

Account of Purley on Thames

The Census

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The Census was started in 1801 when some fairly basic questions were asked so that the Government had some elementary statistics about population. They have been conducted every ten years since, with the exception of 1941, with the questions getting more and more complex until by the 2011 census it was virtually decided that that was that and a very different scheme was required to provide the statistical information. Since then the Government have been striving to decide first what information they do need and then the best way of obtaining it and keeping it up to date as nowadays nine year old data is almost useless.

The 1851 Census

An article by Jean Debney originally published in Purley Parish News April 1981

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This month (April 1981) the Census will be taken as it has been every ten years since 1801 except in 1941 when the War put a stop to things. The earlier Censuses were only "head counts" but in 1851 all the inhabitants are listed by name and ages, jobs and birthplaces are detailed - and it is this return that I have been looking at. (Reading Reference Library has microfilms of the returns for Berkshire of 1851, 1861 and 1871)

Purley's population in 1851 was 220: 123 males, and 97 females.- Their average age, was 27 years, and over half had been born in Purley or within five miles of the parish. It is not possible to identify the cottages in the Village as we know them today: only the Rectory, Purley Hall, Purley Park and Mapledurham Pound are named. Everyone lived in "Purley Village" or "Oxford Road," but which was the "Old House" in Purley Village? was it Ivy Cottage?

Everyone who was in the Village on the night of 30 March is recorded. The 55-year old bachelor Rector, Richard Palmer, was at home in the Rectory With his housekeeper, maid and groom. William Sheppard, the keeper at Mapledurham Pound (the Lock) was with his wife, Mary Ann and three of their children. Mary Ann was born in Northamptonshire and probably came to Purley from a working boat on the Thames. Her husband was born in Streatley-:

The grocer was William Pocock in the Oxford Road. It must have been difficult to make ends meet because his wife Esther aged 44, was a "working mother". she was an agricultural labourer. Six of their then,nine children were living at home - the tenth was yet to be born.

John Simmonds, the blacksmith, his wife Susannah and their 2-year old son and an apprentice lived in the Oxford Road, "superdad" Jesse Lewendon, a gardener, aged 30, was in Purley Village with his first wife and their eldest 5 Children aged between 12 months and 8 years. (Remember he went on to have 16 children by two wives!)

Most of the villagers worked on the land as labourers, from 10-year old Frederick Green to 92-year old Thomas Martinane, (the oldest inhabitant). They were probably all employed by Edward Sherwood, who farmed 800 acres and employed 45 labourers. He leased all of Purley's land and most of the cottages. None of the labourers could afford servants, but the tenants of Purley Park and Purley Hall were wealthy. There were 12 servants at Purley Park to look after a household of five; and 8 servants at Purley Hall to look after only four.

Thirty children were scholars and were aged between 3 and 10 years old, They would have attended the village school where Mrs Mary Herridge was the Mistress - although in 1851 she said she was an "agricultural labourer" the Berkshire Directory says differently.

Four OAPs were "in receipt of Parish relief" they were the widows Martha Hope who was 67, and Mary House, 84. Both lived With their sons and had been agricultural labourers. Sarah Hope, aged 66, lived with her unmarried sister of 61 - they had been servants.

The picture emerges of Purley as a-small rural community. I wonder how our Census Returns will look in 130 years' time?

Population Growth

There have been other methods of measuring population but here are the figures for Purley:-

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Electorate</i>	<i>Houses</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Notes</i>
1676	80			e	not including children
1768		4		p	
1796		4		p	
1801	153		28	c	
1811	197		30	c	
1812		4		p	
1818	197	0		p	
1821	196		36	c	
1831	172		37	c	
1832		3		r	
1841	198		40	c	
1851	220	10	38	cr	
1861	193	6	40	cr	
1871	194		43	c	
1881	188		39	c	
1891	180		36	c	
1901	207		43	c	
1911	238		53	c	
1921	247		55	c	
1931	339		75	c	
1941					no census due to war
1946	867	607		r	
1949		720		r	
1950		709		r	
1951	1061	752	342	rc	
1952		784		r	
1954		880		r	
1955		893		r	
1956		963		r	
1957		1026		r	
1958		1113		r	
1959		1190		r	

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Electorate</i>	<i>Houses</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Notes</i>
1960	2163	1256	766	re	
1961	1868	609		c	
	1893	682		e	
1962	1932	687		e	
1963	1987	689		e	
1964	1970	693		e	
1965	2035	1313	706	re	
1966	1984		716	e	
1967	1996	1263	722	re	
1968	2176		775	e	
1969	2468		834	e	
1970	2593	1680	957	e	
1971	2615		855	c	
	2689		979	e	
1972	2715		986	e	
1975		2062		r	
1976	2840	2049		er	
1977		2132		r	
1978	3210	2229		r	
1979	3345	2495		r	
1980	3525	2635		r	
1981	4062	2784	1298	rc	
1982		2927		r	
1983		3002		r	revised elect. register
1984		2909		r	
1985		2987		r	
1986		3055	1620	re	
1987		3164		r	
1988		3589		r	
1989		3568		r	
1990		3575		r	
1991	4049	3064		cr	reduction in parish area
1992		3060		r	
1993		3130		r	
1994		3185		r	
1995		3237		r	
1996		3236		rd	
1997		3259		rd	
1998					
1999					

Key to sources

- c Census taken in May - does not include uninhabited houses
- e Official estimate - usually refers to December
- p Poll book - list of people who actually voted
- r Electoral register compiled in previous October

