

Account of Purley on Thames

Purley in the 1891 Census

R200675 7/7/2019

An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 107 published in PPN April and May 1992

Purley in the 1891 Census (Part 1)

The 1891 Census Returns were released to the public on 2nd January this year. They record the details of everyone in England and Wales on the night of Sunday, 5th April 1891, a week after Easter. As in previous census returns, the information given includes names, age, marital condition, occupation and place of birth. Extra questions asked in 1891 were how many rooms did each household occupy if less than 5 and were people employees, employed or neither. Microfilms of the Berkshire returns have been purchased and can be seen in the Local Studies Section at Reading Central Library.

When compared to earlier censuses, the number of houses and people in Purley in 1891 show the continued slow decline from 1851 that affected many rural parishes. In 1891 there were just 34 houses (plus 2 empty ones) housing 180 people compared to 220 in 38 houses in 1851. From this low point in Purley's "career", later figures show that the population increased, slowly at first and then more rapidly, as new houses were built in this century.

The occupational descriptions show that most of those with "special" skills were not born in the parish; job opportunities for local people in Purley remained as they had done throughout the 19th century with only agricultural work for the men and domestic service for the women. Most young people had to move to Reading etc. in order to "get on" in Huntley & Palmers Biscuit Factory, and so on.

Comparison with the 36 pupils entered in the Purley School register in March 1892 shows that almost all were living in Purley the previous April when they were recorded as "scholars" in the census. There were, of course, a few newcomers and some older children who had left "by age" in the meantime.

Some of the inhabitants in Purley in 1891 will be familiar to older residents and others today. Ages in years are given in brackets followed by the parish or county of birth.

Throughout the 19th century, Purley was dominated by four large houses; Purley Park, Purley Hall, Purley Lodge and the Rectory, only three of which were occupied in 1891. Anthony Storer (77), born in Purley, a "retired Major in the Reserved Forces", and his wife Cecily (59), born in India, lived alone in Purley Park with 6 servants - a cook, 2 housemaids, a kitchen maid, a butler and a footman. Other servants lived in the Park. William Bazeley (55), his coachman from Northamptonshire, lived in the 4-roomed Lodge Gate on the Oxford Road, with wife Mary and youngest son James (13), a page boy, plus a lodger: Frederick Webb (20), born in Sonning, was a constable in the Berkshire Police. In the "Garden House" near the church was James King (51), his gardener from Brighton, Sussex, with his wife and grown up daughter.

Purley Hall was occupied by Frederick Wilder (58), a JP born in Tring, Herts, his wife Augusta (54), born Portland Place, London and 4 visitors, including a Russian governess. They had 7 servants - a butler, footman, housekeeper, ladysmaid, housemaid, under-housemaid and kitchen maid. Because of boundary changes in this part of the parish since 1881, his coachman and gardener were included in the Sulham returns, as were the occupiers of the lodge gates.

In Purley Rectory, Rev. Canon Matthew Powley (66), "Clerk in Holy Orders", said he was born in Cumberland. His wife Louisa (53) came from Wiltshire, and their 4 children, aged 10-20 years, were all born in Christ Church, Reading where he had been rector from 1869 until he came to Purley in 1881. Their living-in staff consisted of a cook, parlour maid and housemaid.

Purley Lodge, where Commander Robert Boyle had lived with his wife Elizabeth from their marriage in 1858 until their deaths in the 1880s, was empty apart from two elderly servants, Charles and Mary Tubb, both from Hampshire. Charles (70), a "farm servant", formerly his coachman, and his wife Mary (76) had been a housemaid and was the "caretaker" in 1891; they had been listed in Purley as servants of the Boyles from the 1861 census.

