

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

## ***Occupants of site of Stargable and Letgable***

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*An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 100 published in PPN July 1991*

### 100. Some Owners & Occupiers of Stargable & Letgable

Next door to Purley School on the SW corner of Purley Village and Purley Lane are a pair of modern brick semi-detached houses called "Stargable" and "Letgable". Built about 1970, they are the third known buildings on the site. The identification of this property as Plot no. 8 on Robert Moss's map of Purley Magna of 1786 means that it is now possible to trace details of its subsequent history, although it has not yet proved possible to find anything prior to that date.

In 1786 the site measured just over 1/4 acre (1 rood 19 perches to be exact) with a gravel pit to the south. The house and plot was let at £1 10s a year (3p/week) to Widow Haines, 2nd wife of Thomas who had died the year before. By 1793, it was recorded that the cottage was empty and "almost down" with "no fence round it" and would cost "at least £30 to ... repair for a tenant". Early in 1795, as one of the village poor, Widow Haines, who was obviously living somewhere nearby, received a guinea (£1 1s or £1.05) from the will of John George Liebenrood of Purley Lodge; she died in April that year.

The next reference to the site is in the Purley Tithe Award made on 21 March 1839 (the map is dated 1840). Plot No 104 belonged to Anthony Morris Storer as part of Purley Park (formerly Purley Magna) and the Rector was

the tenant. It now measured almost half an acre and

perches) and was described as a "plantation & pit".

By June 1841 when the Census was taken, a pair of brick and tile cottages had been built. Each had a living room, scullery and pantry downstairs with three bedrooms above and at the back, store and coal houses, an earth closet, a well for water and a large garden.

The occupants in June 1841 were an agricultural labourer John Josey senior, with his wife and four children including 7 month old John, and Eliza Jonson with two sons next door. Eliza's husband, David, was then a servant of Edward Sherwood at "Elyham House" on the Oxford Road.

At the next Census in March 1851 these two families were still there. But David Johnson, now described as a "gentleman's servant" (and presumably still employed by Edw Sherwood) was at home with his wife, one son and her elderly father, Thomas Mortimer, who was buried in Purley the following year aged 95. This family probably left the parish after the death of Edward Sherwood in 1856.

On 7 April 1861, the next Census records that John Josey senior was a widower, his wife Harriet having been buried in Purley only the week before. Living with him was their youngest son John, now aged 20 and, like his father, an agricultural labourer. Next door were Edward & Harriet Harris from Tilehurst with one son. They had three more children baptised in Purley, the last one in 1866, before they moved on again.

Ten years later, in 1871, John Josey junior was married with two children; his 79-year-old widowed mother-in-law and his father, now 75, also lived with him. John senior died in 1873 and the family left the parish. Next door was John Wait with his wife and two sons. A farm labourer born in Reading, he lived at Viners Farm in 1841 where his father was Edward Sherwood's steward. By 1851 he was married and living near Purley Hall with two of his four children. In May 1875 his two youngest sons, aged 16 and 17, died in Purley within a week of each other of "phthisis pneumonia" (pulmonary tuberculosis?).

The 1881 Census records John & Eliza Wait still living there. She died in 1887 but John survived until 1904; both were buried in Purley. Their neighbours were now Edward Sheppard, a fisherman, with his wife Sarah and three children. Edward was baptised in Purley in 1851, a son of William Sheppard lockkeeper at Mapledurham Lock. Between 1877 and 1889, seven of Edward's eight children were baptised in Purley. Two sons died in World War I and a third in 1940 in Slough. The older residents of Purley have fond memories of the daughters, the Misses Sheppard, who were "in service" and lived in the village until the 1940s.

In 1920, when the Purley Park estate was sold to Mr K A McAndrew, one cottage was "in hand" (ie empty) and the other let to Edward Sheppard for 5s (25p) a week. Edward died later that year and in 1923 his widow paid 3s 6d (17½p) rent a week and Fred Pitman, gardener at Purley Park to Mr McAndrew and then Mr Farmiloe, lived next door. By 1926, at the height of the depression, the rent had been further reduced to 3s (15p) and next door was again empty.

In the early 1930s, the Misses Sheppard lived in one house and Mr Flemming and his unmarried sister in the other. From the late 1940s the houses were occupied by various tenants before being finally demolished prior to the present houses being built about 1970.

Jean DEBNEY (C)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I feel I must correct Jean Debney in last month's "From My History Notebook" on the point regarding the occupiers of Letgable, of which there were many.

Mr. & Mrs. Pitman never lived there, they lived in the house down by the church. Mr. Pitman was Head Kitchen Gardener to Mr. MacAndrew, Mr. & Mrs. Pitman had one daughter. Every night he locked and unlocked the church. He was followed by Mr. & Mrs. Sid Pocock. Mr. Unwin then bought the house. Later it was demolished and the present estate was built.

Phyll Rawlins

**Jean Debney replies:** Thank you to Mrs. Rawlins for correcting the list of tenants of the property formerly on the site of Stargable and Letgable in Purley Village.

Unfortunately many modern historical sources available to me are incomplete and the details of the tenants in the 1920s were obtained from the Purley Park sales catalogues and Kelly's directories. The 1923 catalogue said the second occupant was the estate undergardener, name not given. Since Fred Pitman was listed in the 1924 Kelly's as a gardener to K.A. McAndrew Esq. in Purley with no other address, I put two and two together and make an incorrect assumption.

As a matter of interest, Mr. Pitman was listed in Kelly's as gardener from 1924 to 1927 and Sydney Pocock as gardener to H. Farmiloe Esq. from 1929 to 1940.

It is nice to know that my articles are read with an eye to detail which in this case has been corrected.

**And a further comment from Phyll Rawlins published in PPN  
October 1991**

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Mr. Bryant is the gardener Jean Debney is referring to, he was head gardener for the lawns and flowers for Mr. & Mrs. McAndrews at Purley Park. Mr. & Mrs. Bryant lived where Letgable is now built.

Mrs. Norris also worked at Purley Park. One day while holding the ladder for Mr. Bryant, who was cutting the holly hedge, she let the ladder fall. After Mr. Bryant climbed out of the hedge, he asked her why she had let go and she said "a harnett (hornet) went over, he'd kill a hoss (horse) let alone I".

Phyl Rawlins

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**Jean Debney replies:**

Thank you, Mrs. Rawlins. Mr. Bryant would be the un-named gardener who occupied the second of the pair of cottages in Purley Village referred to in the 1923 Sales Catalogue for Purley Park. (See Purley Parish News "From My History Notebook" July 1991, and correspondence in August 1991).