

Account of Purley on Thames

History of Purley Parish Council

Part 2 1927-1955

By John Chapman

R200612 23/2/2019

The story of Purley Parish Council is recorded in the minute books now lodged with Berkshire Record Office. CPC/93/1/1 is a bound volume covering the formative years 1927-1955. Published in Purley Parish News January 2019.

The new Parish Council first met at the schoolroom on Monday 28th March 1927. It comprised: The Revd C H Coe, Mr C E Hodgkin, Mr H A Tidbury, Mr H Pocock and Mr S Anderson. Two other parishioners attended as well. The Revd Coe was elected Chairman, but within days he was moved to Windsor by the bishop after some rather unsavoury events. Horace Turner was appointed Clerk at a salary of two guineas per annum. At the next meeting Miss Caroles-Jones took over the chairmanship and at the following one Ernest Hodgkin was elected, but was absent at the following meeting which was chaired by Horace Pocock; but Hodgkin returned to stay as chairman until his death.

For the first 30 years there were two topics that came up at almost every meeting. Footpaths and roads. One might get the impression that every landowner was intent on obstructing or denying footpaths and Brownyard footpath was reported as having been damaged by a timber wagon. So in 1934 they produced a list of 14 footpaths and bridleways and set about convincing the County Council to agree. A need for fingerposts to direct walkers was recognised and installed in 1929 but in July it was reported that one had been sawn down. Later George Abery from Long Lane admitted to sawing and burning it so was ordered to pay £3 to replace it. He never did! The roads were always being reported as in bad condition and needed tarring and ire was directed toward the County Council.

Gradually as the 1920s turned into the 1930s other issues arose. One key one was the building of Council houses in Glebe Road and

the Parish Council were lobbying Bradfield RDC to reserve at least four of them for Purley residents.

Houses were springing up along the Oxford Road and Long Lane and there were complaints about the poor postal service they received as the postman had to walk from Pangbourne to the Roebuck then back and up Long Lane and then back to Pangbourne with a lot of wasted mileage so after talks with the postmaster it was agreed that the area would be served from Tilehurst so the postman could walk along the Oxford Road, up Long Lane and back to Tilehurst. The end result has been the southeastern quadrant of Purley is now RG31-6 and called Tilehurst while the rest of Purley is RG8-8.

As time went by the Council were asked to nominate members to various outside positions to represent Purley and this established many connections with neighbouring parishes especially Pangbourne so, for the celebrations to mark King George V's Silver Jubilee and King George VI's Coronation, Purley joined with Pangbourne but they broke away for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth. Purley received the money for a lifebelt from the Jubilee fund.

Among the joint enterprises was Pangbourne Fire Brigade toward which Purley paid £12/5/0 every half year with Horace Pocock serving as representative. This continued until January 1939 when Bradfield RDC took over responsibility. Two members had to serve on the rates assessment panel.

One of the odd allocations of responsibility placed on Parish Councils in 1892 was the Parish Clock. Purley's had stopped working and in 1952 they tried to get it working again. A parishioner offered to pay the cost but the then chairman, A W Bucknell objected to the noise, claiming all that had gone wrong was that someone had stolen the lead weights. However he seems to have been over-ruled.

The first hint of war came at the meeting of 28th March 1938 when they were ordered to begin Air Raid Precautions. A Head Warden for the area had been appointed and the Council had to provide wardens. However on the 28th July 1941 all the wardens turned up at the Parish Council meeting because the Head Warden Mr Stocks had resigned and been replaced by a woman, Miss Ashloss. They

demanded that the PC support them in opposing this but the Council said it was not their business, so all the wardens resigned. The second issue was the provision of a shelter which the Council wanted in the School grounds but the rector, Revd Skuse objected and an alternative option for a hut on the River estate was ignored so the matter was dropped. Later in August 1942 they were issued with instructions on how to welcome American troops.

In September 1936 the Council sought to buy land for a village hall but although various sites were suggested, nothing came of it. Then after the war, in June 1946, Mrs Goodman revived the idea and joined it to a need for a war memorial. This resulted in the building of the Memorial Hall. While the Council fully supported the scheme it was felt better to let the Memorial Hall committee get on with it with the Council merely nominating one member.

The next big demand was for a recreation ground. The Revd Skuse first offered a site for the village hall in an acre next to the rectory and then extended the offer to two acres to provide a recreation field. This was rejected as being too small and land was sought both from Home Farm and Westbury Farm also from Trenthams on land adjacent to Long Lane. After much to-ing and fro-ing with the planning authority, the National Playing Fields Association and the newly formed Sports Club, it was decided to seek six acres from Sulham Estate and the Revd Wilder offered a seven year lease on land adjacent to Beech Road which was agreed. The Parish Council paid £15 for fencing (2s 7d per post) and the sports club offered to level half of it and lay it out for organised games. There were lots of arguments about whether the Sports Club should rent the pavilion from the Parish Council or take a direct lease with Sulham Estate. Eventually however it all got sorted and when the lease expired the Council bought a slightly different area of land from Sulham Estate.

The Council was very active in persuading utility companies to serve Purley. They joined forces with Pangbourne PC to get more favourable terms from the water company and did a survey of residents to try to get electricity but it took some time before enough residents agreed to take electricity before the company would lay a cable from the mill at Whitchurch.

There were many concerns about the river estate. It was first mentioned in January 1936 when the council called for the 'camping estate' to be closed down. During the war its nature changed completely and it had become a permanent home to many people. There was much ill feeling between older residents and the newcomers until the estate dwellers realised that, as they were on the electoral register, they could summon up enough votes to have their own parish councillors and after this relations improved markedly. By June 1947 the Parish Council were supporting a public telephone for the estate and for Bradfield District Council to improve sewage and refuse services.

Another campaign the Council sponsored was a move to get the ferry moved closer to the lock so that Purley could be closer to Mapledurham. The matter was raised in October 1938 but this was the last thing the owners of Mapledurham House wanted. Instead soon after the ferry itself was closed.

Planning matters began to be considered after the 1948 Act but it was not until July 1952 that they were consulted on a number of issues eg an application to site a caravan at 17 River Garadens and for a proper caravan to replace an old van at 33 Oak Tree Lane.

Purley faced two threats during this period. First Reading Borough Council moved to incorporate Purley in October 1947, then in July 1953 Pangbourne proposed taking over the Bourne Road area. Both were vigorously opposed although the latter did succeed much later.

Transport was a big issue. In January 1932 the Council were incensed to learn that the fares for the Thames Valley bus service to Oxford were the same from Reading to Pangbourne as for Reading to Purley. Complaints were made to the bus company who pointed out that fares were set by the Traffic Commissioners and a combined deputation to them eventually, in July, resulted in a slightly cheaper fare for Purley. During the war there were complaints that Purley residents were left standing in the mornings due to overcrowding. After the railways were nationalised in 1948, in May 1949 the Council demanded a halt be provided at Purley but the British Railways Board rejected it out of hand.

The highlight of the period however was the Coronation celebrations in 1953. Purley went it alone, turning down Pangbourne's offer. The programme approved in October 1952 included a TV relay of the coronation in the Memorial Hall, Sports events, aquatic events, a children's tea and a bonfire at the new recreation ground.

It all went off well and perhaps for the first time the parish council was seen to have moved from a small group, bitterly complaining about roads and footpaths, to an organisation dedicated to renewing, providing and enhancing community amenities