

Account of Purley on Thames

The Turnpike

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The Main Road

Purley is bisected by the Reading to Pangbourne Road which was named variously 'The Highway', 'The Reading Road', 'The Turnpike'. In later years it became known as the 'Oxford Road' and was numbered A42 in the Road Classification scheme of 1920. After the Second World War it was de-rated and renumbered A329 and named 'Reading Road' from its junction with Long Lane to Pangbourne as an extension of the Reading Road there, and as the Oxford Road from the boundary with Reading Borough to the Long Lane Junction as an extension of Reading's 'Oxford Road' This was always regarded as odd because the Reading Road led to Oxford and the Oxford Road to Reading.

When street numbers were introduced the numbering scheme for Reading was continued a mile into Purley. Following an attempt by Reading to incorporate Purley in 1983 the Parish Council responded by renaming the Reading Road as Purley Rise. This latter name had been in use for a short part of Reading Road since the 1920s when what was known as the Purley Rise Estate was built. The unofficial renaming ceremony was covered by Regional Television, both BBC and ITV and was followed shortly by the official procedures through Newbury District Council and the London Gazette. At the same time the opportunity was taken to number the properties. Unfortunately the change of name order ran from Purley Lane to the Sul Brook leaving a very small section between Long Lane and Purley Lane with the old name as anyone using sat-nav at the junction will soon find out.

When Repton drew up the plans for a new mansion for Anthony Gilbert Storer around 1795 he suggested that the turnpike be diverted southwards so as not to be so obtrusive from the house. As it turned out the new house was not built on the proposed site by the river and the new site lay astride the turnpike so the need to divert the road became even more acute. This is what happened and a new road was constructed which ran about 300 yards south of the new house. It was bounded by a six foot flint and brick wall in traditional Berkshire style and the opportunity was taken to close off the old road to the village and construct New Hill.

Over the years traffic flows have increased substantially. They were running at around 9000 vehicles per day in 1979 and had risen to around 13,000 by 1990. Roundabouts have been built at the junctions with Knowlsey Road and Sherwood Rise and traffic lights installed at the junction with Long Lane. From the Roebuck to just past Westbury Lane it had a 40mph limit but this was reduced to 30 mph around 2012. There have been many accidents and a number of deaths as it is quite unsuitable for the volume of traffic and motorists are very inclined to speed.

Over the years it has been widened and land taken from adjoining properties. It has a footpath of sorts for all its length but the section between Westbury Lane and Pangbourne can be hair-raising for pedestrians.

In 1910? the County Council were getting very upset over the damage done to the road by traction engines towing trailers loaded with bricks from the Tilehurst brickworks to the developments in Pangbourne. It became particularly troublesome when the Chain Arches bridge over the Sul Brook collapsed and had to be rebuilt. As a consequence the County Council were in the forefront of the move to force road users to pay a road tax to contribute toward maintenance.

The Turnpike

In the 1700s a number of Turnpike Trusts were established to improve the roads for wheeled vehicles and they were empowered to charge tolls.

The Reading and Wallingford Turnpike was the only Turnpike to affect Purley. It was established in 1763 under the name of 'The Shillingford, Wallingford and Reading Road Company', Each of the villages through which it passed had a share and as Purley had 1 mile 7 furlongs 27 chains out of a total length of about 18 miles it thus owned about one ninth of it.

In 1837 it was reported as taking £1200 10 0 in tolls and having spent £1379 13 6. It had total debt of £2526 14 6 and assets of £606 5 2.

The turnpike was turned into an ordinary highway in 1875 and the Trust wound up. Purley then had 2486 out of a total of 28092 yards and received £41/15/5 out of the £472 final assets.

It followed the course of the present A329 for most of its path except for the section from New Hill to the Roebuck. It originally ran fairly straight from the Roebuck to Long Lane, but when Wyatt came to advise on a new mansion for the new Lord of the Manor around 1800 he advised building it on the line of the turnpike and diverting the turnpike to the south so that it was out of sight of the house. This was duly done and the road adopted roughly its present alignment leaving the old route redundant. It was used as the eastern drive for while but that was abandoned in favour of a new drive leading from the Lodge gates.

