

# ***Account of Purley on Thames***

## **From Purley Magna to Purley Park**

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*An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 46 published in PPN September and October 1984*

### 46. FROM PURLEY MAGNA TO PURLEY PARK (Part 1)

Two manors are mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, which can be identified as Purley Magna and Purley Parva. There may also have been a third smaller manor later known as "La Hyde" which overlapped the parish boundaries of Purley, Sulham and a detached portion of Whitchurch, Oxfordshire on the Berkshire side of the River Thames. The lands of these manors consisted of many strips mixed up in the common fields which eventually became amalgamated into the parish of Purley which we now know.

The Saxon lord of the manor of Purley Magna was Bricward who held his land from the King, Edward the Confessor. After the Norman Conquest, William the Conqueror granted the manor to Roger son of Siegfried. It subsequently passed through the families of Huscarl, Carew and Iwardby to the St Johns who held it from the early 16th to the mid-18th centuries.

Because of the legal wording of some copy deeds that have recently been examined, it is not exactly clear when in the 1700s the St John family disposed of the manor. By the beginning of the century their main estates were Lydiard Tregoze in Wiltshire, and Battersea in Surrey, whilst Purley Magna had become a minor part and was used in various marriage settlements. When Frederick, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke, divorced his wife the Lady Diana Spencer, by Private Act of Parliament in 1767/8 (this was

the only way to obtain a divorce in the 18th century), a legal chain of events was set in motion.

By the early 1780s the lord of the manor was Robert Mackreth, Esq., of Ewhurst, Hampshire, and in June 1789 he mortgaged the property for £7,000. Less than a year later he sold it to John Martindale, Esq., of Hanover Square, Middx. for £18,375 which included the £7,000 mortgage. Two notices appeared in the Reading Mercury in the autumn of 1792 advertising the sale of the contents of the manor house and of the house itself with its land. The outcome of these is not known.

Within a year Anthony Morris Storer, the antiquary and collector, and a former Member of Parliament who had inherited a plantation with its negro slaves from his father, purchased the manor for £15,000. He paid off the mortgage and thus removed the Trustees and their encumbrance on the estate.

(To be continued)

Jean Debney

46 - FROM PURLEY MAGNA TO PURLEY PARK (Part 2)

Anthony Morris Storer became the new Lord of the Manor of Purley Magna on 24 September 1793. With the advice of Humphrey Repton, the famous landscape gardener, he set about improving his newly acquired property. He enclosed Purley Park, stopped the old road leading from the Roebuck to the parish church and opened New Hill to allow access to the old village street. The church of St Mary the Virgin remained inside this new park and access was only allowed along a gated track now known as St Mary's Avenue. The few remaining cottages near the church shortly disappeared, as did the old red brick manor house formerly known as "St John's" or the "Great Farm" with the dovecote and other farm buildings nearby. Many specimen trees were planted and those that remain are now nearly 200 years old and past their prime.

Storer also intended building a new mansion house on the high ground overlooking the River Thames, but he had been in poor health for some years and died before this work could be carried out. In April 1799 he added a hurried Codicil to his already lengthy Will requesting that "after my decease my Executor, Mr John Peachy, is to employ James Wyatt of Queen Anne Street, London, architect, to erect a mansion house and offices at Purley at an expense not exceeding £15,000 ... the house to be faced with stone similar to that of Francis Sykes of Basildon ...". A few weeks later he died of "a deep decline" at Hotwells, Bristol, on 28th June 1799. He

was only 53 years old.

His new mansion was built probably about 1800 and has a facade of Portland stone said to be in "Wyatt's most severe classical manner". Its position necessitated the Reading Road being moved several hundred yards to the south. A Sevres china dessert service presented to Storer in 1783 remained in the house until this century. Of two known portraits of him, one now hangs in the Prado Museum in Madrid, Spain, and the other is in Eton College Library. A former pupil of this public school, he left his complete library of rare books and a collection of prints to Eton. His estate at Purley was left to his nephew, Anthony Gilbert Storer, whose son Anthony Morris Storer died in 1902. It was then left successively to his wife, Cecily Barr Storer who died in 1908, his daughter Mrs Leila Minna Gertrude Downing Fullerton who died in 1918, and his grand-daughter Mrs Ivy Leila Downing Evans who sold the estate in 1920.

The Park was already divided by the Turnpike Road from Reading to Pangbourne (now the A329) and in 1840 it was further divided by the line of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Great Western Railway from Paddington to Bristol. These three sections of land are now filled with modern houses: Purley Park River Estate is on the low-lying ground near the river and north of the railway; Purley Beeches surrounds the Mansion House between the road and railway; and the newly developed Westwood Fields is nearing completion on the south side of the main road. Since 1948 the old mansion house, now a Grade II listed building, has been a home for handicapped men.

Jean Debney

















