

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## Water Supplies

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### *Introduction*

Water has been a commodity that Purley has never been short of. It has the River Thames and the Sul Brook and a number of minor streams which drain the hillsides and flow down to the Thames. On the flood plain at least the water table is sufficiently high for there to be an ample supply of well water only a few feet below the surface. Further up the side of the hill the wells get progressively deeper but the chalk makes for reasonably easy digging, if somewhat hazardous due to the possibility of hitting caves or swallow holes.

### *Dispute with Mapledurham*

In the 14th Century there was a major dispute about the rights to use Thames water for irrigating fields. The then Lord of Purley Magna, Sir Thomas Huscarle, conceived the idea that an irrigating ditch to convey water from the Thames would increase the weight of his hay crops. He then proceeded to construct it. Unfortunately for him the whole of the River Thames was in the ownership of the manor of Mapledurham, as it is today. The water that he drew had a reputed effect on the mill at Mapledurham and the Lord of Mapledurham took Sir Thomas to court to force him to desist.

The matter went before the Justices of the Common Bench at Westminster in 1366 and Sir Thomas was twice fined 200 marks. The judgement stated that one of the fines would be held for naught if Sir Thomas met a deadline to fill in his ditch. The remains of a ditch which is likely the one in question can be seen to this day as a hollow running across the meadow between the River estate and Mapledurham Lock. (ref 24)

### *Ponds*

The village pond was also a source of water but likely used only for watering cattle and other livestock. It was situated on the north east corner of what is now Mapledurham Drive and Purley Village. A stream used to leave the pond flowing in a southeasterly direction towards the Thames to join it near where the railway line passes the marina.

There was a second small pond about half way along its reach.

### *Wells*

The sites of most of the wells have been forgotten. One is known to have existed alongside Purley Rise at Well Cottage which used to stand where the spur to Nursery Gardens now is. It can be assumed however that many if not all the major dwellings in the village had a well of their own at one time and that there was probably one or two common wells for the others to use.

On the River Estate a fairly simple well type was in common use and several remain today although few are in use. An example could be seen in the churchyard by the north east corner of the new

vestry. It consisted of a hollow iron pipe about one inch in diameter which is hammered into the ground to a depth of about 10 feet. It was topped by a simple hand pump which needs to be primed. Most plot owners on the estate used to keep a few milk bottles full of water for this purpose, because if you hadn't got enough to prime the pump you just couldn't get any water up. However when Mr Rawlins, the former sexton, retired and moved to Ashmore Green he took it with him as a keepsake.

## *Water Companies*

In 1894 the Tilehurst, Pangbourne and District Water Company was 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 (ref 21)

This was taken over by the Reading Corporation Waterworks in 1930 (ref 25), by a new Water Board in 1958 (ref 309) 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. (ref 25)

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. For a long time the River Estate was without mains water but in 1960 a new main was constructed to serve them and by the end of the year about a third of the dwellings had been connected. Bradfield RDC served a notice under the 1935 Water Act requiring the remaining dwellings to be connected. (ref 309)

The Public Health Inspectors regularly sample the water supplied at the Pangbourne Borehole and test for natural fluoridation and bacteriological activity. The natural Fluorine level was always found to be less than 0.1 part per million during the period 1960-70 (ref 309)

## *Mains Water Connections*

The annual reports of the Public Health Inspector of Bradfield Rural District Council (ref 309) gives details of extensions to the mains water supply in the area. The entries for Purley read as follows:-

<i>date</i>	<i>location</i>	<i>length (yards)</i>
1959	Orchard Close	150
1963	White Lodge estate	122 *
1965	New Hill	100
	Marsh Farm	114
1966	Adjacent Garden House	308
	Lamerton estate	809
1967	adj Garden House Ph I	208
	adj Garden House Ph II	100
	Peterhill nurseries	480
	The Thatch, Long Lane	278

<i>date</i>	<i>location</i>	<i>length (yards)</i>
	Home Farm	336
	Lamerton Estate	809
1968	New Hill	170
	Long Lane	198
	Old Rectory	494
	New Hill	51
1969	The copse	540 *
	Rectory Road extension	48 *
	Long Lane	67 #
	Long Lane	97 *
	Winchcombe, Oxford Road	72 #
	Winchcombe, Oxford Road	86 *
	St Mary's Church	73 *
1970	West field & Oxford Road	206 *

\* 4inch main      # 3 inch main

The cumulative positions were listed as:-

a) Houses

A

B

C

D

1960

676



