

Account of Purley on Thames

The Roebuck

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The Roebuck stands on the bank of the Thames just to the east of the Purley/Tilehurst border. Although not actually part of Purley it has strong associations with the village, particularly in Victorian times when it was the nearest pub for most people owing to Purley being strongly teetotal after the Red Lion was closed around 1800 and the owners both of Purley Hall and Purley Park were strong supporters of the temperance movement.

The west wing dates from the 17th Century and it was expanded in 1882 to accommodate boaters and anglers arriving at the new Tilehurst Station. It has gone through several changes of ownership and for a while was known as Beethovens. It has now been converted to short term rental flats with further flats built on the old car park.

It achieved fame when it was one of the stops for the boatmen in Jerome K Jerome's *"Three men in a boat"*. When the railway came a pedestrian bridge with steep steps was built to give access to the tow path, the ferry cottage and the landing stage and is now part of the Thames Path.



*The Roebuck was a popular meeting point for the South Berks Hunt
[M000274]*

Here are extracts from several articles which mention it.

The Roebuck by Jean Debney

In her series "From my history notebook" 7, published in the Purley Parish News December 1980

Although it lies just outside Purley, the Roebuck in Tilehurst is our nearest "local". Local rumour suggests that Purley does not have a pub due to Quaker objections; but I have not found anything so far to substantiate this idea; nor have I yet found anything in the records to suggest that we have ever had an inn in the village.

The Roebuck is on the north side of the Oxford Road, very close to the junction of the old road to Purley village and the Church. This road was closed to traffic when Purley Park was built in 1799. - its beginning is marked by the old pillbox.

The oldest part of the Roebuck is the west wing, now the public bar which is said to date from the 17th. century, The walls are built of red and grey bricks in Flemish bond; and the 19th. century tiled roof retains a "catslide" to the west. Although the interior has been much altered, this old portion is now a Grade II Listed Building.' -

The main portion of the Hotel was built in 1882, the same year as Tilehurst- Station, and was



The west wing is the oldest part of the hotel [M001896]

intended for the use of anglers and boatmen. Two years later the Cambridge boat crew trained there prior to their victory.

The earliest record I have found for the Roebuck is a Mortgage dated 1743 John Heath, a victualler of Tilehurst, who had inherited the property from his father, found himself short of money. He borrowed £87 from Elizabeth Burd, a widow and wealthy brewer of Reading. Two years later he borrowed a further £55. by the following year he had not repaid a penny, and Mrs Burd claimed the property, although she said it was worth the £155/18s - including interest - which was then due. After Mrs. Burd died the property passed to her daughter, who later sold it, together with "a ferry over, the Thames", fishing rights on the same river and other messuages in Berkshire.



A rear view from the river [M051243]

Directories in the early 19th century name G.T. Holgate and then Mrs Lydia Holgate - (? his widow) as occupiers.

Elizabeth Holgate, a spinster of 38, was innkeeper in 1851 when she had two lodgers. In the 1890's a Mrs Annie Noyes was lessee, and the Roebuck was described as a "family and commercial hotel, three minutes walk from the station, with good boating, etc. A pony and trap was kept, and later changed to a trolley when the pony died probably

used to transport guests and luggage from the station. The stables were on the south side of the Oxford Road - they are now a private house called "Roebuck Cottage.

There was at this time a great deal of correspondence with the Thames Conservancy who found that the correct licences for a landing stage had apparently not been granted. This was finally sorted out on payment of an annual rent to John Darrell Blount of Mapledurham of 10/6d as owner of the "bed and soil" of the River, and £1 to the Thames Conservancy. -

Since the '18th century the Roebuck has been owned by a series of breweries, including Blandy, Hawkins & Co. of Castle Street, Reading and then the S. Berks Brewery E & G Simonds were owners in 1936 and in 1962 they merged with other companies to become the Courage Group, the present owners.

