

# Account of Purley on Thames

## The House and Hunt Families

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An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 78 published in PPN January to March 1988

### 78. The House and Hunt Families of Purley (Part 1)

When individuals and families are studied the patterns of migration and intermarriage often become very complex. This remains true whether we are considering those who pass in and out of Purley's long history or that of other parishes. As has been said before, a few families might stay for one or more generations and become intermingled with other longstay families before moving on again, but there were also innumerable families or individuals who stayed only briefly.

Two labouring families in Purley who became linked by marriage were the Houses and the Hunts. The Houses arrived in 1791 and the Hunts by 1813 and both remained until the 1880's - apart from one House granddaughter who married and lived in Purley until her death in 1915. In 1841, two sons, Henry House and Thomas Hunt and their families shared the parish cottage and garden which lay on the south side of the Oxford Road - now called Lichfield Cottage - and a brother and sister of each married and lived in Purley; this meant that Henry and Thomas were, in effect, brothers-in-law.

Richard House aged about 27 was first recorded in the Court Leet of Purley in 1791 and he married Mary Cole (?25) from Welford the following year. Neither could write and both spent the rest of their long lives in Purley. Within two months of the wedding, Richard served on the jury at the coroner's inquisition into the death of a neighbour. When the wealthy merchant John George

Liebenrood of Purley Lodge died in 1795, he was one of the village labouring men asked to attend the coffin whilst his wife received a guinea (£1-05p) from the Will.

Richard and Mary had eight sons and two daughters born over the next twenty years and, despite the high infant mortality rate at the time, only their eldest daughter died as a baby. Six of their sons, including Henry (b.1811) of whom more later, married and most had families. Some left the village as teenagers for work and then came back in later years.

Sarah, their only surviving daughter (b.1806) returned from London in 1828 to give birth to an illegitimate son who was brought up by his grandparents until he died aged 13. In 1831 she married Charles Hunt, an agricultural labourer and Thomas' elder brother. They lived in Purley and had seven children, one of whom died young. Charles was blind in his 60's and, after his death in August 1880 aged 72, an iron cross was erected in his memory in Purley churchyard. Sarah was a laundress and in later life was deaf and may have had a speech defect. When she died in 1882 aged 77, two unmarried children, Harriet (b.1831) and James (b.1841), laundress and gardener respectively, were living with her.

Richard and Mary's eldest son, also Richard (b.1793) married in Purley and then left; James (b.1798) was living at Church End, Tilehurst by 1851 with his wife and son; Samuel (b.1804) remained at home with his parents and did not marry until he was 45 years old when he chose Maria Hunt, Thomas' sister, a spinster of 32. The marriage was childless and only lasted five years, ending with her death in February 1855. After the death of his widowed mother, Mary, Samuel lived alone until he too died in November 1878 aged 74.

The youngest son, Robert (b.1813) lived at The George in Reading in 1837 and, still a bachelor, was working as a porter in 1839.

(to be continued)

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78. The House and Hunt Families of Purley (Pt. 2)

Henry House was Richard and Mary's 9th child. Baptised in January 1811, he married Ann Brown in Wantage in 1835 and their first child was born in Sulham the following year. They then returned to Purley where 8 more children were born. In 1841, they shared the parish cottage with Thomas Hunt and his family.

Henry was a farm labourer and also a fisherman in 1867 when, together with Thomas, he was appointed as meresman for Purley (1); in 1871 his 62 year old wife was a dairywoman.

Like many village families they had a lodger and in 1861 it was William Bazeley a 25 year old groom from Northampton. William later married their eldest daughter, Mary (b.1839), became coachman to Major Storer of Purley Park and raised a family of 10 children in one of the small gatehouse lodges.

In February 1837, when over 70, Richard House was taken ill and two unmarried sons, Samuel living at home and Robert at the George in Reading, were ordered by the Poor Law Guardians to contribute 1s (5p) and 1s 6d (7½p) respectively towards his upkeep each week until May.

Next winter Richard was ill again and once more relieved

"in kind" by the Guardians. Within two months he sent a message of thanks to the Guardians "for the relief given him" and he said he hoped "to be able to return to work", but by March, "wholly disabled from paralysis" both he and his wife were considered "past labour". Enquiries by the Guardians revealed that Samuel (34 yrs) earned 10s (50p) a week, Robert (26 yrs) was a porter and five other sons were married with families.

It is thought that small weekly payments were made to the old couple until he died in May 1845 aged 81; his widow died just before Christmas 1860 aged 93 years.

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James Hunt and his wife Martha came to Purley from Brimpton just before Richard House's youngest child was baptised in 1813. James had been born in Brimpton, his two eldest sons, Charles and Thomas, were also born there and six more children were baptised in Purley. Before he died in 1851 aged 72, James had 16 grandchildren born in Purley, four of whom had already died. After his death, his widow received parish relief until her death in 1860; at first she lived with an unmarried son, Richard, but he too died in 1853 aged 33. Other children also died; 16 year old Eliza in 1831, bachelor David in 1850 aged 26 and Maria, who married Samuel House when she was 33 and died five years later in 1858.

(To be continued)

- (1) Meresman: Parish officer controlling parish boundaries or involved in upkeep of roads, bridges and waterways.

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78. The House and Hunt Families of Purley (Part 3)

More is known about the two eldest sons of James and Martha Hunt who spent almost all their adult lives in Purley. The elder, Charles, came to Purley when he was about 6 years old, married Sarah House in 1831 and his story was related in Part One (1).

The second son, Thomas Hunt, was born in Brimpton, spent his childhood in Purley, married in Wargrave in 1831 where his eldest son was born, and then returned to Purley by about 1836 via Tilehurst. Thomas and his wife Elizabeth (nee Bissett) had nine children but were not very successful in rearing them; Jane dies in 1843 aged 6, Alfred in 1844 aged 8m and Benjamin in 1846 also 8m. Elizabeth herself was buried only five weeks after the baptism of the youngest child, Martha, in spring 1850 - she was only 41 - and the baby, cared for by her Hunt grandparents, died aged 8.

In November 1838, only a few weeks before their 5th child, William, was born, Thomas Hunt became "wholly disabled from illness" and was unable to work for three months. In addition to his 29-year old wife he then had four children aged 7, 4, 3 and 2 to support and was granted weekly relief "in kind" by the Poor Law Guardians. At first it was 8/7½ (43p) a week which was increased to 9s 6¾d (63p) in the New Year. For two weeks in December a nurse was provided at 3/- (15p) for

Elizabeth's confinement and baby William was baptised on 13 Jan 1839. By the age of 12, William had left home and was working as a labourer on Thomas Shackell's farm in Bray, Berkshire.

Edward Hunt, Thomas and Elizabeth's 3rd child, also had health problems. He was an agricultural labourer but seems not to have left home like his younger brother. The workhouse was often used as a hospital for the poor and in March 1858, when 23 years old, Edward was an inmate of the Bradfield Union Workhouse until June when he was discharged "at his own request". He died in Purley of "diseased lungs" in 1869 - he was only 34 years old.

Although the Hunts seem to have been slightly more prolific than the Houses, they were perhaps less successful in rearing their children. In 1851 there were about 20 assorted cousins in Purley but, just over thirty years later, by a process of death and migration, only two remained; Harriet Hunt, an unmarried laundress died in Purley aged 66 in 1898 and her cousin Mary Bazeley (nee House) who lived in Purley Park Lodge Gate House. Mary died in 1915 just a week before her husband William, former coachman to Major Storer. And so ended 120 years of the House family's association with Purley and their close link with the Hunt family.

(1) See Purley News, Jan 1988

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