

Account of Purley on Thames Westbury Farm 600 years ago

R200697 14/7/2019

*An article by John Titterton in the series From my History Notebook article 61 published in PPN
May 1986*

61. Westbury Farm 600 years ago.

Westbury Farm has had several previous names. Those of Viner's Farm and Purley Malines came from the surnames of former owners. The Viner family were eighteenth century owners (see last month's article) but for the Malines one must go back over 600 years. The first member of this family was Henry Buscre de Malines who was granted the Manor of Purley Parva jointly with his wife Cecily in 1302. Henry was a merchant from a town called Malines which we know today as Mechlin in Belgium. His trade, that of a Buscre, was probably associated with either wood or wool but its precise nature is not known. He must have first traded with England about 1280 and was permanently living here by 1305.

He was a good businessman and in addition to trading he increased his wealth through money lending. Most of his property in Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Essex and London was acquired from people to whom he had lent money. When he died in 1323 in addition to this land and personal effects etc he was still owed over £800, a considerable sum in those days.

One disadvantage of such wealth, which is also true today, is that he became liable to pay the equivalent of a wealth tax. Like most people he was reluctant to do so and evaded the situation by granting some of his

estate to his elder son, Edmund. Although he was no longer the legal owner of these lands he was still involved in their affairs afterwards.

Purley was not transferred to another member of his family. The manor had been granted to him and his wife jointly by a William Syfrewast who is not known to have owed Henry money. These two facts suggest that his wife may have been a relation of the Syfrewasts. This supposition is supported by Cecily holding the manor as her dower after Henry's death.

Henry did not live at Purley but had homes in Gracechurch St., London and at Henton, near Chinnor, Oxon. He is known to have visited Purley but there was unlikely to have been a medieval manor house of any substance. In 1323, in addition to the manor farm house, the estate consisted of 180 acres of arable land, 15 acres of meadow, $10\frac{1}{2}$ acres of pasture and a dovecote. The estate would have been used as a source of income and food. After Henry's death it was enjoyed by his widow Cecily and on her death it passed to their elder son Edmund. Their younger son John may be the John Malines who in 1342 had land on the SW corner of the present junction of London St. and London Road, Reading.

For the next hundred years Purley was just one part of the family estate which was used to provide income for younger members of the family. Henry's grandson Reginald was a prominent knight at Court and his successful military career and life will be the subject of next month's article.

John Titterton