Some owners and residents

I am interested in George HOLGATE of the Roebuck Hotel at Tilehurst, Berkshire, and his daughter Elizabeth Louisa who married John FOREMAN. *

George Thomas HOLGATE was baptised 10 May 1771 at Bisham, Berks, son of George & Elizabeth HOLGATE nee LEWINGTON. He was married on 18 Jan 1794 at Hurley, Berks, to Harriet GODFREY, who died in 1794 at Hurley. George then married Ann Athaliah WARWICK on 14 April 1798 at Tilehurst. They had five daughters and two sons - Harriet Ann (m. Robert MILLS), Frederick, Elizabeth, Eliza Ann, Elizabeth Lydia (m. John FOREMAN), Ann Athaliah (m. Daniel ELLSON), and George Thomas Henry. Ann Athaliah was buried 10 Jun 1835, and George was buried 2 March 1842, both at Tilehurst. *

1830/George Holgate/.../.../Pigots Directory ***

1841/George Holgate/Publican/70/ /Census *

1841/Elizabeth Holgate/ /25/Berkshire/Census

Elizabeth Lydia HOLGATE was baptised 7 Feb 1813 at Tilehurst. She married John FOREMAN at Cardiff in Wales in 1857, and died in 1881. *

1844/Elizabeth Holgate/.../.../Pigots Directory ***

1847/Mrs Lydia Holgate/.../.../Post Office Directory ***

1851/Elizabeth Holgate/Inn Keeper/38/Tilehurst, Berks/Census ***

1851/Thomas Burgiss/Lodger, Agricultural Labourer/40/Purley, Berks/Census

1851/Henry Brew/Visitor, Scholar/4/Reading, Berks/Census

1852/Elizabeth Lydia Holgate/.../.../Slaters Directory ***

1854/Elizabeth Lydia Holgate/../../../../Billings Directory ***

John FOREMAN was baptised 1 Oct 1809 at Ivinghoe, Bucks, the son of James & Elizabeth FOREMAN, and married Eleanor PLAISTOW at Chelsea London on 15 Jan 1838, and later married Elizabeth Lydia HOLGATE. John died 2 Aug 1882 at Reading, Berks. *

1861/John Foreman/Inn Keeper/50/Ringshall, Bucks/Census *

1861/Elizabeth L Foreman/wife/48/Tilehurst, Berks/Census

1861/Ann Trinder/house servant/15/Englefield, Berks/Census

1864/J Foreman/../../../../Kellys Directory ***

1868/James Foreman/../../../../Casseys Directory ***

1871/John Foreman/Inn Keeper/61/Ivinghoe, Bucks/Census *

1871/Elizabeth Foreman/wife/58/Tilehurst, Berks/Census

1871/Mary Chilvers/niece/28/Hounslow, Bristol/Census

1877/J Foreman/../../../../Harrods Directory ***

1883/William Green/../../../../Kellys Directory ***

1887/Henry James Noyes/../../../../Kellys Directory ***

1891/Henry James Noyes/../../../../Kellys Directory ***

1899/Mrs Annie Noyes/../../../../Kellys Directory ***

1907/Charles E Ratcliffe/../../../../Kellys Directory ***

1920/Charles E Ratcliffe/../../../../Kellys Directory ***

1924/John Herbert Ganson/../../../../Kellys Directory ***

1928/Clifford H Ritter/../../../../Kellys Directory ***

1931/Frank Timson/../../../../Kellys Directory ***

A Start for the Far North

Extract from an article by Tom Hine recording a journey by Dr William Gordon Stables around 1885.

So we steered for Reading, and on without stopping as far as the Roebuck Hotel at Tilehurst. Nine years ago this hotel was a very small one indeed, but all gables thickest thatch, and climbing roses and honeysuckle. The thatch has given place to red tiles, and an addendum of modern dimensions has been built. The old must ever give place to the new. But what lovely peeps there are from this hotel, from the balcony and from the bedrooms. It is a river house now in every sense of the word, though not old as a hotel of the kind, and all day long, and far into the night, the bar and passages and the coffee-rooms are crowded in summer with men in snowy flannels, and with some in sailor garb and with artificial sailor swagger.