



Buildings and Estates of Purley on Thames

Gardener's Cottage

The Gardener's Cottage of Purley Park was adjacent to the kitchen garden just north of the church. It consisted of a parlour, living room and scullery on the ground floor and three bedrooms on the upper floor. It had its own garden and lawn.

In earlier years the manor house of Purley Magna had been adjacent to the Church and in the plan to replace it by a gentleman's mansion, drawn up by Humphrey Repton in 1793 there was to be a walled kitchen garden to the north west of the church. This was about the only feature of the plan which survived as the mansion (Purley Park) was eventually constructed on the top of the hill.

The cottage was built, in 1863, some time after the main mansion house on the other side of the railway. The cottage replaced a much older building in the village which had housed the gardeners for the Estate of Purley Magna for many years. Its construction followed the move by Anthony Morris Storer to take up residence in the mansion after having inherited it as a child.

It contained a number of unique features. It was designed by an architect called Joseph Morris who attempted to establish some new standards for the building industry. In 'The Builder' of 11th July 1863 the contract for the supply of materials was listed. Four contractors had tendered; Woodroffe £367/10/-; Barnicoat £357/10/-; Matthews £353/10/- and the successful tenderer Briant £350.

The bricks used in the gardeners cottage were mainly standard sized bricks, but they used a quite different bond, known as Rat-trap which was based on a running bond but with occasional headers linking two single thickness walls together. These occasional headers used a special elongated brick of around 11" which gave a two inch air space between the inner and outer walls.



The Gardener's Cottage



*View along The Short
in the 1950s*

*- the cottage can be
seen at the end*

Photo Philip Osbourne

Nowadays we are all used to the standard brick of 2 1/2" x 4" x 8 1/2 ". The two main bondings, English and Flemish, both call for bricks to be laid parallel to the wall line (stretchers) and at right angles (headers). The combined depths of two stretchers and a width of mortar add up to the depth of a header (ie 8 1/2")

This means that double thickness walls will be solid, ie with no air gap. If an air gap is required then one has to build a double thickness wall and an inner single thickness one in running bond with a spacer to provide the gap. Morris was a pioneer in the use of these specially long bricks which could be used to build double thickness walls with an air gap without the need for the second inner wall which was very expensive.

This use of cavity walls was quite unique for the early part of the 19th century in ordinary houses but while it was a great improvement on the double thickness walls which were common at the time, it cannot have been totally successful, for while it provided better heat insulation and at least as good weather protection, water could still bridge the gap by permeating through the long stretchers. The use of twisted metal spacers solves this problem.

The house was built on an cruciform plan with deep roof gables. It was oriented north-west/south east with the longer leg of the cross pointing north west. There was a central chimney stack sitting astride this longer leg with a single pipe. The roof ridge was decorated with an alternating spike and trefoil design. The gables had very deep eaves and the one to the southwest was filled in with intersecting timbers in a diamond pattern, giving an 'Austrian' look to the building.

The windows were fairly typical early Georgian casements with a shallow brick arch above, except for the parlour window which was bayed. The brickwork was relieved with double courses of a much lighter brick at ground level, just below and just above the windows on both floors. The courses at window levels were further decorated with cross-crosslet and diamond designs of the lighter bricks.

The two story building had two living rooms and a scullery on the ground floor with three bedrooms upstairs. The central chimney stack had a single flue serving a fireplace in one of the living rooms. Outside there was a coal house

Piped water was never supplied throughout the lifetime of the house. Water was drawn from a well in the garden. There was no electricity, no gas and no mains sewerage. There was an outside earth

closet, later replaced by a sealed tank unit which had to be pumped out regularly.

After the Purley Park Estate was sold three times in the 1920s the Gardener's Cottage and the adjacent gardens came into the possession of the Farmiloes. During the Second World War it was used to house some of the employees of Sangers Ltd who had moved into Purley Park Mansion. Immediately after the war the gardens were leased to Melville Brothers who operated a horticultural business in Purley and later the Unwin's bought them, together with the cottage, in 1953.

The cottage was known as 'Purley Gardens, St Mary's Avenue' and was reached from a long drive adjacent to the church. There was a second pedestrian entrance which lead onto the Short which was used by special permission of the Purley Park Property Owners Association. When Dudley Unwin died around 1975 the house was left empty for a while and then pulled down after having been badly vandalised by local children. Soon afterwards the whole site was redeveloped as Church Mews and Waterside Drive.

