



Account of Purley on Thames

Scraces Farm

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Scraces Farm is in the north west quadrant of Purley and just to the south of Westbury Farm. It was part of La Hyde but became separated by the coming of the railway in the 1830s. In recent years it and Westbury Farm have been linked and known as Springs Farm.

An article by Jean Debney in her series From my History Notebook article 102 published in PPN September and October 1991

102: SCRACE'S FARM, PURLEY (part 1)

Scraces Farm was named after Joseph SCRACE, tenant farmer from about 1769 to 1791 and the name was in use for over 200 years until it was recently changed to "Springs". It lies on a slight rise of land on the flood plain of the river Thames in Purley, close to and south west of Westbury Farm. The name was first recorded on the Purley Tithe Map of 1840.

Scrace's Farm was part of the Purley Hall estate which straddled the Oxford Road east of the boundary with Pangbourne. This estate was formerly the manor of La Hyde and consisted of numerous separate pieces of the parishes of Purley and Sulham, Berks and some detached portions of Whitchurch parish, Oxfordshire - all south of the River Thames.

The earliest reference to this manor was in the Domesday Book of 1086 when a hide of land was held by a man at arms from Miles Crispin of Pangbourne. The manor was later held by the families of St Philibert, Somery and Carew and then, through the female line, to Francis HYDE who married the heiress. Hyde Hall, now called Purley Hall, was built by him in 1609, probably to replace a smaller manor house nearby. The manor was deprived of its rights by the King in the early 17th century because of the Hyde's persistent recusancy.

In 1720, the property was sold to Francis Hawes. A map of his estate, drawn by Josiah Ballard in 1753, named all the fields and their tenants. This showed that William Lovegrove occupied 158 acres of land now thought to be "Scraces Farm". It consisted of pieces in the common meadow along the river bank, several arable strips in Purley Hither and Further Common Fields and some scattered fields south of the Oxford Road. One of the strips in Hither Field was called "Scracys Acre" in the Purley Tithe Award in 1840 and is now under the railway line and gardens of Glebe Road.

William Lovegrove probably farmed in Sulham and then Tidmarsh before coming to Purley about 1749. It is not known when he left the parish but his wife Martha was buried in Purley in 1757 and either he or his son, also called William, married Ann ILSLEY in Purley in 1765.

The first mention of Joseph SCRACE was his marriage in Purley in April 1769 to Frances BISHOP of Whitchurch. Joseph and Frances had ten children baptised in Purley of whom the eldest and three others died in infancy and the two eldest daughters married in Whitchurch in 1794. In 1773, during his tenancy, the Purley Hall estate was bought by Rev Henry Wilder of Sulham.

Joseph was prominent in village affairs and evidently possessed much local knowledge. He served as Churchwarden in Purley from 1778 to 1791 and as Parish Constable in 1789. In 1782 he assisted the Rector of Whitchurch in his perambulation of the parish bounds and "frequently pronounced the correct position of the boundary stakes".

In 1776, accused of owing money to Richard TAYLOR of Mapledurham, he was involved in a court case which he won. In April that year he was attacked by a footpad near Purley Hall at 9 o'clock one evening and robbed of three guineas (£3 15p) and his watch; Thomas Wise of Henley was later caught and sent to gaol.

(To be continued)

Jean DEBNEY (C)

102: SCRACE'S FARM, PURLEY (part 2)

Joseph Scrace's departure from Purley seems to have been rather sudden. His fellow churchwarden, John Sherwood, reported to the Archdeacon of Berkshire in May 1791 that "the late Churchwarden, Joseph Scrace, having left the parish ... there is no other person to serve with (Mr Sherwood) within the said parish".

In 1813, during a dispute between Rev Henry Wilder of Purley Hall and the Rector of Whitchurch about payment of tithes, Joseph was present at another perambulation, or "beating the bounds", of the Whitchurch parish boundary and again corrected several boundary details. However, his evidence did not please Dr Wilder who said that it was "of a very suspicious nature and liable to much observation". Joseph had apparently been "long at variance (with Dr Wilder), in consequence of having been prosecuted for wilfully setting fire to his barn, of which he was understood to have been acquitted, not for want of evidence, but from the length of time which elapsed between his being brought to trial" Was this the reason for his sudden departure?

From the 1790s Scrases Farm, together with most of the land in Purley and Sulham, was leased and farmed by successive generations of the Sherwood family, until the sudden death in 1856 of Edward Sherwood.

In 1856, the common fields in the ecclesiastical

parish of Purley, which included some detached pieces of land belonging to the parishes of Sulham, Berks and Whitchurch Oxon, were inclosed. The scattered strips of land owned by Mr Wilder in the common fields were exchanged for fields west of Scrace's Farm called Great and Little Guntlings (or Gunkleys in some records) and the large field between the railway and Oxford Road opposite Purley Hall. The western portion of Purley Common Mead also went to Mr Wilder who already held Satney Mead and Charley Mead.

After 1856 Scraces Farm was again leased as a separate farm and the following names are recorded in various directories and census returns etc: John Butler 1860-64; Thomas Barnes from Stoke in Kent, who had 5 children baptised in Purley from 1868 and left about 1882; John Stone was then listed until 1888 and William Henry Lee from 1890 to 1899. In 1900 Frederick Cox was bailiff at Scraces for Saunders Bros. and Franklin Taylor was farmer in 1907. It was a private house in 1910 occupied by Basil Borset, by Robert Rayner from 1924 to 1926 and between 1942 and 1947 by George Burton Fraser. Air Commodore Sir Edward Hedley Fielden was listed as a farmer at Scraces between 1952 and 1972.

The property has recently changed hands and, after two centuries of being called "Scraces Farm", has been renamed "Springs" with the boundary clearly marked by a security fence.

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