

Account of Purley on Thames

Purvey's Railway

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In the 1920s John Purvey and Sons had a yard which ran from the Oxford Road to the Railway and between what is now the Garden House and Glebe Road, they ran a road maintenance business which was mainly contracting to the County Council. They kept supplies of roadstone and other materials there as well as providing a base for their lorries and steam rollers.

Two projects came up which required the transportation of a lot of gravel. These were: the construction of the new Caversham Bridge in Reading and the building of the Purley Rise estate, ie what is now Glebe Road, Purley Rise, Westbury Lane and Beech Road. To provide this gravel a new gravel pit was dug about 100 yards from the river Thames and a light railway constructed which could transport the gravel from the pit up to the Oxford Road or down to the river to be loaded into barges from a landing stage built on the south bank.

The railway was built as a 2'0" gauge industrial railway using Decauville track which had been much favoured during the First World War for laying down temporary railways to carry ammunition to the front lines. The decauville standard gauge was 600mm but it is variously described as 2' 0" or 1' 11½". Undoubtedly there was plenty of track and waggons going for a song in the early 1920s and it seems as if Purveys bought some from the Government. They had to negotiate a way-leave from the Great Western Railway in order to allow their trains to cross the main lines over the bridge built to carry cattle from Belleisle Farm to the pastures on the north of the railway. This was signed on 28th March 1925, although one would suspect that the railway had been there for a while before the GWR had caught up with the Purvey's.

There is no evidence that a locomotive was ever used on the line and it is assumed that the waggons were drawn by horses. The agreement with the GWR was a temporary one which expired 31st December 1926, however the contracts had been completed well before that date and the line was closed by the 24th June. The waggons and a substantial amount of track lasted until the Second World War however they were soon removed. Fragments of the track remained in place near to the river until recent times and today three posts in the river adjacent to the south bank about 200 yards upstream of the lock are made of this track. Also a bridge of the West Brook at Westbury Farm was made from a complete section of track although it has now been removed.

After the line closed several of the wagons were obtained by the Menpes Fruit Farm in Long Lane but we have no ideas as to how extensive their network was..

