

# **Account of Purley on Thames**

## What happened to the Cow Money?

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*An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 23 published in PPN May 1982*

### FROM MY HISTORY NOTEBOOK

#### 23. What Happened to the Cow Money?

On 21st June 1905 a meeting was held in the Schoolroom to enquire about a Charity which had been left to Purley and had long since been lost. Present were the Rev. J H Dudley Matthews, Rector of Purley, Mr G F Downing Fullerton of Purley Park, Job Burgess the Sexton and others. Fortunately the results of this Inquiry were published by the Charity Commissioners as no record remains in the Purley Parish Council Minutes about this meeting.

Until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the early 16th century, the care and relief of the poor had been largely in the hands of the Church. After 1540, in order to relieve the increasing ranks of paupers roaming the country, money and property were left by Will for the benefit of the poor. By the end of the 18th century, many of these charities had been lost or misappropriated and so in 1786 Parliament ordered an Inquiry. It is from this date that many of the "Charity Boards" were erected in churches listing the names of the benefactors and their bequests.

In the parliamentary Returns of 1786 for Purley, it was stated that a sum of £6 was in the hands of the overseers of the poor of the parish: it had been given by an unknown person and was then producing 6s interest a year. A further report in 1837 said that the sum had "appeared for a hundred years in the parish books as the cow money". (These books have now, alas, completely disappeared.) Mr Edward Sherwood had the money and paid the 6s annual interest which was "distributed occasionally among poor widows". He was a tenant of a farm in Purley which was let by the Storer family subject to the condition that the occupier should act as overseer, in which capacity Edward Sherwood acted until his sudden death in 1856. The 1905 Inquiry stated that "since his death there has been no payment, and the money cannot be traced, but it is said that his descendants can".

Somewhere among the Probate Records of Purley folk I hope one day to find the record of this lost charitable bequest. To date I have found several legacies to the poor, but none for as much as £6: Thomas Holloway (died 1572) left 6d for the "porre mens box"; Alice Bird, a widow (died 1617) left 10s and William Henwood, fuller of "Purleigh" (died 1638) left 3s 4d to the "poore of Purleigh upon the day of my buriall." John Justice the younger, husbandman (died 1600) left 12d "a peace to the poor of Purley" and then names five of them - unfortunately, his writing is so appalling that I can only decipher that 4 out of the 5 names are widows!

The only "Parish Book" that survives, apart from the Parish Registers, is one volume of the Churchwardens and Overseers Accounts which date from 1825. I have searched this and found no mention of the "Cow Money" between that date and Mr Sherwood's death. One day I hope that the answer will materialise - it will probably come from a totally unexpected source, if at all.

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