

Account of Purley on Thames

Sarah Sheppard

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

Obituary to Mrs. Sarah Sheppard

DEATH OF OLDEST INHABITANT - The death occurred at her home in Purley on January 30th of Mrs. Sarah Sheppard, in her 98th year. Born at Brinkley in Cambridgeshire in 1847, Mrs. Sheppard came to Purley at the age of 19, and in 1875 married Mr. Edward Sheppard of Mapledurham Lock. She then came to live in a cottage at Purley and remained there until her death. She had many interesting memories and well remembered Purley Church being restored in 1869 and saw the present school built in 1874. Before the church was restored, she remembered the old sexton turning the handle of a barrel organ, situated in a gallery in the old church, to accompany the hymn singing. Mrs. Sheppard was the oldest member of the Mothers' Union, having joined when it first started in the village over 40 years ago. She retained all her faculties and took a great interest in everything until she died. She was a great knitter and this winter knitted many comforts for the troops. Her eyesight was good and each evening she would always read a portion of the Psalms. She had seven children (3 sons and 4 daughters) and leaves her four daughters to mourn her loss. Two of her sons were killed in the Great War. The funeral took place at Purley Church on Saturday, the Rector, the Rev. E.E. Skuse officiating. The mourners were Mrs. Abbott, Miss M. Sheppard, Miss N. Sheppard, Mrs. Colyer (daughters), Mr. Colyer (son-in-law), Mrs. W.J. Sheppard (daughter-in-law), Mr. A.J. Howlett, Miss Howlett, Mr. & Mrs. F.W. Sheppard (nephews and nieces), Miss Palgrave, Mr. A. Bucknell, Mrs. Kirton and Mr. Worracker.

This obituary appeared on page 12 of "The Berkshire Chronicle" on Friday, 9th February 1945 and a copy of part of this newspaper has recently been given to me.

From the above information, it would seem that Mrs. Sheppard arrived in Purley about 1866 and she is recorded in the 1871 Census Return as Sarah Jaggard, a 24-year-old housemaid to the Rev. Richard Palmer in Purley Rectory. This, plus the Returns of 1881 and 1891, confirm her age and place of birth. Also living in Purley Street in 1871 were a Charles and Marianne Howlett. Marianne is possibly related to Sarah Sheppard; both were born in Brinkley, both came to Purley in the 1860s, there was a Howlett nephew and niece at the funeral (see above) and when Marianne Jaggard's Banns of Marriage to Charles Howlett were called in Purley in 1864 the bride was described as "of Brinkley".

Edward Sheppard was baptised in Purley on 31st August 1851, the 7th child of William and Mary Anne Sheppard, lock-keeper of Mapledurham Lock. Edward was a fisherman and, for 5s a week, rented from Major Storer of Purley Park one of a pair of "large and picturesque old-fashioned freehold brick and tiled cottages" on the corner of Purley Village and Purley Lane (now the site of Let Gable and Star Gable). Each cottage had three bedrooms, living room, scullery and pantry, an earth closet, brick store and coal houses, a large garden and a well for water.

Edward and Sarah's seven children were baptised in Purley: Harriet Emma (Hatty) in 1877, Mary Ann 1878, William James 1880, Charles E. (baptism not recorded c1883), Ellen (Nellie) 1887 who was described in the 1891 census as a "cripple from childhood", Edgar George 1887 and the youngest, Jessie, in 1889. Harriet is recorded in the village school log book as receiving a prize for her needlework in 1883, and the three youngest children with their dates of birth are all listed in the earliest surviving school register. Charles and Edgar were both "killed in action" during the First World War in 1917 and the 3rd son, William James, died in Slough and was buried in Purley in 1940.

Edward and Sarah had been married for 45 years when he died in August 1920 aged 69 years. The widowed Sarah continued to live on in the cottage with her unmarried daughters until her death in 1945. Are there any residents of Purley who remember Mrs. Sheppard and her daughters and possibly also some of those who attended her funeral and can supply further information about them?

The additional information was obtained from the Purley Parish Registers, Census Returns, School Log Book and Register and the Sale Catalogue for Purley Park 1920.

Jean Debney

My thanks and appreciation to Mrs. Rita Denman who wrote the story of "Purley C of E School" which you have all been enjoying in the Purley Parish News in June, July and August 1992.

