

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

## ***The School Site***

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*An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 54 published in PPN September and October 1985*

### 54. The School Site (part 1)

Fresh information which has come to light in the past few months means that the history of the Purley School Site can now be traced with some certainty for about 250 years. A series of manorial court documents for Purley Parva found in the Berkshire County Record Office interrelates with another series in the Oxford CRO, and enables us to trace the occupants together with descriptions of the property from 1733.

In the middle ages a manor was said to be a residence or a unit of estate administration; by the 15th century it was also a piece of landed property with tenants over whom the landlord exercised rights of jurisdiction in a private court known as the Court Baron. This court dealt mainly with the land transactions of the customary, or copyhold, tenants of the manor who were given a copy of the entry from the court minutes.

The known records of the Court Baron of Purley Parva date from 1624 to 1848 when the court seems finally to have ceased functioning. It met infrequently and apparently only when some business needed transacting which might be some years after the death of a tenant; the sequence of records suggests that there are still some gaps. Out of about half a dozen copyhold properties in Purley Parva

the Tithe Map and Award of 1840: these are the school site and the empty field opposite in the Street (now called Purley Village).

At the Court Baron held in 1733, a Copyhold lease for the three lives of Richard Pusy, his wife Elizabeth and son John was granted for "all that new-built messuage or tenement" together with a garden and three-quarters of an acre of land. The boundary of this land seems to have been identical to the present school playground together with School Cottage (now called Hemington) and its garden. This latter was probably the "new-built messuage" referred to above. Richard was to pay an annual Quit Rent of 2s 6d (12½p) and a heriot (death duty) of 5s "when it shall happen".

Within 17 years all three Pusys had died and lease was granted in 1750 to another family: John Martin, Mary his wife and Thomas their only son were admitted on the same terms. The house was again described as "new-built" but now included an orchard. This may have been the same John Martin, a sawyer from Padworth, who came to Purley in the late 1600s and was recorded as occupying property in the parish in 1711; or possibly it was a son.

(to be continued)

Jean Debney

54 - The School Site (part 2)

When the Court Baron for Purley Parva met again in 1773, John Martin's wife Mary was dead and the life of daughter-in-law Elizabeth (wife of John's only son Thomas, a cord-wainer) was added to the Copyhold Lease. This time the house was described as "two customary messuages, late but one". Thomas's two surviving sons were also cord-wainers and went to live in Reading. Before this, the younger son James took part in the "riot" at the Red Lyon in Purley in 1773 during which the prisoner, John Sherman, escaped from custody.

The Copyhold was next renewed in 1785; John had died eight years previously, son Thomas was admitted as heir, and Thomas's 8-year-old grandson was added as the third life. Grandfather Thomas died in 1792 and four years later the life of a second grandson was added. This enabled Grandmother Elizabeth Martin to end her days in her cottage home where she died two years later. It is not known who actually lived in the two halves of the cottage for the next decade or so but they were probably sub-let. Grandson John was admitted as the heir to the Copyhold in 1808 and in 1813 the Rector of Purley, the Rev Charles Manesty who lived in the Rectory next door, paid the lord of the manor £20 to be admitted as the third life.

Five years later the two Martin grandsons were dead and Mrs Eliza Manesty and Eliza Warner, the Rector's wife and niece, were admitted as the other two lives, the Rector now being heir to the property. It is interesting that in the same year, 1818, the Rector replied to a Parliamentary Enquiry that there was a "day school for younger children" in the Parish where 20 children were "instructed". Perhaps his wife and niece were the teachers? Eliza Manesty had no children and may, therefore, have turned her attentions to the poor of her husband's parish.

At the Court Baron in 1827 it was presented that the Rev Manesty had removed "an old and accustomed fence in

a piece of ground called Martin's Garden". Unless he replaced it or put in boundary marks he was threatened with a fine of £5. The boundary marks were in position when the court met again in 1832.

The rest of the story of the 19th century establishment of Purley School has already been told; (see Purley News, June and July 1984).

Jean Debney