

Account of Purley on Thames

Purley Lodge

R200214 4/4/2017

Location and Listing

Purley Lodge is located at the foot of Purley Lane at the westerly side. It is a largish house, now split into two. It is a grade 2 listed building. Its origins are somewhat obscure but the house that exists today is of Georgian design. The cellars contain ancient timbers and brick and flint work which look very much earlier and an ancient holy water stoop was discovered in a niche during one of the renovations.

Early History

The early history is of necessity very speculative. However the account that follows does provide a reasonable continuity for a series of otherwise unrelated and unconnected facts.

The manor of Purley Parva was held by the Siffrewast family from before 1137 to around 1300. The Siffrewasts owned land all across Berkshire and in Dorset. Isabella de Siffrewast was the daughter of Robert de Sifrewast and husband of Michael de Baseville. It would seem that Robert gave Isabella the manor of Purley Parva as her dower and that after her death it reverted back to the Siffrewast family. However Isabella was widowed in 1194 and shortly afterwards she donated a half virgate of land to the monks of Reading Abbey.

A virgate is a quarter of a hide which we may take as being roughly 120 acres in these parts. Thus a half virgate would be somewhere around 15 acres. It would appear that the land was occupied at the time by Osbert the fisherman and his sons and in the deed of donation she leaves the monks of Reading Abbey to deal with Osbert. It would appear that Osbert was found another farm on the Huscarle estate at Beddington in Surrey and it is through this connection that the modern Purley acquired its name. The deed was inspected by Robert's grandson William de Sifrewast in 1217 who confirmed that the gift had been made and that the terms were such that the land would not revert to the original family as would have been the custom with a wedding portion. Thus its ownership by the Abbey was thereafter, undisputed. [Kemp II pp106-108]

There are numerous legends about the use of this land. However none of them are backed by any documentary or other evidence. One is that there was a retreat house there for the Abbey which the Abbot of Reading would call at on his way from the Abbey to his country residence at Bere Court in Pangbourne. At this time the main road ran through the village and continued alongside the present house to join with Westbury Lane. The second is that it was for a while a house of the Knights Templar who acted as bankers for most of Christendom until they were suppressed in the early 14th century. It is of course feasible that both these legends are founded in fact as they are not mutually exclusive. Interestingly shortly after the suppression of the Templars in 1314 we find Hubert le Constable in possession of an estate in Purley [BM Add MS 28661] and one might speculate that the land had been leased to the Templars by Reading Abbey, that Hubert had acquired it after the suppression and the Abbey had reclaimed it when the lease was expired.

When Reading Abbey was suppressed in 1538 its land were disposed of for the benefit of King Henry VIII. However a few years earlier in 1534 a holding of land in Purley was settled on Thomas Stafford of Bradfield and remained in his family's possession until at least 1605. This form would indicate however that he leased rather than owned the land. The ownership seems to have been transferred in 1550 when John, Earl of Warwick, acquired land in Purley 'late of Reading Monastery' He was granted all lands and liberties pertaining to Purley for one knights fee [BM add MS 28661-28171] As all the other land in Purley was and had always been in secular hands we are left only with the conclusion that this land was the same as that given by Isabella de Sifrewast.

John Rocque did a detailed survey of the area in 1761 and a house is shown in the location of the present house and insofar as one can judge, the shape of the 1761 house bears a considerable resemblance to that of the present house. Its general architectural features suggest a house roughly of this period, hence one can assume that it was built in its present form only a few years earlier. Interestingly Rocques map also shows the village street running past the house instead of being diverted around the kitchen garden and all the land between the main road, the village street and Purley Lane being part of the same holding.

Thomas Pride in his map dated 1790 shows a similar pattern, but now the land holding ends close to Purveys lane and as

far as can be judged cover about 15 acres.

When the GWR came to extend their land holdings in 1891 in order to widen the railway, it was discovered that all mineral rights were held by the Countess of Shannon, the mother of the then owner of Purley Lodge. This appears to run in a strip from the turnpike down to the Purley Street. This is an area of 70x260 metres, ie 18200 sqm. or about 4 acres. This strip is not shown as part of the combined Purley Magna and Purley Parva in 1786 and could well be therefore the residue of lands with a quite different ownership history. The evidence then, while being circumstantial, does point to the half virgate, originally donated by Isabella de Siffrewast, being the portion bordered by the present Purley Rise, the line of the ancient village street, Purley Lane and the line of Purveys Lane (Winston Way)

Several portions of the original property have been sold off. The walled kitchen garden is now occupied by three houses. There are two houses between the Lodge and the railway. The Coach House has been converted to a large residence as has the Barn.

Originally the village street ran alongside the house in a direct line but when the kitchen garden was built the street was diverted around the perimeter and is now a bridleway. There is a small arched gateway in the wall to allow sheep to be moved to pasture.