The Stretches

It is convenient to consider the road in a number of stretches as follows:-

- A Pill Box Area
- B Pill Box to Purley Park Lodge
- C The Anglo-American Estate
- D Knowsley Road Roundabout
- E Roundabout to Long Lane
- F Long Lane junction and Traffic lights
- G Traffic Lights to Sherwood Rise
- H Sherwood Rise Roundabout
- J Sherwood Rise to Glebe Road
- K Glebe Road to Westbury Lane
- L Westbury Lane to Purley Grange
- M Purley Grange to Sul Brook
- N Sul Brook to Dunluce Gardens.

A - Pill Box Area

The pill box is just inside Purley and was erected in WW2 as part of a defensive line in the event of a German invasion although the pill box itself was not actually part of the line but was a protection for Reading.

About where the pill box now is there was a road leading down to the village known as 'hanging on the hill' This was closed off when the railway cut through in the 1830s and abandoned as an access to Purley Park Mansion.

B - Pill Box to Purley Park Lodge

It was where the pill box is that the old turnpike which ran through parkland and arable, veered off southwards to avoid the mansion and a six foot wall was erected on its north side to shield the Mansion grounds.

On the south side was parkland with drives originating at the Purley Park Lodge Gates. Over the years from the early 1900s to the 1960s plots of land were sold off for housing with very deep gardens running up to the Tilehurst boundary

A road parallel to the main road was constructed when the County Surveyor decided that there were too many accesses onto the main A329. It cut across the fronts of nos 1085 to 1113 Oxford Road and all residents were granted a right of way. A single access was constructed between 1087 and 1091 but a second access was opened at the west end to make it easier for refuse collection vehicles. When Goodliffe Gardens was constructed the two most westerly properties had their access reversed and became 19 and 20 Goodliffe Gardens. Bitter inter-neighbour disputes have resulted in further private accesses being constructed.

The south side of the main road was protected from development close to the road as it had been intended as the start of the Purley-Pangbourne bypass and seen as a potential dual carriageway. However three new estates have been built on the land plus land accessed from Fullbrooke Crescent in Tilehurst which was developed as Copse Close and Oregon Avenue and ceded to Tilehurst Parish in the 1990s.

The first of these developments was Theobald Drive built in the late 1960s. It consisted of six large houses parallel to the main road with a further three up a driveway following footpath 6 which led to Fullbrooke Crescent.

The second development was Roebuck Rise which consisted of fifteen large houses, of which four were on a spur named Durant Way after our MP. This had been intended to lead to a much larger development to the east but the owner of the next house on Oxford Road refused to sell.

Eventually in the 2010s the owner sold out and a new estate was constructed leading from Rawlins Rise with a mixture of large house and flats with roads named after Purley war heroes. The conditions placed upon the developers obliged them to provide a traffic light pedestrian crossing for footpath 6 and lots of landscaping.

C The Anglo-American Estate

Unusually the gatehouse to the Purley Park Mansion was on the south side of the road although in later years they did construct an entrance leading directly from the main road. The gatehouse consisted of two small thatched cottages with a common roof and a drive way entrance in the middle. The driveway then turned left and ran through the parkland almost to the Tilehurst border and then looped back to enter the grounds of the main estate via a tunnel under the road. This tunnel became the Purley Air Raid Shelter in WW2.

By the 1930s Purley Park had sold off almost all its land save that between the railway and the main road with New Hill providing the western boundary. The land to the south between the last house (1107) on Oxford Road and the start of the hill towards New Hill became a light industrial estate named the Anglo-American Estate and included kennels for the greyhounds that used to race at Reading Stadium (close to the Norcot roundabout), a trout fishery, Keenes poultry farm and various other small enterprises of which very little record remains.

