

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

## ***An important discovery***

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*An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 98 published in PPN April and May 1991 It related to the Manorial Court Baron of 1786 which John Titterton found in the British Library.*

Just a few days ago in answer to a casual question an important document was produced for my inspection. For the past ten years members of Project Purley have been searching for this document in the catalogues of Record Offices and libraries, but to no avail until now ...

The background is as follows:

When Project Purley held its inaugural meeting in May 1982, one of the items in our archives was a copy of a tracing of a map of Purley Magna dated 1786. This was and still is in private hands and had been displayed in Purley Memorial Hall at the 1977 Jubilee Exhibition. It was traced by 12 year old Cecil Tidbury about 1926 and shown to the Purley School children by his mother who was then headmistress. Although it only covered part of the parish, it included the blacksmith's shop at the corner of Long Lane and the Oxford Road and some house plots numbered 2 to 6 near the Church. But it was apparent that he had omitted an unknown amount of detail.

In 1986 another, more accurate and detailed, tracing of the map was discovered by John Chapman: it had been made in the early 1930s by draughtsman Bob Skerritt and stored in his loft. This copy listed eight tenants but only showed the location of numbers 2, 3, 4 & 5 and not of 1, 6, 7 & 8; also the blacksmith's shop at the corner of Long Lane was not shown. [This tracing is now deposited in the Berkshire Record Office.]

It seemed likely that the original map was part of the ancient title deeds relating to Purley Park. These were probably dispersed after the Law of Property Act 1925 which only required deeds to cover a relatively short period for proof of title. As a result of this Act many old parchment documents were disposed of.

In the early 1980s John Titterton found a document in the British Library dated Oct 1786 which related to these tracings: it was a Manorial Court Baron held in the Red Lion, Purley, at the request of Robert Mackreth, who had recently purchased the manor. It described how the members of the Court perambulated the manor boundary (which was virtually the old parish boundary) and placed marker posts at strategic points.

In October 1986, members of Project Purley and some visitors donned various costumes to celebrate the 200th anniversary by re-enacting the Court Baron. Purley Church was "converted" into the Red lion for the evening. John Titterton had taken colour slides of the places mentioned in the Court Baron and, together with Jan Jones, compiled a script for the evening.

The lord of the manor, Robert Mackreth (Vincent West), attended with his steward, Mathias Deane, attorney of Reading (John Titterton in wig, knee breeches and buckle shoes). The jury consisted of the two chief tenants, farmer John Sherwood (Tom Robinson) and shoemaker Thomas Martin (Cliff Debney) while "mine host" of the Red Lion, John Emmons (John Chapman) served suitable refreshments of tea, coffee and biscuits. The rest of those present were given the names of villagers of the period taken from the parish registers etc. and some took part in the action.  
(To be continued)

[PS. Those who live in Ivy Cottage, Letgable and Stargable - watch this space for the next article!]

Jean DEBNEY (C)

The Discovery of an Important Record  
of Purley's History

Until now, these two tracings were the only detailed maps that existed for this part of Purley before the 1840 Tithe Map. On this evening, I was with members of the Oral History Project Group listening to a tape recording made by Joan Kettley of Pangbourne of an inhabitant of Purley from the 1920s. During a pause I enquired if she knew where her father had acquired the 1786 map of Purley that her brother, Cecil Tidbury, had traced and what had happened to it. She replied that her father was always "acquiring things" and that the map was now in her possession. She then walked across the room and fetched it.

It has been reported that I was temporarily speechless at the sight of a document I had waited over ten years to see. It is in poor condition due to flood damage from the River Pang, it has a large ink blot made by Cecil and bits of the paper are cracked and peeling off the linen backing. But it is THE original!

The names of subsequent lords of the manor, John Martindale and A M Storer Esqs. have been added in pencil. Other pencil marks suggest that the map may have been used to compile the Tithe Map and Award in 1840, etc. But the most interesting bits are the details that were omitted from one or both of the tracings. These include the blacksmith's shop, cottages along the Oxford Road and the numbering of all

eight cottage plots - previously we had no idea where numbers 7 & 8 were located in the village.

Plot No.1, the blacksmith's house and shop, confirms that the smithy had been on the corner of Long Lane with Oxford Road for at least 200 years. Demolished in 1936 for road-widening, there remains an unconfirmed report that it had been there since the early 1600s.

Plots Nos 2 to 6 were known to have been near Oak Tree Walk and Park Walk in the River Estate and had gone by the early 1800s.\* But we can now see that plots Nos 7 and 8 were on either side of the Street - now called "Purley Village". No 7, on the north side, is now "Ivy Cottage" and No 8 on the south west corner, by Purley Lane, has become the semi-detached houses "Stargable" and "Letgable".

In addition, there are cottages marked on the north and south sides of the Turnpike Road (A329). They were described as being enclosed from the waste land of the manor and were narrow sites along the road-side. Those on the north lay opposite the site occupied until recently by Trenthams Ltd and may later have become known as "Well Cottages". Almost certainly this was the site of the lost house known by the name of the "Red Lyon" - the only pub Purley has ever had!

Those on the south side are probably now known as "Litchfield Cottage" and will be remembered by some as the Post Office run by the Misses Pocock in the 1920s and 30s. In 1786 they were occupied by Joseph Lambourn and William Lukeman.

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\* See Purley News (May 1987) for further details.

