

Account of Purley on Thames

Purley C of E School

R200631 3/7/2019

Articles by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook - articles 44 and 45 published in PPN June and July 1984

43. PURLEY CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOL, 1875

"The New Schools were opened" says the first entry in the Log Book of the Purley Church of England School on 9th February 1875. Forster's famous Education Act of 1870 had specified that there should be an elementary school in every district and new ones were to be set up where none already existed. This led to a spate of new schools or improvements to existing buildings. Purley already had a "small free school built and supported by the Rector". Nothing further is known of this building but it was possibly on the same site as the present school.

In 1870 the Rector of Purley was the Rev Richard Palmer. When he inherited his brother's considerable estate in 1872 he was in a position to be generous to the parish and he financed the brick and flint school building for 55 children which is still in use today. Unfortunately he died in October 1874 before the building was officially opened and the site passed to his sister.

On 16 February 1875, a week after the school was opened, a deed was registered in Chancery for a piece of land measuring 3 roods 5 perches (just over $\frac{3}{4}$ acre) given by Miss Palmer to the then Rector of Purley, the Rev Travers. On the plot were "two customary messuages (houses) formerly one messuage ... together with the gardens and orchards thereto belonging" and "the school house and buildings".

The site had been part of the manor of Little Purley and

described in the document as being "bounded on the north by the public road" (Purley Street), on the "east and south by the glebe lands of the parish" (the former Rectory now Lister Close and Miss Pryor's house, respectively) and "on the west by land of Anthony Morris Storer" (now a pair of semi-detached houses).

To our modern ears the restrictive clauses of the deed sound very pompous. The school was to be used only for the education of the adults and children of the labouring, manufacturing and other poorer classes of Purley and for the residence of the master or mistress. It was to be open at all reasonable times for the School Inspector. As School Manager, the Rector was to control the finance, the religious, moral and other instruction of the scholars, as well as to select, appoint and dismiss the teachers (who had to be members of the Church of England). He could also permit the premises to be used as a Sunday School.

1875 thus marked the beginning of a new era for Purley School, which is still attended today by the children of this parish.

Jean Debney

44 - AN EARLY REFERENCE TO PURLEY SCHOOL

The surname "Martin" was relatively common in Purley in the 18th century and it has not proved entirely possible to identify the different families. A John Martin, sawyer from Padworth, paid taxes in Purley before 1710 and a Copyhold Rent in 1754. In the 1770s a Thomas Martin was cordwainer (shoemaker) in the parish until he died in 1792. It is possible that at least Thomas Martin is one of the two men referred to in the next paragraph.

In July 1818 at the Manor Court of Purley Parva a heriot of 5s each (i.e. a death duty due to the lord of the manor) was paid for John and Thomas Martin. It was against a Copyhold Lease for "two customary messuages or tenements - formerly one messuage or tenement - adjoining together with the gardens and orchards belonging". A new Copyhold Lease was then granted for the three lives of the Rector of Purley, Rev Charles Manesty, his wife Eliza and his niece Emma Warner. They were to pay an entry fine (price) of £10 and 2/6d annual rent.

The description of this property is so similar to that in the Deed of Purley School in 1875 (see last month's story), except that the adjacent properties are not mentioned, that it probably applies to the same site. So, the question arises; was the Rev Manesty leasing this property so that his wife and niece could run a

small school for the children of the parish? The answer we don't know, but further researches may provide it.

That same year (1818) in reply to a Parliamentary Enquiry into the education of the poor, Rev Manesty said that there was a small school for 20 children in Purley and that he sent the "elder children" to schools in Pangbourne and Tilehurst. In 1802, soon after he was appointed as Rector, thirteen children with an average of 11 years were presented with a Prayer Book and Testament each. The implication of this is that they had all received some form of education and could read.

There was said to be no school in Purley when the Bishop of Sarum enquired at his Primary Visitation in 1783; so the date of 1818 must remain, for the time being at least, as the earliest reference to a school in the parish.

Jean Debney

