

Account of Purley on Thames

Thomas Burgess

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Two articles by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 40 published in PPN March 1984 and article 53 published in PPN August 1985

FROM MY HISTORY NOTEBOOK

40. Thomas Burgess' Story

Thomas Burgess was baptised in Purley on 14 Nov 1810, the second of 12 children of Thomas and Letitia Burgess who had come to the parish about a year previously. Thomas senior, a shoemaker and farm labourer, served as Purley's Parish Clerk almost continuously from about 1814 until his death in 1859. The family was not very well off and received occasional help from the parish in the 1820s. They lived at the "North Star" Tilehurst, which is thought to be near the Roebuck.

From the records Thomas junior appeared always to have lived in the vicinity of Purley and Tilehurst, apart from one occasion when on 17 Dec 1831 he was "removed" to St Margaret's, Westminster. The episode cost Purley £1 in expenses and was puzzling as it seemed fairly obvious that Purley was his home. The answer has come to light in some documents dated 1857 found in the records of the Reading Petty Sessions.

Thomas's wife, Sarah, had been declared a "pauper lunatic" and sent to the Littlemore Asylum, Oxfordshire, on 3 June 1857. Tilehurst had met the cost of this removal and needed to be reimbursed by the parish in which he had a settlement, i.e. was responsible for him. As a 43 year old bachelor and gardener, he had married Sarah Chase, a 31 year old dressmaker, in St Mary's, Reading, on 2 Nov 1853; both gave their address at 7 Chatham Street, Reading.

In July 1857 two JPs examined Thomas who said that he had gone to London in about 1829 and been "hired for a year by Mr David Bowley of Distaff Lane, a cheesemonger, as an errand boy in the house". For the first six months he slept at his master's house at 43 Stamford Street Blackfriars Road, and for the last 6-7 months of his service he was lodged at 4 Stamford Place, Pimlico. He was then taken ill with a swelling on his knee and spent 19 weeks in St Bartholomew's Hospital. Afterwards he returned to his native parish of Purley and was removed by order of the justices and sent back to Westminster as his last place of "settlement". There he was kept at the

expense of the parish for several weeks. Since that date he declared that he had done nothing further to gain a "settlement".

Tilehurst sent the following bill to Westminster:

3 June 1857 - Expenses of Removal of Sarah Burgess from Tilehurst to Littlemore Asylum:

Paid for	Assistance for 1 day & night	6.6
	Assistance to Oxford	6.0
	Hire of fly* to Reading	3.0
	+ Gate 3d; driver 1/6	1.9
	Railway Fares for 3	15.9
	Hire of fly to Littlemore	5.6
	+ Gates 2d; driver 1/0	1.2
	Refreshments to patient	1.6
	Own expenses	<u>12.0</u>
		£2.13.2
	Clerk's Fee	10.0
	Mr Walden Esq	2. 2.0
		<u>£5. 5.2</u>

* Fly = a one-horse Hackney carriage

+ Gate = Toll paid at gate on Turnpike road

Unfortunately nothing further is known about this couple except that Thomas told the Census Enumerator in 1861 that he was unmarried!

Jean Debnev

53. TOM BURGESS - HIS STORY

The majority of inhabitants in 19th century Purley are only recorded in the parish registers or in the census returns. If occasionally something is found in other records this can throw a great deal of light on their lives.

Tom Burgess was baptised in Purley on 14 November 1810 and does not appear to have moved far from his native parish. He was the second child of Thomas and Letitia who had been in the parish for about a year. Altogether they had 12 children and they lived at the North Star near the Roebuck in Tilehurst. Father was a shoemaker and was also parish clerk from at least 1814 until his death in 1859. As clerk he received £3.12s.6d a year with occasional extras such as 1s.6d for assisting the stonemason at the church in 1828, and 5s for burying a child in 1830. He was also the Parish Constable from 1811 to 1839 (except between 1824 and 1833). This was an unpaid post but an important one.

During the 1820s the family seem to have hit hard times. The overseers paid the parish midwife 5s to deliver Ann Burgess in 1826, and 6 months later 15s to bury Jane, their 9 year old daughter. In December 1831 the overseers paid £1 to take Tom Burgess Jnr back to London. This was puzzling because Purley was obviously his native parish. The answer was not discovered until some Petty Sessions records were examined.

In this bundle of examinations made by Justices of the Peace one was labelled "Sarah Burgess, lunatic; Tilehurst to St. John's, Westminster, 4 July 1857". The contents told an interesting story. It appears that poor Sarah was "Of unsound mind" and had been sent to Littlemore Asylum in Oxford. This cost the Tilehurst overseers £5.5s2d including 15s 9d for train fares from Reading for Sarah and her two guardians, the hire of a fly, a hackney coach or cab, in Reading for 3s, and to Littlemore for 5s 6d, not to mention various expense at toll gates, for refreshments and for the inevitable legal fees amounting to more than half the total. Sarah's husband was Tom Burgess: they had been married in 1854 at St. Mary's, Reading, when he was a 41 year old gardener and she a 31 year old dressmaker; both were then living in Reading. At that time, a wife took her husband's place of settlement which had to support her if she became destitute.

The following is the story that Tom told the JPs. He left home when he was about 19 and obtained employment as errand boy to a cheesemonger in Distaff Lane, London. For the first 6 months he slept at his master's house, but when the mistress died he was lodged elsewhere for about 7 months. Then, taken ill with a swollen knee, his master Mr. Bowley sent him to St. Bartholomews Hospital where he remained for 19 weeks. After his discharge, it was natural that he should come home to his parents in Purley. Because he had no money, and had worked for more than a year in the London parish, they, and not Purley, were now responsible for his welfare. He was therefore sent back to St John's, Westminster, at the cost of £1 where he was kept at the expense of that parish for several weeks. Since he had subsequently gained no further place of settlement, Tilehurst decided that the London parish should pay the expenses of Sarah's removal.

The conclusion of this story is not known, but Tom remained in and around Tilehurst as a gardener and in 1881 was lodging at the New Inn Public House in the Oxford Road, Reading; he was then 70 years old.

Jean Debney