The Present House

We can assume from the evidence of the maps and the architectural style that the house in its present form was originally built in the early to middle part of the 18th century. In 1776 a house was advertised for rent in the Reading Mercury of May 20th. The advert read:-

To be let pleasantly situated at Purley, Berks four miles from Reading about 200 yards from the turnpike from Reading to Oxford and about half a mile from the River Thames. A well built sashed bricked house in good repair containing 2 parlours, a butlers pantry and kitchen on the ground floor with a brew house adjoining. Three bed chambers, a dressing room one light and two other closets on the first floor, two bed chambers and others for servants on the attick story, a wine vault and good cellars, proper conveniences for wood coals etc, stabling for 3 horses, a garden, orchard and close adjoining the premises.

Part of the furniture is to be disposed of if agreeable to the tenant.

Further particulars may be had on the premises which may be viewed at any time being now inhabited.

The house was divided into two in 1957 with the kitchen and servants' quarters forming the Gatehouse and the principal rooms the main house, still known as Purley Lodge. The house is unusual in that there are two different ground levels. To the north ground level is at the level of the Village Street, to the south the level is that of the lawns, one story higher.

There have been several alterations to the partitioning of the house but the exterior remained essentially unchanged until an extension was constructed by the Jones to the part now known as the Gatehouse. This included renovation to a former outbuilding, the wash room and enclosing the courtyard between the wash house and ground floor quarters.

Occupants

In 1786 however we know that John George Liebenrood was living there having quit his house in London some years previously. He stayed until he died in 1794 when the property went to his nephew John Ziegenbein on condition that he change his name to Libenrood. This he did and he stayed in Purley until in 1804 he moved to live at the mansion at Prospect Park.

The house remained as part of the Liebenrood estate through most of the middle 1800s with a succession of tenants, several of whom were well known.

In the 1840s Michael Blount lived there. One assumes from the name that he was related to the Blounts at Mapledurham House.

He was followed by Major General Sir James Hope KCB who had served with the 9th Regiment of Foot (East Norfolks) with great distinction, including in the Peninsular war. There he had to take over from Sir John Moore after Corunna and oversee the withdrawal of British troops back to England

In 1861 The Honourable Robert Boyle moved in with his wife to commenece a stay of 28 years. He was the third son of the Earl of Shannon and related to the Wilders of Sulham and Purley Hall. Robert had been Commander of HMS Dolphin before qualifying in steam to take command of HMS Spey, one of the Royal Navy's earliest steam ships in 1849. He was invalided out in 1855, becoming a Coast Guard where he served for six years prior to coming to Purley.

He died in Purley in 1883 and there is a memorial window to him and his wife in the church. One of his ship bells was mounted on the north face of the house and remains there today.

Charles Ernest Hodgkin was the longest serving occupant of the house. He moved down with his family from Worcester in 1902 when he became Managing Director of Pulsometer Pumps in Reading. He was also Chairman of the Parish Council for many years and one of the longest serving church wardens. He died in 1949 and his wife continued to live at the Lodge until she died in 1955. Their son Curwen Elliott Hodgkin was a noted artist.

He stayed on another year and then the house was split into two with one part being bought by Sir Oswald Mosely for his son Peter. Sir Oswald was noted for being the leader of the British Fascists in the 1930s.

The list of occupants is by no means complete and information is still being gathered.

1786-1794	John George Liebenrood
1795-1804	John Engelberts Liebenrood
1824-1827	T Cameron
1828	R Southby
1835-1846	Michael Blount
1848-1853	Maj Gen Sir James Hope
1854-1858	William Shackell
1858	Thomas Henry and Sarah Pyke
1861-1887	Hon Robert F Boyle
1888-1891	Mrs Elizabeth Boyle
1892-1896	Lady Edith Ackland
1899-1901	The Misses Baker
1902-1949	Charles Ernest Hodgkin
1949-1955	Mrs Hodgkin
1955-1956	Curwen Elliott Hodgkin

House split

Main House

1957-1959	John & Shirley Symonds
1960-1973	Noel McLoughlin
1974-1981	Peter Marsden
1982-1986	John & Judy Page
1987-1993	Natan & Gwenda Levi
1996-date	Stewart & Emily Kennedy

The Gatehouse

1957-1973	Peter Mosley
1959-1973	John & Shirley Symonds
1975-1984	John & Marianne Downs
1985-date	Jan & Rick Jones

Peter Mosley's Discovery

This seems to have been an article in a local newspaper while Peter Mosley was living there between 1957 and 1973

Find under Kitchen Floor

Some weeks ago while Mr Peter Moseley of Purley Lodge, Purley was carrying out repairs to his

kitchen floor, he made a remarkable discovery. Beneath his floor was an underground passage running in the direction of the river. Could this be the answer to a rumour that has been puzzling Purley residents for many years? That a tunnel ran beneath the river to a house or cottage in Purley from Mapledurham House on the opposite bank?