Occupants

Built 1863

1871 William Griffin

1876-85 Samuel and Alice Mortimer

1889 John Seaman

1898-10 William Weston

Sold 1920

Sold 1923

1924 Fred Pitman

Sold 1926

1929-40 Sydney Pocock

1940-45 Sanger employees

Sold 1953

1953-74 Dudley Unwin

Demolished 1974

Bibliography

Repton's Red Book for Purley Magna

The Builder (11th July 1863)

The Gardener's Cottage, Purley Park

(an article in Purley Parish News July-Sept 1988 by Jean Debney article 83)

82: The Gardener's Cottage, Purley Park (Pt. I)

Ideas for these stories come from many different sources. A recent early morning phone call asked if I knew anything about the Gardener's Cottage in Purley Park because he had discovered the name of the architect concerned and, therefore, its possible date of building. This stimulated me to put together the following information. My thanks are due to Sidney Gold for permission to use his as yet unpublished information and to H. Godwin Arnold for quotations from his article on Joseph Morris and the Pearl Building, published in Transactions of the Ancient Monument Society vol. 28 (1984).

The manor of Purley Magna was purchased in 1793 by Anthony Morris Storer (I). From the General Court Baron and accompanying map drawn in 1786 for a previous owner, he knew that there were seven small cottages with gardens along the Street to the west of the Church. All had been let on "leases on lives" which had "lapsed to the Lord of the Manor". In other words, former copyhold leases which could be passed on through several generations of a family had, quite legitimately,

reverted to the owner. This meant that when John Newbury, a tenant in 1786, died in 1789, his son was

not admitted to the property. Information from a descendant indicates that after losing a "court case" i.e. probably the Court Baron dealing with manorial land transactions, the Newburys moved to Pangbourne with only a few sheep to their name. By 1793, two of the seven cottages were empty and derelict, another two were in poor repair and John Newbury's cottage and quarter acre of garden was occupied by Barnard Ballard at an annual rent of 2 guineas (£2.10p).

Humphrey Repton, the landscape artist, visited Purley in November 1793 and drew up plans to create an estate suitable for a gentleman. One suggestion was that Mr. Storer should enclose an oval area out of an arable field called Churchams, north of the church, to create a kitchen garden for a proposed mansion house on the south side of the church. The manor farm near this spot was to be resited further along the Street (now St. Mary's Avenue) to the north west and together with its rickyard and stables would mean the removal of any remaining cottages. As regular readers of these articles may recall, after a severe flood in the winter of 1795, the plans were changed and the mansion house, Purley Park, was built on high ground by the Oxford Road and the farm, later called Belleisle and now Trenthams, was moved to the south side of the same road.

The Tithe Map and Award of 1840 shows that only the northern half of the kitchen garden had been laid out as suggested by Repton. It lay within the perimeter of his proposed oval of land that later became densely wooded and remained a feature on all maps; its outline can still be traced round the back gardens of the modern Waterside Drive and Church Mews. In 1840 and in 1841 Barnard Ballard, an agricultural labourer, was still living in Newbury's cottage which lay outside the west perimeter of the oval.

Between 1849 and 1851 (and possibly until 1856), Richard Chillman, gardener to the current tenant of Purley Park, lived with his family in this old cottage. In the 1861 Census, John Pilcher, a 57-year-old gardener, his wife and dressmaker niece were the residents.

On 15th November 1860, Major Anthony Morris Storer, great nephew of A.M. Storer I, was married in London. For most of his life, since he had inherited Purley Park from his father in 1818 as a five-year-old boy, the property had been let to various tenants. During the 1850's he lived for a while in Belleisle but was in Purley Park by 1860. Soon after this, he decided to replace the old gardener's cottage near the Church.

(To be continued).

Jean Debney

83. The Gardener's Cottage, Purley Park (Part 2)

The Reading-born architect Joseph Morris (1836-1913) submitted a design for a gardener's cottage at Purley Park which was accepted and the work put out to tender. 'The Builder' of 11th July 1863 printed the following quotes to "supply materials": Woodroffe £367 10s, Barnicoat £357 10s, Matthews £353 10s and Briant (accepted) £350.

The successful builders were probably Richard and Robert Briant of Whitchurch, Oxfordshire. They were described in local directories in the 1860s as builder and painter, plumber, glazier and land agent respectively and, with other members of their family, were probably involved in much of the local building work in the 19th century.

Joseph Morris was a son of Thomas Morris, draper and mayor of Reading 1846-7; an elder brother was also mayor 1867-8. Joseph, who was later to become the Surveyor of Bridges and Buildings for Berkshire County Council, had an office in Holborn, London in the late 1850s and from 1867 in Friar Street.

Reading. From his architectural practice came

designs for work in Reading, Wokingham and Caversham etc. Perhaps the most notable were the Pearl Assurance building in Station Road, Reading (1898 or 1901-3 and demolished circa 1980) and the steel toll bridge from Whitchurch to Pangbourne, rebuilt in 1902, and still in use. In 1862 he designed an ornamental cottage for Captain Fowler in Whitchurch and this may have influenced Major Storer's decision to engage his services at Purley.

