

Account of Purley on Thames

Court Baron of Purley Magna

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An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 36 published in PPN Sept 1983

36 - A Court Baron of Purley Magna

From medieval times the general administration of a manor was carried out by a Court Baron presided over by the lord's steward (a solicitor) and the homage, who were two men sworn each year: they seemed to have performed duties similar to those of the churchwardens of the parish. The record of only one such Court, held in 1786, has so far been found for the manor of Purley Magna.

In the economic soup of the 18th century many estates up and down the country changed hands and by 1786 Robert Mackreth was Lord of the Manor of Purley Magna, which had been held for over 250 years by the St John family of Lydiard Tregoze, Wilts.. A General Court Baron was convened at John Emmon's house called the Red Lyon in Purley on Monday 23 October that year. It was presided over by Mathias Deane, gent., the Steward, and attended by the Homage of John Sherwood and Thomas Martin.

The main business of this Court was to ascertain and record the boundary of the Manor, so, taking with them a number of posts marked with the letters PM (for Purley Magna), the three men set off from the Red Lyon and walked to Warren Shaw on the road to Reading. There they cut a cross on a beech tree before going along the middle of the Turnpike Road to within 60 yards of the Roebuck. Turning into Broom Close they drove their first post into the corner of the field there.

Although the old field names have now gone out of use and the original boundary markers of oak bollards, elm and beech trees, quickset hedges and ditches have long since disappeared, by using old maps, etc. many of the references can still be located. From Broom Close they proceeded clock-wise round what seems to be essentially the 19th century parish boundary. Their route took them along the south side of several fields including Upper Hides, Kernham Close and Jordans Pightle to Purley Cross where an old oak pollard appeared to be marked with a cross. This tree has gone, but the boundary bank can still be seen on the east side of Long Lane near Denefield School.

From here the boundary continues west but is far less easy to follow as the land was intermingled with that of Sulham and Whitchurch. The men continued along the left hand side of Elven Acres, Harry Jarrs Close and Long Lands and went through a gate into Blaze Ground Lane. After passing a "figure with a dial" they entered the south part of Purley Hall and went out of the west door of the house and back on to the Turnpike Road leading to Pangbourne. There they went through the barn, round the house and cart shed of Marsh Farm and cut through the garden, climbed under a hedge into Down Field until they reached an elm tree marked with a cross.

(to be continued)

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