

Account of Purley on Thames

The Village Street and Other Roads

R200626 4/7/2019

An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 29 published in PPN November 1982

29. THE VILLAGE STREET AND OTHER ROADS

It seems likely that the earliest settlers in Purley arrived by water and finding a suitable site near the bank of the River Thames, created a clearing among the trees and established themselves. This early site may well have been in the area of slightly higher ground where the church now stands. From this site tracks leading to the nearby settlements of Reading and Pangbourne gradually developed.

From old maps etc., it is possible to trace the line of this old road through Purley village. From the Roebuck a road turned north down the hill towards the church, and then turned west following a curved line to the north of the present St Mary's Avenue, and passed the south bank of the village pond. This pond is now filled in, but was formerly at the bottom of New Hill on the corner of Mapledurham Drive and Purley Village. The old road then continued west, passed to the north of Purley Lodge and turned diagonally south-west to meet Westbury Lane near the present junction with Glebe Road. The old name for this road was "The Streete" and the section between the church and Purley Lodge is so named in a Terrier of 1634. The present "Purley Village" is the only surviving section of this old roadway and extends from the bottom of New Hill to the bottom of Purley Lane.

A turning northwards off "The Streete" led to the Common Marsh and the River Thames and was called "Marsh Lane" in 1634. It was probably in the area of The Short

in Purley River Estate, but it disappeared with the enclosure of Purley Park circa 1800. This enclosure also closed "The Streete" from the Roebuck to the pond, which was replaced by St Mary's Avenue and New Hill to allow access by the inhabitants to the church and village respectively.

Goosecroft Lane, also mentioned in the Terrier of 1634, led south from the Reading Road to a field called Goosecroft. It was later called Beech Road, and its overgrown remains can now be seen to the west of Yew Tree Farm Cottage.

Long Lane is first mentioned in 1608 and was probably in existence much earlier than that. Where it crosses into Tilehurst the Tithe Map of 1840 records a field called "Purley Cross Piddle" and this suggests that it was once the site of an ancient boundary marker. Some repair work was carried out in Long Lane in January 1825 using 16 loads of stones at 6d per load. Two men and a boy with two carts and three horses worked all day at a total cost of 13/6d. The same Parish Accounts which record this work also list payments of 1/4d per day to various parishioners during the winter months for work on the roads, at a time when no work was available on the land. Since Edward Sherwood, the main farming employer in Purley at this time, was also the Surveyor of the Roads, it looks as if he may have employed his "men" at the expense of the parish ...

In 1831, R Briant was paid £1.14.11d for a gate at the end of "Lusum Road", but I have not yet been able to positively identify the position of this road. Other paths and tracks in the village have now disappeared into the mists of time. There used formerly to be a footpath across the fields connecting Purley Lodge and Westbury Farm; and at least a couple of tracks led west from Westbury and Scraces Farms towards Pangbourne, only to disappear into the field boundaries and the marshy area around the stream from Sulham to the Thames.

Next month I will write about the Oxford Road (A 329) and I hope that these two articles will help you to visualise the road system of the old village.

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