Morris designed a cruciform two-storey building of brick and tiles containing two living rooms, one with a bay window and fireplace, a scullery and three bedrooms upstairs. His architecture has been described as "startling" and even "wild" and he may have used some new techniques in this building. When it was demolished in the 1970s, it was found that he had used extra long 11" bricks in addition to 8½" standards. A photograph taken in the late 1860s, soon after completion, shows that the walls were built using a version of "rat trap bond" with alternate stretchers and headers, i.e. sides and ends of the bricks visible. These would have been laid in two leaves with a cavity in between and the extra long bricks used as headers right through the wall to bond the two leaves together thus creating not only a stronger wall but providing better insulation. (Vernacular Architecture by P.W. Brunskill).

In contrast to the standard red bricks, Morris used five bands of light colour ones at ground level, above and below the 1st and 2nd floor windows and in diamond patterns on each side of the windows. The windows, surmounted with shallow segmental arches probably made of tapered bricks, were mostly double casement with a four-light bay to the living room and all had diamond-lead lights.

The ridge of the tiled roof was decorated with an alternating spike and trefoil design. The gable end over the living room was filled with a diamond "trellis" bargeboard suspended from the roof.

The central chimney stack with a single flue probably served a fireplace in the living room.

Outside there was a coal house, a well for water and a small lawn and garden. By 1945 the scullery had become a kitchen with a tiled fireplace, a sink and an enamel bath, which was probably filled and emptied by hand. There was also an outside closet fitted with Elsan apparatus. With no power supplies or running water, the only lighting was by candle or paraffin lamp and the well still supplied all the water.

(To be continued)

Jean Debney

82. The Gardener's Cottage, Purley Park (Part 3)

William Griffin, a gardener born in Warwickshire, lived in the Gardener's Cottage, Purley Park, in 1871. From 1876 to 1885 Samuel Mortimer and his wife Alice lived there and their five children were all born and baptised in Purley. Edith, the eldest, attended the School and in 1883 was awarded a needlework prize of 1s6d (7½p) by Mrs. Storer.

The head gardener in January 1889 was John Seaman and it was he who produced the white azaleas, orchids and other exotic flowers which, together with the ivy trails and ferns, were used to decorate Purley Church for the wedding of Major Storer's only daughter, Sheila, to George Fullerton and which has been described in an earlier article.

Between 1898 and 1910, William Weston was the gardener at Purley Park. His two daughters, Dora and Ethel, attended Purley School from September 1898 until they left in April 1906 to go to school in Reading.

Purley Park, including the cottage, was sold by Major Storer's grand-daughter in 1920. There was a further sale in 1923. In 1924 Fred Pitman was gardener to the new owner, K.A. MacAndrew, and he continued for at least a year after the property was sold again in 1926 to Harold Farmiloe when the cottage was said to be "in service occupation".

From about 1929 until 1940 Sydney Pocock of Purley Village was Mr. Farmiloe's private gardener, after which no further gardeners are listed. During the 1930s both the cottage and kitchen gardens lay empty and neglected, but in 1945 the gardens were leased to Mellville Brothers of Carlton Tree Nurseries for £45 a year; they were tree growers and later nurserymen and local directories list them in Purley from 1931 to 1960.

During the Second World War, when Purley Park was occupied by Sangers Ltd., Wholesale Chemists, the cottage was occupied by some of their employees, one of whom is thought to have been a Mr. Arthur. Some cultivation was carried out in the kitchen garden by the girls who worked in Purley Park house.

The new owner of the gardener's cottage and kitchen garden etc. from 1945 appears to have done little but to cut down many of the large cedar and beech trees on the site. It was sold again about 1953 to Dudley Unwin when its value is thought to have been £4-6,000. He lived in the cottage, then called 'Purley Gardens', St. Mary's Avenue, for nearly 20 years and developed a chicken farm on the land, using a greenhouse against the north wall of the kitchen garden for deep litter pens. Within days of his moving out of the cottage in April 1974, it was vandalised, windows broken and everything moveable disappeared. After his death in December 1974, the cottage and kitchen gardens were sold to a developer, the cottage demolished* and the houses of Waterside Drive and Church Mews built. The distinctive egg-shaped outline of Repton's original plan in 1793 for the kitchen gardens with their border of woodland walks near the church

can still be traced round the back gardens of this modern development.

Note: My thanks to Bob Skerritt of Purley on Thames and David Unwin of Amersham for information on recent events and to John Chapman of Project Purley for use of his notes.

Jean Debney