westbury Farm including pottery repair, renting out space in his collection of old barns to local craftsmen. He was also a ham-radio enthusiast.

He died in 1992 and the farm was sold to Mr Shaker of Springs Farm who cleared out almost all the old barns and modernised the Tudor Barn and Farmhouse. He also removed all the vines and the remainder of Bernard's stock of bottles of wine was sold off to cover the excise duty. Those that were not sold were smashed and the contents thrown away.

### *Lease of Westbury Farm 1741*

*From an article by Jean Debney, published in Purley Parish News March 1986*

The Manor of Purley Parva or Little Purley is known to have existed at the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086 and during the next 600 years continues to be referred to as such. By 1629 it is referred to as the manor of Westbrook Farm alias Little Purley, and a century later as Westbury Farm or occasionally as Purley Farm

If a family is associated with a property for some years their name may be linked. Thus there are several references to this manor being called 'Purley Malines' in the late 17th and early 19th centuries after several generations of a family who held it in the 14th century.

The name Viners Farm relates to 174 acres of this manor which members of the Viner family leased in the 18th century. This name stuck until the present century when it reverted to the current Westbury Farm

The first record of the Viner family in Purley is the baptism of three children of John and Ann between 1704 and 1709, when although referred to as 'of Mapledurham' they paid taxes in the parish; within two years Ann was a widow.

Nothing more is known until 21st February 1741 when Ann Viner, still a widow but now described as 'of Newnham, Oxford' leased for 9 years 'all that messuage or tenement, farm lands and premises lying in Purley called Westbury farm, late in the occupation of Giles Blagrove and now in the occupation of Elizabeth Flower, widow' plus some other unspecified land in Purley and all the 'timber trees'. The annual rent was £90 for the farm and £11 for the rest plus 'one couple of fat and well-fed pulletts yearly' to be paid on the 1st January to the widow Isabel Lybbe and Philip Powys her son-in-law, both of Hardwick Oxford.

The terms of the lease stated that the 'dung and compost' from the farm should be spread over the fields as manure, except in the last two years when it was to be stored in the 'backside' ie the Farmyard. 'Mixt grass seed with barley was to be sown in the final year in 25 acres of enclosed arable field. Also free accommodation for the lord's men and horses was to be allowed any time after the 1st May that year so that the Common Field, lying in a summer fallow, could be ploughed and sown with seed ready for the next tenant.

The lease also stated that Ann Viner could store her crops free of charge for a month after the expiry date. The landlords promised to allow them to 'hold courts' in the demised messuage as often as they pleased.

From other fragmentary evidence, it seems that Ann Viner, her son William and then his daughter remained in possession until about 1796 when Edward Sherwood was the farmer. A Manor Court appears to have been held in Westbury Farm House on 22nd October 1754 when among other expenses is the payment of 2s 6d to Mrs Viner's daughter, presumably for serving the mutton and beer which were eaten on that occasion, and a further court was held there in March 1773 just 5 months before William's death.



