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Project Purley

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Summary

The River Thames in Purley. One of the sections of the account of Purley on Thames by John Chapman. This section introduces the sections about the river.

Section LA0001

The River Thames at Purley

Introduction

The Thames is not the longest river in England but it far and away the most important one. It runs for some 210 miles from its source at Thames Head near Cirencester to the Nore where it merges into its estuary and the North Sea. It has many tributaries, mostly fairly small and is navigable as far as Lechlade. At one time it was connected by canals to the Avon in Wiltshire and Somerset, to the Severn in Gloucestershire and to the Warwickshire Avon.

These links all but disappeared in the years after the Second World War, but great efforts have been made to restore them, however there is still a break in the links of the Thames and Severn Canal and the Stroudwater which it is hoped will be restored before long. The result is that at Purley one can see boats registered all over the country and even some from abroad.

It was historically one of the major lines of penetration of invaders from the continent and one of the country's major trade arteries.

It has a watershed of about 3800 sq miles which forms the territory of the Thames Water Company as a supplier of water and a disposer of sewage. The flow at Teddington ranges from a low of around 200M gallons a day to a high of around 20B galls a day.

For many centuries river traffic was obstructed by weirs erected by millers and fishermen and a system of flash locks was established to allow the passage of boats from one reach to another.

In 1771 an Act of Parliament allowed for the construction of Pound locks and in 1857 the river's affairs were regulated by the Thames Conservancy. This was supplanted in 1973 by the newly formed Thames Water Company and was reestablished under the name National Rivers Authority, Thames Region in 1989.

At Purley the river passes through some delightful countryside, and while its passage from Tilehurst Station to River Gardens has been blighted by development on its south

bank, the overall impression is one of great charm and beauty.

Mapledurham Lock divides it into two reaches separated in height by around 15 feet.

A great deal of northern Purley lies in the flood plain and in former years flooding was a annual problem. Nowadays however because of computer control of the weirs serious flooding has become somewhat of a rarity.

There are now no crossing points within Pudey. The nearest bridges are at Caversham and Whitchurch. There used to be ferries from Purley to Mapledurham village and to cross from the towpath on the south bank to one on the north bank at the end of River Gardens.

The river has been extensively written about, both from a topographic point of view and as a setting for fiction. It has also been used several times as a background for film makers.

It has provided a livelihood for fishermen and boatmen in the past but nowadays both these activities are conducted more for pleasure than as a business.

This account of Purley on Thames deals with the river under the following headings:-

- LB The Lock
- LC Wildlife
- LD River Traffic
- LE Flooding
- LF Ferries and Crossings
- LG Pollution
- LH The Marina
- LK Film Making
- LL Regulatory Authorities
- LM The Weir
- LN Books about the Thames
- LZ0001 The Aldermaston Pipeline

Angling is covered in IS0001 and much of the wildlife in section M