

# ***Account of Purley on Thames***

## ***The Purley Park River Estate***

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*Two articles by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 64 and 65 published in PPN August to October 1986*

### 64. The Purley Park River Estate

On Saturday, 7th June 1986, the Purley Park Property Owners Association celebrated their 50th anniversary at a meeting in Purley Memorial Hall. Formed to "safeguard the interests of the owners and to provide social and communal activities" it has also played its part in the conversion from the rural slum that the Purley Park River Estate had become in the post-war years to the desirable residential area that it is today.

The 34-acre estate, which lies in the NE corner of the parish near the church, was one of many "plot-lands" which developed in the first forty years of this century. The main concentrations in SE England were along the South coast of Sussex, in the North Downs of Surrey, in Essex and the riverside suburbs of the Thames Valley. Thousands of dream homes were erected without reference to councils, planners, architects, building societies or even builders. By the post-war years many had declined to become eyesores and gave their local councils a bad headache - and this included the Purley Park Estate.

Although the estate as we know it today only dates from 1934, when Mrs. Mountain offered camping or holiday sites for sale from £5 to £25 each which could be paid for at 1 shilling a week, the history of the land itself can be traced back for more than 900 years. For Purley, in

common with thousands of other villages and towns all over England, 1986 is the 900th anniversary of its entry in the Domesday Book. The area now covered with houses formed part of the manor of Purley Magna, which was held before 1066 from King Edward the Confessor by a Saxon then called Bristward. Following the King's death in 1066, England was successfully invaded by the Norman King, William the Conqueror, who came to claim the throne of England which was his by right.

Twenty years later in 1086 William requested a detailed survey of the country. With no knowledge of geography and no maps, he needed to know who held what and where in order to obtain the highest possible returns for the lands granted to his followers. He had inherited a system of local government, probably established by his Saxon predecessor Alfred the Great in the 9th century. This had developed into the so-called "feudal system" whereby services were rendered to and for the King in time of war in return for land held. The land was assessed by hides - five hides for a knight - originally a unit of land sufficient to support a family, which later became a unit of taxation rather similar to our rating system.

At the time of the Domesday survey, Purley Magna was held by Roger son of Seigfreid, the number of hides had been reduced from  $4\frac{1}{2}$  to 4, and 9 villagers and 3 smallholders lived there with their families tilling the land.

It seems that most of the area now bounded by the railway on the south, the river on the north and east and Mapledurham Drive on the west was known as the "East Field" and at an unknown date was divided and enclosed into smaller fields. From a map made in 1786 we know that these fields were called Foveys Piddle, Hop Garden and Wheathams on the west side, now bisected by Mapledurham Drive; the Common Marsh and Horse Croft Mead along the river bank, part of the latter now forming River Gardens; with Wheathams and Churchams under Colyton Way and Wintringham Way respectively and Little Wheathams and Duncroft in the area of St Mary's Avenue. The 18th century field boundaries

changed in the 19th and again by the 20th centuries but they bear no relation to the road pattern of today.

Curving NW from Purley Green, now the car park in front of St Mary's Church, the original village "Streete" passed over the area now covered by The Short, Oak Tree Walk and Park Walk. Just east of the junction of these last two a road called Marsh Lane led north to the Common Marsh and the River Thames. At this point the Street turned SW to the pond formerly at the bottom of New Hill. On either side of the Street were several cottages and gardens which belonged to the lord of the manor and one to the church.

From various Glebe Terriers dating from the 17th century we know the names of some of the tenants who lived in 3 cottages on the north side of the Street, the centre one being the Glebe cottage. These were Nicholas JUSTICE and John NORTH (1608), John WELLS, Robert COXHEAD and Barnabe SIMONS (1634), John WILDER, Richard OSBORNE and Thomas BUSHENELL (1671) and Thomas CRESSWELL (1704), by which time the glebe cottage appears to have fallen down. From an initial comparison of the 1786 map with the modern OS map these properties appear to have lain diagonally NE from 1 Oak Tree Walk towards Park Walk.

In 1786 the cottages on either side of the glebe land were occupied by William Lukeman and Benjamin GUTTRIDGE, with Widow DENCH opposite, in the area of the back gardens of St Mary's Avenue. At the corner of Marsh Lane John NEWBURY lived next door to John GREEN. All these cottages were described as lapsed Copyhold tenants who were now presumably only paying an annual rent.

Within a decade great changes were to take place which not only affected the lives of these villagers, but altered the whole face of the parish.

(To be continued)

Jean Debney

64. The Purley Park River Estate (part 2)

When Anthony Morris Storer purchased the manor of Purley Magna in 1793 he created a gentleman's park from the countryside. Almost all trace of the old fields, roads and buildings disappeared and changed again when the Great Western Railway divided the Park in 1840.

