

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

## ***George Reynolds and the Flood***

R200706 17/7/2019

*An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 73 published in PPN June 1987*

### 73. George Reynolds and the flood, 1795

From the end of November 1794 Berkshire was in the grip of a hard frost which lasted for two months. Rivers and canals were impassable, crops froze in the ground and food prices rose. The Reading Mercury carried reports of heavy rain following a sudden thaw at the end of January, which caused severe floods. By February, Pangbourne was under water and on the Thames near Basildon, Harts Lock "bulged" and the gates, with the adjoining eel bucks, were swept away. Ground at Whitchurch was washed away and the new bridge became unusable.

On 16th February 1795, George REYNOLDS the steward living on Purley Farm, wrote an account of the flood to his master, Anthony Morris STORER I, at his town house in Devonshire Street, London. The letter was recorded by Storer in his Estate Book:

"Sir, We have had the highest flood at Purley that has happened these one and twenty years. On Thursday last, the water rose very fast and at night it wanted about five inches upright of coming into the stable. I told the Carter that I would venture\* the horses that night, for I did not think that there could be more than five or six inches in water before the morning. But to my surprise the next morning, I found them almost up to their bellies in water as the flood had risen almost two feet perpendicular. I obtained leave of Mr. JOHNSON to put the three cart horses and the colt in his stable and for the two saddle horses and the cow I had a bit of ground hurdled off at the end of the kitchen garden, as

that spot, and a small part of the Church Yard, with a few yards by the steps at the front door was all the dry ground on which we could put anything. The timber on the premises was floated but, by the help of the boat and the men, we saved every stick, nothing was lost. The flood continued rising till Thursday night and then the water was three feet high in the stable. Since that time, the water has continued sinking fast as it rose and on Sunday it was out of the stable and this day I shall have the horses brought home. You have not received any damage by the flood.

Sir, I remain, your dutiful servant, George REYNOLDS"

Reynold's letter almost certainly influenced Mr. Storer NOT to build his new mansion on the low ground by the river. This was despite the suggestion in 1793 by Humphrey Repton that the stream which ran from the Pond (formerly at the bottom of New Hill) to the Thames at the Moorings, should be deepened and the earth used to raise a mound for the house. At that time the farm house, which was also the manor house of Purley Magna; two large barns and stable etc were in the wooded area next to the churchyard. The story of what possibly happened to most of them will be the subject of next month's article.

\*VENTURE = undertake the risk (of leaving the horses in their stables).

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May 1987

