

Account of Purley on Thames

Elmes Copyhold

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An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 92 published in PPN March to July 1990

The Story of Elmes Copyhold in Purley Village (Part 1)

A chance question by Rita Denman asking if I knew the history of the plot on which her house called "Mimosas" stands, led me to re-examine some of the many documents that I have transcribed over the last ten years or so. Within a short space of time I had pieced together the history of the site, which includes "The Cottage" next door, back to the early 1600s and thus, by implication, back to the Domesday Survey of 1086.

Mimosas is a brick detached house on the north side of "The Streete", now called "Purley Village", opposite the school and with Jasmine Cottage on the west and The Cottage on the east. It was built by Jack Steel in 1975 on an empty site he purchased from Lady Rose in 1973. This gave me my first clue, as Lady Rose is the owner of the former manor of Purley Parva, part of Hardwick House estate.

The two storey brick and tiled "Cottage" is built very close to the street and, although it has two front doors, only one is now used. These two buildings stand on land which formerly had a single house, a

barn, garden and orchard.

Purley Parva was the smaller of two manors listed in the Domesday Book in 1086. It was then valued at half a hide (probably a valuation for taxation and not an area of land) and was held by Theodoric the Goldsmith, having been held by Edward at the time of the Conquest in 1066. The population at that time was probably about 18, composed of one villager and three smallholders with their families.

Little is known of any inhabitants for over five centuries but the lords of the manor of Purley Parva descended through the families of Sifrewast, Malynes and Norris. Although a rental of 1466 lists six tenants with their holdings and rents due, this information cannot yet be linked to the next known records of the early 1600s.

A manor was basically an estate with the right to hold courts, levy payments, e.g. a heriot or death duty on the decease of a tenant, and receive the payment of a "relief" or "consideration" when a new tenant took over a holding. The manorial system of landholding was apparently set up by the Saxons, taken over and developed by the Normans and was at its peak by about 1500. After that it slowly declined until it was finally abolished in 1926.

The strips of land in the common fields of Purley were divided almost randomly between the two main manors of Purley Magna and Purley Parva, i.e. Purley large and small. Purley Parva's cottages seem mostly to have been along The Street and Purley Magna's near the Church. With the enclosure of Purley Park and the building of the mansion house on the hill circa 1800, Purley Magna's cottages disappeared.

From the Middle Ages tenants were granted holdings with full hereditary rights and fixed rents. They received a copy of their entry recorded in the court roll of the lord's "Court Baron" and their holding was then referred to as a "Copyhold". The Copyholds were held for three lives, who were named and any relationships given. From this information, it is not only possible to build up mini family trees, but also to trace the descent of a holding from one family

to another, sometimes through the female line. The series of Court Barons for Purley Parva recording the transfer of the Copyholds to new tenants provided most of the information for the history of the "Mimosas" site and the final links came from the Tithe Award for Purley in 1840 and the Inclosure of the Common Fields in 1856.

(To be continued)

Jean Debney

The Story of Elmes Copyhold in Purley Village (Part 2)

When Francis Norreys, Earl of Berkshire, died in 1622 his widow, Bridget, now the Dowager Countess, held one-third of his estate, including Purley Parva, in dower for her use during her lifetime. (ORO. J.XVII/I) After her death it passed to her daughter and heiress Elizabeth, wife of Edward Wray, Esq. who sold the "Manor of Westbrook alias Little Purley in Purley Berkshire and Westbrooks Farm" to Richard Libb Esq. of Hardwick for £5,400 on 1st April 1629. (ORO: PL.IV/7)

An undated document in the Oxford Record Office listing details of the tenant farmer, the three Copyhold tenants and their holdings was almost certainly drawn up early in 1629 as a valuation before the sale. (ORO: PL.IV/4(2)). One of the Copyholders was John Henwood (Heyward in the document) and the description and measurements given of his holding almost exactly match those given in the Tithe Award of 1840.

