

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## German POWs in Purley

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The story, as far as we know it from four letters recently handed to Project Purley, is that Purley played host to two German Prisoners of War, Alfred Ubat and Karl Stephan. Both worked on Westbury Farm with Fred Miles and went back to Germany in early 1947. Various Purley inhabitants are mentioned in the letters: Mr Staniland (who also worked on the farm), Violet (who probably was Fred's daughter and about to get married), Mr Theobald (who at that time was intending to buy Westbury Farm), Mrs Smith (who had sent Alfred a very welcome food parcel) and someone referred to as 'old' Frank (another farm worker).

The first letter from Karl, dated 1st March 1948, expresses gratitude for the kind treatment he and Alfred had received at Fred's and his family's hands and I quote: "Well, dear Fred, I am thinking very often of the time I have spent on your farm. [Name withheld] didn't think very much of us, but you always were very kind to us and treated us ever so well. I needn't mention how glad I was and still am, when I remember all the good things, such as the good soup, cake and cocoa, you gave to us." He then goes on to contrast this with the conditions he found on his return to Germany, which "... are indescribably bad, especially for us refugees from the East, as I have lost my home and nearly all our belongings to the Poles, who have taken over my former homeland." He also shows that he is still interested in what goes on at Westbury Farm: "How is Violet? Is she already married? I think we had a good time then and we always got on well together. I would be very pleased if I could get a letter from her. Has Alfred written to you? I wonder where Staniland is now. Is he on another farm? Has Theobald got Westbury Farm? How is old Frank getting on? I suppose he is all right and still working."

Alfred's 1st letter, dated 5th September 1947, is along similar lines. "I found my parents old and sick, not much to eat and four people together in one room...", he writes. He also talks of his very low pay, and of how little there was in the shops that they could afford to buy. Alfred illustrates this by saying that his earnings are 30 RM (Reichsmark) a week, while the price of one egg is 10 RM on the black market. "Last week I received a parcel from Mrs Smith and we were very glad about its contents, especially the chocolate for the children." He adds: "The weather here has been very bad, no rain, very bad for potatoes and Swiss chard. This winter there will be much hunger in Germany. I often think of the good times in Westbury Lane. How is Mr Staniland, and Mr Theobald? When is Violet's wedding day? At Christmas?" He concludes: "All the best to you and all (my) friends in Westbury Lane...I hope you will write very soon...". The address he gives is in Hesse, 'American Zone'. His second letter, dated 12.12. 1948, begins with: "Thank you for your letter and parcel. We were very pleased with its contents and we can use everything. One can buy things here but prices are too high, particularly as we have lost everything and have to start afresh. Now that Christmas is here, I still remember the good time we had with you. You always treated us well and that was not the case with everyone... I would like to come and see you, but it is too far - if only the Channel was not in the way...The children are looking forward to Christmas. They all have large wishes but everything is very expensive. Kindest regards..."

Karl's 2nd letter of 26th April 1948, shows how much he appreciated receiving a reply from Fred: "...I was so happy to receive [it]. Now just about a year has passed since I was with you. I think back a lot to those times, it was often nice, even if we argued now and again... Yes, Fred, times are bad now, everybody has worries and has to see how best to get through life. You can imagine how my family was happy when I came home, but it is hard for us now, we haven't got anything. You know that we live as refugees here. In our home town are the Poles. I hope that one day we will be able to go back there. The everything would be better again.

I suppose you have a lot of work now and Ginger will be after the work, How is your wife and Violet, we have always understood each other so well and they were always so good to us. How is Violet, is she still on the farm or is she already married? It would be nice to receive a few lines from her. You write that the prisoners walk around free now. Yes, when we were there everything was stricter. I suppose a lot of them will stay there.

Dear Fred, you write if you can help me with something. What we would need most at the moment are fats, but I can't expect you to send anything, you don't have much yourself. Of course I would be thankful for anything as we are in need of practically everything at the moment..."

There are no further letters in Project Purley's possession and no other information. It would be quite rewarding to try and complete the picture - and even expand this episode of 'Purley at War'. Perhaps some readers have memories or other information that would add to the story.