

Account of Purley on Thames

Purley in 1842

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67. Purley in 1842

Directories developed during the Industrial Revolution to bring the manufacturer, retailer and customer into contact. With the coming of the railways, holiday resorts and shopping centres began to advertise their cultural and commercial advantages to travellers and later included information of a more general nature.

(1) Most people are familiar with the series of Kelly's Directories which were published between 1842? and 1972? In addition many local printers produced their own, some hastily and inaccurately compiled, some with shamelessly plagiarised information.

In 1842 John SNARE, printer of 16 Minster Street, Reading, published a directory of Berkshire that included an entry for Purley. (2) Either he, or his representative, apparently visited the villages to compile the information. Unfortunately for Purley, it was only "visited" from a boat on the river. As those of you who are familiar with the geography of the area will know, not a lot of the village can be seen from this view point. What the description lacks in hard fact was written with romantic imagination as follows:

'First impressions, it is said, are not only the most lasting, but, as far as beauty is concerned, generally the most correct. When first we gazed on the lovely scenery of Purley, it was through the drooping willows that hung in graceful canopy over our gently gliding skiff. It was the hour when

"The dews of summer eve did fall:
The moon, sweet regent of the sky,
Silvered the grove of Purley Hall, *
And many an oak that grew thereby."

In the wide prospect around us - from the Thames which we were floating, to the wood-covered heights in the distance - every tree, and hedge, and hillock - the thatched-roof cot and the stately mansion, all even to the ploughman "plodding homeward his weary way" - stood forth in mellowed clearness, in the soft light of a summer's moon - while the "light drip of the suspended oar," the sharp shrill cry of the wheeling bat, and the twitter of the rapidly darting swallow, made a music so sweetly in harmony with the scene, that "long as memory holds her seat" we shall deem the neighbourhood of Purley among the most delightful and the most attractive in our vicinity.'

Then comes a list of the parish officials followed by the most important residents:

Rector:	The Rev Charles MANESTY, M.A.
Churchwarden:	Edward SHERWOOD, Esq.
Registrar:	Mr. Samuel LUCAS
Parish Clerk:	Benj. HUNT
Guardian:	Edward SHERWOOD Esq.
Overseers:	Rev C. MANESTY & Edward SHERWOOD Esq.
Assessor & Surveyor:	Edward SHERWOOD Esq.
Constable:	John SIMMONS
Tithingman & Hayward:	Charles HUNT

Michael B. BLOUNT, Esq.
Rev. Charles MANESTY, Rectory
Wm POCOCK, Carpenter & Beerseller
Edward SHERWOOD, Esq.
John SIMMONS, Blacksmith
William WAITE, Steward to Edward SHERWOOD Esq.

Edward SHERWOOD, a farmer, was also the main employer of labour in the village. Because of his wealth he had a Steward to run his farm leaving him free, in effect, to run the parish - as can be seen from the number of positions he held. It is not known for certain where he lived at this time.

*Almost certainly this refers to Purley Park which is visible from the river and not to Purley Hall near Pangbourne - it is an example of the confusion that existed then, and sometimes even today, between the two estates.

SOURCES

1. WEST J: Village Records p.162
2. SNARE John: Post Office Reading Directory Part 2: Berkshire Towns 1842 p.205

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