

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

## ***William Pocock***

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*An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 52 published in PPN July 1985*

### 52 - William Pocock of Purley - 1806 to 1886

The 19th century was a period of great poverty and hardship for some and a time of opportunity and advancement for many others. Social history is full of the tales of families who by sheer hard work and application managed to improve their social and economic status in society. Such a family would seem to be that founded by William Pocock, whose descendants were to dominate the mini-commercial scene in Purley in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

William Pocock was born in Compton in 1806, where he married Esther Deacon in 1831. They spent the following year in Purley and then moved to Pangbourne for 5 or 6 years. He was a carpenter and wheelwright, and soon after the family returned to Purley in 1841 he also became a shopkeeper. He sold mainly groceries and table beer from his cottage on the Reading Road which he rented from Mr Storer of Purley Park although at this time it was probably sub-let from Edward Sherwood the farmer. They had been married for 53 years when Esther died aged 77 in 1884 and William died two years later, aged 80.

The couple had 10 children: Esther Ann born in Purley in 1832 died at Purley Post Office in 1925 aged 93; Elizabeth (1834), John (1836) William (1838) and Harry (1839) were all born in Pangbourne; Peter (1841),

George (1843), Thomas (1845), Mary Louise (1848), and Eliza (1852) were all born in Purley. When the last baby was born the eldest was 20 years old and father

self was 44. Apart from Harry, who seems to have died as a baby, all the children grew up and at least six are known to have married. There were 17 grand-children baptised in Purley and an unknown number elsewhere.

Three of the sons remained in Purley. John was a farm labourer but his two younger brothers were wheelwrights and carpenters like their father. William junior was probably the member of the Pocock family employed as estate carpenter for Purley Park and Thomas is known to have worked for successive Rectors in the parish. Thomas also continued to run his father's shop.

But probably the most well-known of these three brothers was William who succeeded Dinah Green as sub-postmaster in about 1887 and was himself succeeded by his two unmarried daughters, Laura and Amy. Many can recall these two Miss Pococks serving sticky sweets from among the stamps from the front room of the Post Office, now called Lichfield Cottage. These two redoubtable old ladies died in December and January 1967 aged 90 and 87 respectively.

Their elder brother, Horace, was a market gardener in Stonecroft (formerly next to Yew Tree Farm Cottage and now the entrance to Beech Road) in the Reading Road. It was probably Horace whom some recall as an old man struggling through the snow to deliver milk in Long Lane after the last war - he would then have been in his 70s. He died in 1958 aged 83.

Old William and Esther were buried in Purley Churchyard where their memorials can be seen together with those of some of their descendants. The last representatives of this great village family are still resident in the parish.

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