John Henwood is known to have been in Purley from at least 1605. His Copyhold in c1629 comprised approximately $7\frac{1}{2}$ acres composed of 8 pieces of land scattered round the manor. The "house and homestall", i.e. a house with garden adjoining, and an orchard from 1725 to 1812, stood on about $\frac{1}{4}$ acre of land

and is now the site of the present "Mimosas" and "The

Cottage". His land consisted of 2 acres of arable in two strips in Middle or Hither Common Field; 2 acres of arable, also in two strips, in Further or Yonder Common Field to the west of Westbury Lane and a half acre strip on the edge of Lewsam Common Field. This was on the north side of the Reading Road from the corner of Purley Lane part way towards the Nursery Gardens turning. On the west of Long Lane, behind the gardens of the present houses near Denefield School and the parish boundary with Tilehurst, were 2 acres of enclosed land "shooting upon Long Croft" and called "Elms Piddle" by 1840. Lastly he held $\frac{1}{2}$ acre of meadow in Purley Common Mead near the river Thames in the far north-west of the parish, called "Drapers Acre" in 1840.

Sometime after 1630 this Copyhold was re-granted for the three lives of William Henwood, Margaret his wife, and Mathew their son. William served as churchwarden of Purley from 1634 to 1635 and when he died in 1639, his will named his son Mathew and daughters Elizabeth and Joan, who then were under 21 years old.

The probate inventory taken soon after his death lists the following rooms in the house: a hall with a fireplace, shop (probably a workshop), chamber "where he deceased", another loft and a buttery, together with a yard and barn where threshed and unthreshed barley and oats worth over £7 were stored. He had wheat, rye and veches (animal fodder) growing on his land, 42 sheep, 2 kine (cows), 2 cocks and 6 hens. In the house was £20 in money and amongst his furniture and other possessions were 3 pairs of fullers shears valued at 5s (25p) each; wool, scales, a pound of feathers and hemp also worth 5s; a fullers rack at 15s (75p) and woollen cloth at 10s 6d (52½p). A fuller is a man who treads or beats cloth to cleanse and thicken it and it, therefore, seems likely that in addition to his farming activities William was also one of the many outworkers of the Reading wool merchants. Although apparently unable to sign his name, he may have been able to read as

he possessed a bible worth 10s.

There is a complete lack of records for the parish during the Civil War and Commonwealth period (c1640-1660) and at the next Court Baron on 26th September 1664, both Mathew Henwood and his mother Margaret were dead and a heriot of 40s was paid for her. The Copyhold was then renewed for the three lives of John and Francis Elmes, sons of Edward Elmes, and John son of William Elmes, all of Ashampstead, at an annual rent of 6s (30p) which remained unchanged

The Story of Elmes Copyhold in Purley Village (Part 3)

Again there is a long gap in the records and the next court roll recording this Copyhold is the Court Baron of 19th July 1708 when it was renewed for the lives of Samuel Elmes and his children Elizabeth and Samuel, Francis Elmes being named as only the occupier. It is not very clear who was actually living on this property in the early 1700s because, although Samuel was not listed as a "life" until 1708, he is recorded as occupying the land in a Glebe Terrier of 1705. By this time he had also acquired "Mr. Justice's living", a Copyhold in Purley Magna and in the survey of the Churchyard Rails made in 1711 he was listed as responsible for not only the upkeep of 8 foot of rail by virtue of his "own living" but also the 7 foot allocated for "Mr. Justice's". He had also sub-let the land in his own living to John Viner (dead by 1711) and then to his widow Ann Viner. At the same time, Francis Elmes contributed 2d (1p) "Trophy Money" in 1707 and his brother John was Churchwarden of Purley in 1710.

Samuel Elmes was the only member of this family who really seems to have settled in the parish. He married Elizabeth Readle in Purley on 4th February in 1696/7 and their six children were all baptised here. Elizabeth, the second "life" in 1708, was baptised in 1697, married at St. Giles Reading in 1720 to Thomas Gutteridge and was still alive in 1725. Her brother Samuel,

baptised in 1699 and the 3rd "life", was also still alive in 1725. Three more daughters were born between 1702 and 1708 but only the youngest son Edward, baptised in 1710, was known to have continued living in Purley until his death in 1778.

Samuel Elmes attended a Court of Examination for Purley Parva held on 29th April 1725 at the steward's house at Gatehampton, when his "copy Court Roll" was checked, and a Court Baron in 1733 when he was one of the "homage". He had died by the time of the next Court on 22nd October 1754 and his youngest son Edward, having paid the heriot of 40s (£2), was admitted to the Copyhold. Two other lives were then added: James, son of William Draper of Purley, a carpenter, and Richard, son of Richard Taylor of Henley on Thames, Oxfordshire, also a carpenter. Neither of these two are known to have any blood relationship to Edward Elmes.