D - Knowsley Road Roundabout

The Knowsley Road roundabout was constructed as the start of the Purley-Pangbourne by-pass. Knowsley Road itself was seen as an access to Tilehurst opposite the access to Purley. The bypass itself would form the southern boundary of Purley and cutting Long Lane in the area of the present Carew Close. although there were many appeals for Long Lane to cross the bypass with a bridge as at this point the bypass would be in a deep cutting. Apple Close was the first of the housing developments on the new Wimpey Estate and was built with its gardens backing on the bypass.

When the by-pass proposals were dropped Wimpeys were able to put housing on Simons Close retaining the dual carriage start of the bypass and also built Huscarle Close, Cornwall Close and extend Devonshire Gardens and other roads to occupy the reserved space. At the same time Goodliffe Gardens was constructed and the last two houses on Oxford road given new accesses as

part of the deal and to reduce the accesses onto the main road.

E - Roundabout to Long Lane

F - Long Lane junction and Traffic lights

G - Traffic Lights to Sherwood Rise

H - Sherwood Rise Roundabout

J - Sherwood Rise to Glebe Road

K - Glebe Road to Westbury Lane

L - Westbury Lane to Purley Grange

M - Purley Grange to Sul Brook

N - Sul Brook to Dunluce Gardens.

We conclude with Jean Debney's article of the subject article 30 in the From My History Notebook published in PPN December 1982 and January 1983.

30. The Reading/Oxford Road (A329). (Part 1)

It has not yet been possible to ascertain exactly when the "Highway" between Reading and Pangbourne first existed: Michael Hinton in his "History of the Town of Reading" (1954) suggests that it may have been in the second decade of the 18th century, but there are several references that show the existence of the road prior to this. The earliest reference that I have found so far is a bequest of 40s (£2) "for mending of the way betwene Reding and Pangborne" given by Henry Kelsall, a wealthy clothier of Reading, in his will dated 1493. Glebe Terriers describe the land owned by the Parish Church and 5 survive for Purley dating from a fragment of the 16th century to 1704. They mention the "Reading hye way" (16th C), "Reding way" (1634) and the "Reading Road" (1704) in their description of field boundaries.

For many centuries the road leading west out of Reading was called the "Pangbourne Lane" and a document names it so in relation to the Roebuck Inn in 1748. Nowadays it seems to depend on which map you look at as to whether it is called the "Reading Road" or the "Oxford Road."

At the beginning of the 18th century most parts of Britain were connected by roads, the majority of which were in an atrocious condition. Each parish was responsible for the upkeep of roads within their boundary under the supervision of an annually appointed (and untrained) Overseer; but the tasks were often performed badly, if at all. The most common method of repair at that time was merely to fill in any holes with stones, which soon dislodged leaving the road surface as bad as ever.

Wains or long wagons served as long distance transport for rich and poor alike and were being used in the late 17th century on many long-distance routes out of London. Drawn by 6 or more horses, they travelled at 2-3 mph and carried about 20 passengers in addition to assorted goods. But few people travelled for pleasure and as fares were far from cheap few could afford to do so.

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the numbers of wagons and livestock using the roads increased rapidly and the road system became totally inadequate. It was eventually realised that money must be provided to finance the proper improvement and maintenance of the roads. This was achieved by passing thousands of Acts of Parliament authorising the establishment of Turnpike Trusts. The Acts, which had to be renewed every 21 years, gave each group of appointed Trustees the power to collect tolls in exchange for the provision and maintenance of their stretch of road.

The first Turnpike Act for the road from "Shillingford, Oxfordshire, through Wallingford and Pangbourne, to Reading, Berks." was passed in 1763. It stated that the road was "in a ruinous condition, narrow in many places and incommodious to passengers" and the Trustees were empowered to repair and widen the road and also to build a bridge at Shillingford to replace the hazardous ferry. It seems that the Trustees were not immediately able to carry out their responsibilities because when the Act was renewed 21 years later the road was said to be still in the same poor condition and the bridge at Shillingford was non-existent. But the Act of 1805 was for "repairing the road ... and repairing the bridge ..."

