

Account of Purley on Thames

Further thoughts from Bill Fisher

R200461 18/11/2017

Following an interview by Project Purley members on his recollections of Purley in the 1930s Bill Fisher wrote down much of what he had said. In this document he adds snippets that had been forgotten.

Items not already covered by my notes

My father's job

My father was promoted to position of ganger (foreman) GWR from Reading 1928 to Little Bedwyn. The permanent way (railroad) consisted of sections 1 1/4 miles in length and maintained by four men (lengthmen and a ganger). This particular section of railroad consisted of two lines of track. My father wished to progress to maintaining four lines of track and attained a transfer to controlling the section from Pangbourne to Lower Basildon. We rented a tied cottage at Sots Hole belonging to gentleman farmer Mr Hope, 1930-31. When this cottage was subsequently required for a shepherd we were forced to vacate the property. The farmer arranged rehousing on a temporary basis at no 6 Beckfords, Upper Basildon, coupled with the promise of a new Council house at Purley when they were completed. I have no knowledge of Bradfield RDC politics, but we were certainly allocated no 3 Council Houses, later known as Glebe Road.

The School

7 Both were school governors. Religious instruction was high on the curriculum. Mr Hodgkin visited the school during classes. I do not remember him posing any questions, I think observation was the norm.

The Revd Ernest Skuse

9 I realise much has been said about Rev Skuse's incumbency. I personally found him a kind and caring man. When I broke my leg playing football he unfailingly conveyed me to the RBH throughout my outpatient days, a term of ten weeks. Despite the precarious church finances, he, together with the organist, insisted the choir must have their annual outing. He was also willing in his ministration for the sick.

I realise a lot of people were antagonistic towards him, not least my whippet who used to follow him down Westbury Lane barking furiously. He tried; he instituted open air services on the River Estate during the Summer months. He walked the Parish trying to create enthusiasm for the Parish Magazine. Unfortunately he removed from the parish to live in Reading and I fear he continued in the cure of souls long after he was past it, possibly due to financial difficulties. He left £500 in his will.

Rev William Morton came to the parish when religiously everything was at a low ebb. He worked hard unceasingly to provide the framework of a viable parish. I think he succeeded. He visited the chronic sick with unfailing regularity. I lived in Bourne Road with a wife crippled with MS on the periphery of the parish. It was too far for him to cycle, but he and his wife never failed in their regular visits by car. He restored the faith of numerous River Estate members as well as Purley members. I only distinguish between the two sections because the former had more reason to

question the purpose of the incumbent over the years, than the latter. William Morton instigated services in the Purley Church.

The Church

I have no doubt most of the information relating to the church has already been covered but it is possible a few items relating to the 1930s may be of interest.

The choir boys were paid 1d per attendance and 1d per choir practice, payed quarterly at 3s 3d less any deductions for misbehaviour. Attendance at weddings 2/6d. Attendance at funerals 1/-. The organ blower received 12/6 per quarter.

On October 7th 1937 a great festive occasion occurred with the marriage of Miss Athene Farmiloe and Lieut Commander Francis H Ashton. I possess the relevant newspaper cutting and photograph of the choir leading the bridal procession. Most of Purley were there.

I also have a photograph (borrowed from a friend) of the choir in 1931.

Purley church is a beneficiary of Queen Anne's Bounty - Sulham church is not.

I remember the Calor Gas installation in Purley church after the Electric Light Company in Sept 1959

Conclusion and thanks

In conclusion I would like to record my grateful thanks to Daisy Nicholls, Violet and Ted Luker, Christine Reed and my sister Gwen Tappern for the help and confirmation of several items contained in these notes.