Common Marsh and Horse Croft Mead by the river became a large meadow let to Farmer Sherwood: it is still grazing land with River Gardens on part of it. Park and Churchams, later to become part of the River Estate, was a pasture let with the new mansionhouse on the hill. A kitchen garden with cottage and greenhouses to supply produce to the mansion was enclosed round the church: the boundary can be traced round Waterside Drive and Church Mews developed in the 1970s. Maggots Moor extended from the railway to St Mary's Avenue and is now Primrose Close, etc. Many specimen trees planted about 1800 can still be found.

The Streete was replaced with New Hill & St Mary's Avenue (Church Walk in 19thC) for access to village and church respectively and Marsh Lane moved west to become Mapledurham Drive, The cottagers were probably

rehoused locally but Charles Ballard's family were the sole residents near the church in 1840-1.

Further changes had taken place in the field pattern when the estate was sold by the family in 1920: Park and Churchams, now "well timbered" Par, had increased from 22 to 34 acres and was let to farmer Robert Saunders.

Despite the damp conditions of "The Park" it proved a popular holiday spot when Mrs Mountain commenced selling small plots in 1934. With no amenities the sites were for summer use only in wheeled accommodation: soon a variety of sheds, etc. with wheels tacked on their sides appeared amongst the tents and caravans, many being occupied all year. The outbreak of WWII and the London Blitz in 1939-40 increased the number of permanent residents to 800 with evacuees and the "bombed-out".

Despite applications, the local council refused to allow any permanent building as the area was considered unsuitable and, with no water, sanitation or power, it became very run down. The severe floods in the winter of 1947 ruined homes and left a trail of debris and floating chemical loos amidst the unmetalled, muddy and pot-holed roads. At this time a plan by the council to buy the estate and "clean it up" proved too expensive and had to be abandoned.

Bradfield Rural District Council attempted in 1966 to condemn the area as a health hazard but failed as few of the dwellings were actually "unfit". By 1967 some sites had been connected to the water and sewerage but there was little general improvement: permanent buildings were still disallowed as the plots were too small but piecemeal bathroom or bedroom extensions had been permitted adding to the general ramshackle appearance.

A Guidance Plan drawn up in 1970 was accepted and since that date great improvements have been made. The chief roads have been made up, many small plots have been amalgamated to allow the construction of modern brick houses, most sites are now connected to the main services and gas arrived in 1984.

The number of older residents is fast disappearing and with them memories, photographs etc. of the estate. The bus and railway carriage "homes" have gone and very few "shacks" remain. Bob Skerritt at 1 Oak Tree Walk is very keen to collect any reminiscences of the past which recall such happy - and sad - times on the Purley Park River Estate.

Jean Debney

#### 65. Some Memories of the River Estate

The small size of the plots and coping without services generated a tremendous spirit of community from the earliest days. The Oral History Group of Project Purley have interviewed some who remember the life, laughter and problems of those times, and below are two extracts from among those happy memories.

Mrs. Hilda DAW related her experiences with trying to obtain water during her first visit with her husband, who was on leave. She had borrowed her sister's three chalets which were built of wood like portable garages - two were used as bedrooms and the third as a dining room with a small kitchen in front. Assuming that everything would be laid on as in London, they were very surprised to find no running water or electricity. Luckily her husband knew how to light the lamp but not how to work the pump, so Mrs. DAW had to visit a neighbour 3 or 4 times a day for water. The neighbour eventually asked if she knew water had to be put down first in order to get some up; but she didn't know. So the lady gave her some more and she went back and put the water down and - lo and behold! - she got some water up. But by then it was almost time to go home. Her

sister screamed with laughter when asked about the pump and said "what do you think the bottles of water in the loo were for?" but she hadn't asked.

The pumps presented an added problem in the winter when they had to be primed with boiling water to melt the ice before obtaining more water. Some of these pumps still exist and may still be in working order.

Mrs. Lyn Nicholson recalled that coping without sewerage was a "scream". They had to make do with regular visits by "Dan, Dan the lavatory man" who tended to appear at breakfast time, go through the house with a big bucket, do the "necessary" and march out again. He then climbed a ladder and emptied the contents into a "sort of hole" in the top of his brown van. Rumour had it that he once pinched the van and went off to Scotland for a holiday, which she thought wouldn't have smelled very pleasant. In order to let "Dan" know that his services were needed, it was suggested that the letter 'H' for the Hampshire Cleansing Dept. should be hung on the gates. Then someone had an even brighter idea and 'L' plates were used instead. The sight of these caused hoots of laughter amongst visitors when they delicately enquired the reason for them.

With the installation of mains drainage, this novel use for L-plates has been superseded but their use still causes much lighthearted amusement. It is hoped that no-one encountered Dan and his van on his holiday in Scotland!

John Titterton has compiled a 10-minute tape using these and other extracts with a connecting commentary. This will be played at our Christmas Social evening in December. Further tapes will be played by Tom Robinson, who has organised these recordings, following our AGM next March. Visitors will be welcomed at both these meetings.

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