

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## Purley Magna

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Food and water is man's first need. The history and origins of ways of obtaining food are therefore as old as man himself, and in comparison the history of buildings and towns pale into insignificance. In c 6,500 BC a nomadic life of hunting and gathering persisted in the British Isles. We know from the archaeological finds that our area has been inhabited and used by man since time immemorial. Stone Age man trekked along the Thames Valley when our islands were still attached to Europe, bringing the skill of working in stone.

We can imagine these early settlements set up along the Thames quite likely on rising ground along our own stretch of the river with primitive dwellings made from the abundance of natural materials and the lush growth along the riverside. These early residents would have watched

the rain coming across the hill, the swans flying up and down stream, the geese migrating and the ducks clattering in the reeds just as we do. By c 6,500 BC Britain was an island and the process of identity development began. We can therefore say that whatever the name or owner of the farms we know today, their forerunners are thousands of years old and the very soil that is farmed and cultivated was once theirs.

In terms of recorded history the first reliable information is the so called Domesday Book, the Norman census of 1086.

In *READING Hundred*:

Roger also holds PURLEY, Bricward held it from King Edward. Then it answered for 4½ hides now for 4 hides. Land for 4 ploughs. In lordship 2; 9 villagers and 3 smallholders with 3 ploughs. Meadow 16 acres. The value was 100s; later £4, now 100s.

This reference relates to the largest of the three manors which formed the parish of Purley. It was known as Purley Magna and roughly corresponds to what is now the built up area of Purley. It is noted in the *Victoria County Histories* that "The Northern part of the Parish lies very low and is liable to floods. The soil is loam and gravel and the sub-soil gravel. The chief crops are oats barley and beans."

The original great house or manor of Purley Magna was near the river on what is now the land occupied by the Purley Marina. It was surrounded by its farm buildings and the Church. Of the earliest manor house we know nothing. The manor was in the hands of the Huscarle family soon after the conquest and in the 14th century passed to the Carew family. It eventually passed into the ownership of Joan Saunders, whose first marriage had been to Sir John St John of Lydiard Tregoze Co Wiltshire.

In 1514 Elizabeth daughter of Richard Blount of Mapledurham became engaged to John St John the son of Joan Saunders and Sir John St John of Lydiard Tregoze (deceased). When they married they came to live at the ancient manor house at Purley which was almost opposite to the equally ancient Mapledurham House. During the coming century both these houses would be rebuilt. The St Johns were in possession of Purley Magna for the next 300 years.

Throughout the 19th century the manor belonged to the Storer family who had moved the main residence to the large house known as Purley Park, well away from the flooding. The estate was sold in the 1920s and eventually fell into the hands of the developers so that now it is almost all covered in houses. However some parts remain in agriculture, carrying on a tradition from earliest times.

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