In contrast to the spacious - and gracious - living of the gentry, many families lived under quite different conditions. Although 15 of the 34 houses in Purley had less than 5 rooms, it seems that in only 3, which were all in Purley Street, was there any apparent overcrowding. The largest family was that of James Rogers (41) a farm servant from Whitchurch, which included his wife and 8 children (4 boys and 4 girls) aged 19 to 1, plus a 9th child, Emma aged 15, boarding with a neighbour. Next

Purley in the 1891 Census (Part 2)

There were three working farms in Purley in 1891; Scraces, Westbury and Belleisle. Farmer William H. Lee (39) was at Scraces with wife Elizabeth and two sons, Albert (7), all from Devon, and William (4) born in Oxfordshire: i.e. where he had been farming before coming to Purley. They had a 15 year old servant girl and a married cowman living in.

Farmer Oades and his family at Westbury Farm were all born in Surrey and had been in Purley for at least 20 years. In 1891 George (46), from Banstead, was carrying on after his father, Alexander (born Egham), died in 1885. Living with him was his widowed mother, Emily (80) from Chipstead who died in July, and his elder sister, Elizabeth, born in Coulsdon. They had a 21 year old servant from Hampshire, William Foard (55) from Ashbury, had been his shepherd since 1871 and lived with his wife Caroline (46), from Westerham, Kent in a 4-roomed house in Purley Street.

Belleisle Farm was occupied in 1891 by Farmer Philip Symonds, a 41 year old bachelor, his sister Annie (48) and a 21 year old visitor, who all came from Cornwall.

Home Farm in Purley Village seems not to have been a working farm for some time; in 1891 it was occupied by Henry Edward Burgiss (44) a farm servant from Tilehurst, his wife Harriet (41) a dairywoman from Streatley and 3 children, Thomas (9), George (7) and Ellen (1) all born in Purley. A 4th son, Edward (3) was away from home that night.

Walter Crowe (54), late of the Royal Navy, was lock-keeper at Purley Lock. He and his wife Sarah (47) and 3 daughters - Charlotte (19) a dressmaker, Mathia (15) and Elizabeth (13) both scholars, all came from Norfolk. A 4th daughter, Maud (8) had been buried in Purley in January 1891. Walter took over the lock in October 1887 and continued until his death in June 1894.

The schoolmistress, Mrs. Francis E. Daw (39) from Warwickshire lived in the "School House" with husband William (50) a carpenter and joiner from Worcestershire, daughters Frances (18) a dressmaker and Florence (15) a school monitress, both born in Wiltshire and a son William (9) a scholar born in Oxfordshire. She taught in Purley from about 1884 until 1893 when her place was taken by Mrs. Anning.

Living in two houses on the Oxford Road were two brothers, William and Thomas Pocock, who spent their entire lives in Purley. William (53) carpenter and sub-postmaster, probably lived in the house later known as Lichfield Cottage with his wife Elizabeth (52) from Lewes, Sussex and their 4 youngest children: Horace (15) a "rural postman", Laura (14), Amy (11) a scholar, and Edward (7) also a scholar. Some folk may recall the stamps and sticky sweets sold by the Misses Laura and Amy Pocock from Purley Post Office in the 1920s and '30s. The younger brother, Thomas Pocock (46) a carpenter and wheelwright, lived in a 4-roomed house with his wife Caroline (53) from Bedfordshire and son Harry (12) a scholar. He had been employed by successive rectors of Purley since the age of 15.

John Cox (64), a self-employed blacksmith, lived on the corner of Long Lane with his wife Caroline (58) - both came from Pangbourne - a daughter Julia (25) and son Thuringen (17) also a blacksmith; a granddaughter, Julia (6) from Paddington, London, was staying with them.

In Purley Street, in one of the pair of houses on the corner opposite Purley Lodge, lived Edward Sheppard (39) of Purley, a fisherman (employer unknown) with his wife Sarah (43) from Cambridgeshire and 7 children aged 1 to 14 years, including 6 year old Ellen (Nellie) who was recorded in the Census as being "crippled from childhood".

There were 5 carters, all married men, living in Purley with their families in 1891; George Clack (52) at Scrases Farm Cottage, Charles Fuller (39) and Edward Quelch (25) in the Oxford Road, plus William Eatwell (42) and Isaac Head (46) in Purley Street.

Work on the Great Western Railway to alter the two lines of broad gauge track to four lines of narrow gauge had probably started by this time: two "navvies", Arthur

