

Account of Purley on Thames

Some 18th century residents

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66. Some 18th Century Residents of the "River Estate"

Two hundred years ago on 23rd October 1786 Robert MACKRETH Esq. of Ewhurst, who had acquired the manor of Purley Magna, ordered his steward Mathias DEANE, a Reading attorney, to hold a General Court Baron in order to ascertain what property he held and who were his tenants. In the same year a map surveyed for him by William MOSS showed the position and tenants of eight cottages and gardens. A comparison with later maps suggests that plot numbers 2 to 7 were in the area of Oak Tree Walk and Park Walk in the Purley River Estate.

At their meeting on 10th October 1986, Project Purley celebrated the bicentenary of this event with a mock Court Baron in St. Mary's Church, Purley, which was temporarily renamed "The Red Lyon" after the house where the original court was held. Members were asked to come in costume and a motley selection of shawls, long skirts and headgear adorned the women, whilst the men favoured wellington boots, waistcoats, hats and string tied round trouser legs. Only the Steward was resplendent in 18th century costume complete with wig. All who attended this "court" were given the name of a parishioner known to have been living in Purley in October 1786, and the biographical detail for each was drawn from the parish registers, etc. Everyone took part in some way even if only to answer "Here, sir" when the Steward called their name.

The following are brief details of the tenants who lived in the area of the River Estate in 1786:

On plot no. 2 John GREEN, a shepherd, aged about 38, lived in a cottage with just over a quarter acre of garden. He married Hannah Maria PRESTON in Purley in October 1779 and they already had four children with four more yet to come (the two youngest died as infants and their eldest daughter Sarah died when she was only 7). In 1789, John was appointed Hayward and Tithingman to assist the Constable keep law and order in the parish. When John George LIEBENROOD of Purley Lodge died in 1795, GREEN was named as one of the poor labouring men of Purley who were to carry the coffin and then to receive two guineas (£2.20p).

Next door on plot 3, 53-year-old John NEWBURY also had just over a quarter acre of garden round his cottage. Baptised in Purley and possibly married in Caversham when 22 years old, he and his wife Sarah had five children baptised in Purley. Most of them had probably left home at the time of the court, with the possible exception of 14-year-old Sally, their youngest. John's wife died the following January and he himself died three years later.

William GUTTERIDGE at no.4 had a slightly smaller garden. Married in Streatley in 1750, he and his wife Elizabeth had five children baptised in Purley, all of whom had long since left the parish in search of work. Both he and his wife died within two weeks of each other in 1789, only three years after this court.

Opposite William at no.5 lived a widow, Mary DENCH (nee ATKINS). Her garden was smaller still. Married in Pangbourne in 1745, her husband Richard died after more than 30 years of marriage. Altogether they had eleven children but four had already died, three as young adults and one aged 5. It is unlikely that any children were still living at home in 1786. Mary had brought up her eldest daughter's illegitimate child Rebecca, until she died aged 12½. Mary herself lived until 1796, by which time her 10th child, also called Mary, had born two illegitimate children before marrying Richard NEW

in Tidmarsh.

William LUKEMAN's cottage and small garden at no.7 was divided from William GUTTERIDGE's by a small strip of land which belonged to the Rector. He and Ursula (nee DAVIS) had been married for just over 23 years and nine of their ten children had been born. Only one baby had died and just over a year after this court their last child was born, but died 11 months later. Their eldest daughter, also called Ursula, married William PRIOR in Sulham the week before the court. In 1790 William was appointed Hayward and Tithing man, and in 1795 was another of those named to carry LIEBENROOD's coffin and to receive two guineas. In 1786, William LUKEMAN was a hale and hearty 45-year-old and he lived until 1830: the rest of his story has been told elsewhere.

Within two decades most of these folk had either died or had been moved as a result of the development and enclosure of Purley Park.

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