Mr Mosley's house, Purley Lodge, deserves closer inspection. Its exterior suggests that it was built about 1750 and was plaster faced some time during the 19th Century. To all intents and purposes this is a perfectly normal 18th Century residence. Its cellars, however, are considerably older. They are the only clue to the actual age of the structure.

Mapledurham House was the home of the Blount family until 1947. This great Catholic family built the house in 1588. During the reign of Henry VIII and the period of Oliver Cromwell, religious persecution was rampant in this country. The most probable explanation would seem to be this. The tunnel was built as a means of escape or communication from Mapledurham House to Purley. Unfortunately it has now been blocked up so it was not possible to explore it.

Other discoveries in Purley Lodge support this theory. In the cellars important finds have been made. Firstly they give a clue to the original age of the house. Purley Lodge has now been divided into three sections. The owner of one of these decided some time ago to

..... the lodge is older than the present house that now stands on it, by at least 500 years, possibly more.

A room known simply as 'the Chapel' in the cellars strengthens the tunnels's religious significance. When the present owners of this part of the house came to Purley they were told that the room had always been known by this name for as long as they could remember. The most conclusive piece of evidence is a Holy Water stoup in another part of the house. When the Lodge was partitioned various doorways had to be blocked up but it is still easy to see its relation to.....

-----tions it is still possible to see the cupboard's function. It was a form of porch or vestibule to the chapel with the traditional Holy Water stoup at its entrance.

This is probably the first time that anything has been written about Purley Lodge, the chapel or water stoup. The lack of written evidence suggests that its existence was kept secret intentionally. The chapel could well have been used during the Catholic persecution and kept a secret since then.

One other fact has emerged about the Parish of Purley. During the days of Reading Abbey's importance in the area the abbot created a number of minor monasteries called cells. One of these was at Purley and was recorded in a survey called Pope Nicholas' Taxation in 1291. Could the chapel be connected with the site of this ancient

A POTTED HISTORY OF PURLEY LODGE

by Jan Jones

This article was written by Jan shortly before she died . It reminds us of the great contribution she made to Project Purley over many years.

The first question people ask when they hear you are tracing the history of your house is of course, "How old is it?" This is the very question I can't answer. In John Rocque's Survey of Berkshire in 1761, the map showing Purley, has a "blob" of the right shape in the right place, so I can only assume it was built in its present form shortly before that. A few years later, on 20th May 1776 the Reading Mercury had the following advertisement of a house to let in Purley,

"A well built sashed brick house in good repair containing 2 parlours, a butlers pantry and kitchen on the ground floor with a brew house adjoining. Three bed chambers, a dressing room, one light and two other closets on the first floor, two bed chambers and others for servants on the attick story, a

wine vault and good cellars....”

This is certainly Purley Lodge as it matches the interior at that time exactly, and there is no other house in Purley it could have been.

It is possible that there was a much older house on the same site. There are some ancient timbers and flint walls in the cellars that could well be several hundred years earlier. The papers of Reading Abbey mention a house in Purley in the middle ages, and the finding of a very old holy water stoop buried in the walls of the cellar give sonic credence to it being here, but as yet there is no proof

The earliest known inhabitant was John George Liebenrood who paid his rent and taxes for Purley Lodge during the 1780's and died here in 1795 and is buried in St. Mary's church along with his wife Ann, a local heiress.

John George was a Saxon merchant who appears to have moved here from London shortly before his wife died in 1772. With no children of his own he left the house and quite a large amount of land in Purley to his nephew John Engleberts Zigenbein on the basis that he take the name Liebenrood.

John Engleberts, a wealthy man in his own right, lived here at Purley Lodge whilst he was having the much grander house in Prospect Park built, where he moved in the early years of the 19th century.

The house continued to be part of the Liebenrood estate through most of the mid 1800's with various noted tenants. In the 1840's Michael Blount lived here. I assume he would have been related to the Blounts at Mapledurham, but have yet to follow that byway.

He was followed by Major General Sir James Hope KCB who retired here from the East Norfolk 9th Regiment of Foot, after a glorious career in the Peninsular War.

In 1861, the Honourable Robert Boyle, Commander Royal Navy, moved in with his wife to commence their stay of 28 years. The third son of the third Earl of Shannon, the Boyles were related to the Wilders of Sulham and Purley Hall. Robert was the Commander of HMS Dolphin before qualifying as a steam commander in 1849 taking command of HMS Spy, one of the earliest steam ships in the Royal Navy. He was invalided out of the Royal Navy in 1855 and joined the coast guard for six years before retiring to Purley. He died here in 1883. It is one of his ships bells that is mounted on the north wall of the house.