

Account of Purley on Thames

The Road to Theale

R200353 12/4/2017

One of Purley's ancient roads linked Purley Magna with Theale. The only bits left nowadays are Long Lane and Purley Lane but in ancient times it continued where it met Sulham Hill to wind down the escarpment to Theale.

Long Lane

The name 'Long Lane' first appears in a Glebe Terrier dated 1608 and it was the main route from Purley to Sulham. It gradually took over as the route to Tilehurst from what is now known as footpath five (the continuation of Mapledurham Drive and New Hill). It runs from the Main road up the hill and joins the Sulham to Tilehurst road at the Mud House. It passes through Purley, Tilehurst and Sulham parishes.

At its lower (northern) end it has become very urbanised with street lighting and houses for most of its length, but above Dark Lane it reverts much its old self.

It was a very narrow winding Lane with barely room for two carts to pass and remained like this until well after the second world war. In 1956 the County Council acquired land for widening from the Reverend Wilder and some of the bends were straightened out. Further land was acquired from the frontage of the houses to the east and from Rev Wilder in case it was needed for the future, but very little has been done to the width of the road since the main scheme.

Long Lane was particularly noted for its elms which stood on either side. Their branches overlapped making the Lane seem like a tunnel in summer time. Many of the elms on the eastern side were felled to allow building work on the house which sprang up in the nineteen-twenties and thirties and they all met their fate in the dutch elm disease epidemic which raged in the 1970s.

The lane was unlit until 1986 when street lighting was installed after a great deal of public pressure. The scheme was seen by many however as the end of Purley's claim to be considered as rural.

Traffic lights were installed at the junction with the A329 in 1988 after the road had been classified in 198x. It carries a considerable volume of traffic including buses between Knowsley Road and Dark Lane.

Purley Lane

The link between Purley Lodge and the Highway eventually became known as Purley Lane although for a long time it was known as 'School Lane' and probably started as an extension of Long Lane leading from Sulham. It too needed to be bridged in 1837 with the coming of the railway. It has remained an essentially rural road below the railway.

It would seem that originally there was a continuation beyond the Village Street with a track to Westbury but this has now disappeared. The residue of the track to the Black Barns of Home Farm are still in evidence as part of Bridleway 3.