Richard Taylor was probably great grandson of John Taylor, who was living in Purley from 1670 until his death in 1705, and grandson of John jun. who married and died in Purley. Both these Taylors occupied property in Purley Magna and served as Churchwardens. Richard was baptised in Purley in 1694 and later left the parish. Nothing further is known of him, or his son Richard, after 1754.

William Draper was in Purley from 1750 when his son James was baptised. He and his wife Ann had six children born in the parish, the youngest in 1760. Ann died in December 1761 and William just 3 weeks later, leaving three surviving children, 12 year old James and his sisters aged 4 years and 18 months. It is not known who cared for these orphans, but James was at the next Court on 27th October 1785, when he paid the 40s heriot for the death of Edward Elmes, and again in 1796. In 1794 and 1798 he paid Land Tax of 12s (60p) on his land in Purley which, by 1798, he had leased to Edward Sherwood.

(To be continued)

Jean Debney

The Story of Elmes Copyhold in Purley Village (Part 4)

At the Court held on 23rd May 1808, James Draper was described as a labourer, "formerly of Purley but now of Caversham, Oxf". Two further lives were now added, that of Edward Sherwood, gentleman of Purley and his 7 month old infant son Edward. Edward Sherwood snr. was the third generation of his family to farm in Purley. His grandparents, who were both buried in Ashampstead, had arrived in Purley in the early 1730s. As the years progressed, they and their successors gradually bought or leased more and more, until about 1800 they were probably farming most of the available land in Purley, as well as some in Tilehurst and Sulham.

The Court Baron held on 28th July 1812 reported that both James Draper and Edward Sherwood senior were dead, leaving just Edward Sherwood jnr., now aged $4\frac{1}{2}$ years. Edward snr. was only 50 when he died on 15th April 1811 and was buried in Purley. He left his wife Mary Ann and seven children, the eldest aged 12 years and the youngest baptised posthumously in December 1811. The lives of Edward junior's two younger brothers, Thomas aged 3 years and Richard William aged 9 months, were then added. (BRO: D/Etr M1/10).

At the next Court on 29th June 1827, Edward Sherwood, now aged 16, appeared as one of the homage and, on 28th August 1832 the Court was held at his house in Purley, which was probably Belleisle Farm, later to

be Trentham's Engineering Company

When the large scale Tithe Map and its accompanying Award were drawn up in 1839/1840, Edward Sherwood was confusingly listed as both owner and occupier of the pieces of land which go to make up this Copyhold of Purley Parva. However, there is little doubt from the description, measurements and locations in the parish of the 8 pieces of land that they had remained unchanged for centuries. But, by this time, the single dwelling house had been replaced with two semi-detached cottages each in its own garden, built close to the "Streete". They were probably used as tied cottages for Mr. Sherwood's labourers.

During the 1850s, several meetings of the landowners of Purley were held and their holdings listed. Up until then, much of the land had lain in strips in the open or common fields, of which Purley still had at least three in 1853 - Hither, Further and Luccam (probably pronounced Lucham). This land was all reallocated by means of the Inclosure of the common fields in 1856 into consolidated pieces and each new owner was responsible for fencing his new holding. The equivalent of the $7\frac{1}{2}$ acres of the above Copyhold was allocated in a 6-acre square plot in Further Field with Westbury Lane and the Great Western Railway forming two of the boundaries.

In April 1856 Edward Sherwood died aged only 46. Like his father, he left wife and young family of five children, the eldest only 8 and the youngest baptised posthumously 6 weeks after her father's death. It is not known what happened to the Copyhold after this and, since no boundaries appear on the 1899 25" O.S. map, it had probably reverted to the lords of the manor, the Powys family and their descendants.

The 25" O.S. map of Purley in 1899 shows both cottages still there but, by 1932, the left hand one had disappeared and that plot remained vacant until 1973 when it was purchased and Mimosas built.

So, Rita, that's the history of your plot of land.

I hope you have enjoyed reading it as it makes your house and garden that bit more special because of its ancient history.