Each parish along a Turnpike had to contribute several days "statute work" which was usually commuted to a cash sum: Purley's annual "Composition to the Commissioners of the Oxford Road" was £5.8.0d (£5.40p) which they were sometimes slow to pay. In 1825 they paid rates owing for four years!

The main source of income for each Trust came from the collection of tolls, and Toll Gates were set up at Pangbourne Lane (near Battle Hospital, Reading), Pangbourne, and Winterbrooke (Cholsey) as well as Shillingford Ferry (later the Bridge). The Gates were leased out to the highest bidder who then endeavoured to collect sufficient tolls to pay his rent and leave him with a good profit. In 1835 the lease for the Shillingford Bridge Gate was £394 a year, and for all 4 road gates £1,110. Only 11 years later the rent had been reduced to £210 and £990 respectively for reasons that I will

relate next month

30. THE READING/OXFORD ROAD (A329) - Part 2

At first the Turnpikes enjoyed a period of prosperity - the "Golden Age of Coaching" as it is often referred to. This period of the late 18th and early 19th centuries has been immortalised in the writings of Charles Dickens and on countless Christmas cards today. But the advent of the railways spelt doom for the stage coaches and the turnpike trusts: Reading Station on the Great Western Railway was opened in 1840 and within a couple of years many of the coach companies in the town had gone out of business. Everyone, rich and poor, flocked to travel on the new cheaper and faster transport. In an attempt to attract more business, tolls on the Turnpike roads were reduced, but eventually all the Trusts went out of business.

Here are a few examples of the tolls collected at the Pangbourne Lane Gate when it was first opened and just before it finally closed:

	1763	1871
Coach and 4 horses	1/- (5p)	1/- (5p)
Gig with one horse	4d (2p)	3d (1½p)
Wagon and 2 horses	8d (3½p)	
Wagon with wheels less than 4½" wide		6d (2½p)
" " " more than 6" wide		4d (2p)
Oxen, cows, cattle - per score	10d (4½p)	6d (2½p)
Calves, hogs, sheep - per score	10d (4½p)	3d (1½p)
Every vehicle moved or propelled		

This last Toll is very interesting as it indicated the measure of financial penalty imposed on the adventurous, and it also anticipated the development of the internal combustion engine in Germany by about 14 years.

Despite all their efforts, the income of the Wallingford to Reading Turnpike Trust declined and by 1874 it was decided not to ask Parliament for a renewal of their Act. Their affairs were put in order and the Toll gates and Houses were sold off: a Mr S Adams of the Pond House (this Public House is still there by the Grovelands Road traffic lights), Oxford Road, Reading, offered £10 for the materials of the Toll House at Pangbourne Lane Gate as well as the gate and posts themselves. For this sum he also had to remove everything himself after 12 midnight on 31st October. The Surveyor would then "level the ground and coat with gravel and put in proper order the land which will be added to the Road on the removal of the Toll house". At the same time, it was also arranged for all the mileposts to be repainted. At their final meeting in Wallingford on 18 Feb 1875, the Trustees authorised the surplus funds and materials, which totalled £472, to be divided amongst the parishes along the route. Purley's share was £41.15s.5d. (£41.77½p) for 2,486 yards of road through the parish. The Turnpike Road then came under the jurisdiction of the Highways Board, the precursor of the County Council, in 1888.

The only surviving visual evidence today of our Turnpike Road is a set of 11 milestones, which are said to be one of the best preserved sets in this part of the country. They are all the same shape: semicircular solids on square prisms, the tops of the stones being inclined planes. The distances to Reading, Wallingford and Oxford are shown in cut lettering painted black on a white background. Purley's milestone is on the south side of the road, in the grass bank outside Trenthams Ltd. Old maps indicate that it may have once been positioned on the north side of the road. The milestone by the Roebuck has disappeared, but there is one in Pangbourne on the left hand side near the first houses.