

Account of Purley on Thames

Early Purley

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An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 3 published in PPN August 1980

FROM MY HISTORY NOTEBOOK

3. Early Purley

There has been a settlement at Purley for more than 900 years. The name has been variously spelt: PORLEI and PORLAA in 1086, PURLEIA and PURLEGH in the 13th century, and finally emerging, spelt as we know it today, in the 17th century as PURLY and PURLEY.

For some time it had been thought that Purley meant "land of the pear trees"; but a search in a book called "The Place Names of Berkshire" reveals that it means "wood or clearing frequented by the snipe or bittern." (Both are birds that live in reed beds near rivers.) The name is derived from two Old English elements: "pur" = snipe or bittern, and "leah" = glade or clearing in a wood. It is interesting to note that Purley in Surrey has a different origin. Some of the field names in the Tithe Award of 1841 also have OE origins: PIKE SHAW, which lies east of Orchard Close off Long Lane, is on the 250 foot contour and forms a pointed hill (OE "pīc" = point.)

Like many villages, Purley's history really starts with the Domesday Survey in 1086. This was ordered by William the Conqueror (of Hastings fame) as he wanted to know who owned what land in 1066 - i.e. at the time of Edward the Confessor - and in 1086, and how much it was worth for taxation purposes.

Purley has two entries, both of which had been land of Edward. Bricward had held $4\frac{1}{2}$ hides from the King, now there were only 4 hides held by Roger son of Seigfried. Theodoric the Goldsmith held another $\frac{1}{2}$ hide. (A hide is an English unit of measurement or assessment, often reckoned at 120 acres.)

Many village churches are not mentioned, and Purley is no exception. If the church existed then, it was not listed because it did not pay any tax. The present Victorian building contains a Norman chancel arch and font, which indicates that a permanent structure was built sometime prior to 1200.

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Recently I transcribed the Monumental Inscriptions inside the church - except for four which need a ladder and better eyesight than mine to decipher. I noticed that on one of the tablets, the mason appears to have made two errors: one he had attempted to correct, the other remains. I wonder how many of you can spot these errors? (No peeking during the sermon!) - I will give the answer next month.

P.S. (1) After reading my article in June about the floods, George Fielder the lock-keeper tells me that the highest ever recorded flood was in November 1894 when the Thames rose 4'4".

P.S. (2) Sibby Pryor has shown me a photograph taken in 1953 of the Cedar planted in the lawn at Lister Close to mark the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. This is the "topped" tree I asked about last month. Nearby is a large stump which was "ring-dated" when the tree was felled, and estimated to have been planted about 1805. This would appear to be the Cedar tree planted in 1795 by the "old man of the name of Dor(?)".

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