

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## The Sherwoods of Belleisle

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The Sherwood family were the principal farmers in Purley for many years. They managed land on behalf of the manor estate holders and also Glebe land. For most of the time they lived at Belleisle Farm which was located on the south side of the highway just west of Long Lane. This had been built around 1800 when the main farm had been removed from Purley Magna..

Sherwood Rise is named to commemorate the family, the last of whom left Purley in the 1980s.

There follows a number of articles about members of the family who also served in many other parish roles.

## **Edward Sherwood (1807-1856)**

*An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 24 published in PPN June 1982*

### 24. Edward Sherwood (1807-1856)

Four generations of the Sherwood family dominated the life of Purley village for over 120 years until the untimely death of Edward Sherwood III in 1856. First came Edward Sherwood I, yeoman, who arrived in Purley about 1733; he died in 1778. Thirty years previously he was living in "his new dwelling house at Purley". Then came his son John (1735-1792), yeoman of Purley; his grandson, Edward II (1770-1811), gentleman; and finally his great-grandson Edward III (1807-1856).

Edward Sherwood III was baptised at Purley on 2 Dec 1807, the sixth of the eight children of Edward II and Mary Ann Sherwood. He was only 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> years old when his father died, and did not inherit his share of the estate until 1833.

The Sherwoods leased about half the land in Purley, but they only owned about 7 acres outright. By 1835, Edward III had increased his holding to about two-thirds of Purley's 877 acres, and therefore paid about two-thirds of the Poor Rates. In his position as Overseer of the Poor he was responsible for the distribution of Parish Relief (which, under the circumstances, was mostly his own money), either on a regular basis to widows and orphans, etc., or as the need arose in the case of illness or accident. He seems to have performed this task without undue generosity, but it is difficult to judge as there is only his book of the Churchwardens' Accounts to refer to - no other records survive.

Edward Sherwood's property included 14 cottages and 3 houses (excluding Purley Park, Purley Hall, Purley Lodge and the Rectory). Part of the property was leased from Anthony Morris Storer on condition that he act as Overseer and distribute the "Cow Money" (see last month's article). To help him manage his farm land, Edward employed Stewards: William Waite in 1842 and Savory Griffin from about 1851-1854. By 1851 he farmed 800 acres and employed 45 labourers which represents

almost the entire working-force of Purley at that time. Most of his labourers would have lived in his "tied cottages" which had to be vacated on leaving his employment. This goes part of the way to explain why there is relatively little continuity of families in Purley, which remained a "closed village" for a long time: no new houses were built for the growing population. It was not until land was sold off in this century that more houses could be built, thus allowing the population to increase dramatically from less than 200 in the 19th century, to over 4,000 in 1981.

Apart from being Churchwarden and Overseer from 1829 until his death, Edward III was also Constable in 1831 and Surveyor (of the roads) in 1832. Ten years later he held four of the eight parish offices: Churchwarden, Overseer, Guardian (he represented Purley in the Bradfield Union from 1835), and Assessor and Surveyor (this last is one post). The Reform Act of 1832 enabled him to vote for Parliament for the first time as he leased land worth more than £10 per annum.

It was not until he was almost 39 years old that he took the plunge and married Amelia Purvis at St Giles' Church, Reading in Oct 1846. She was 16 years younger than her husband and 4th daughter of Captain Edward Purvis of Watlington House, Reading. Edward and Amelia had five children baptised at Purley: the eldest Edward Purvis Sherwood, Bap 1848, went into the Church; Mary was baptised in 1850; Arthur Paul, baptised 1851, became a doctor; Edith Sophia, baptised in 1854, is perhaps the best known of his children as she was killed while a missionary in China during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900; her memorial is in the north aisle of the Church; the youngest child, Catherine Amelia, was baptised in April 1856, six weeks after her father's death. She later married a minister of the Church.

It is difficult to know where the family lived in Purley. By 1851 they had moved to Pangbourne where Edward Sherwood III died suddenly on 12 March 1856 aged 49. Six days later he was buried quietly in the Sherwood vault at Purley, which is marked by a long, narrow chevron stone

on the right hand side of the path by the porch. His obituary in the Berkshire Chronicle said that he was an agriculturalist and regularly attended Reading Market. For some time he had been "suffering occasionally from heart disease, which rendered the tenure of his life precarious". His wife Amelia, died 60 years later in 1916 at the age of 93; she had left the district and remarried.

Jean Debney

















