

Account of Purley on Thames

A Bit of a Tell

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This is one of a series of short articles written by Rita Denman for the Purley Parish News October 2016.

Hello again. Here we are at the bottom of New Hill which was created when the new mansion was built near to the main road. Ahead is St Mary's Avenue, formerly the tree lined St Mary's Walk where mainly lime trees were planted. Until the 20th century open fields of the Manor of Purley Magna were on both sides. The Walk was part of the early thoroughfare through the village which began on the main road near to the WW2 Pill Box, came down the hill to the ancient manor house near the church, westward through the village street and continued at the lower level emerging onto the main road near to Pangbourne.

Saxon burials were found in St Mary's churchyard when preparations for the 1983 extension were being made. The earliest Vicar recorded is Simon circa 1135 and dates of incumbents are consistent from the 1300s. A surviving Norman arch and a font dated to about 1135 are reminders of the very long history of St Marys. Local historian John Chapman's book *The History of St Mary's* is a mine of information.

The old manor house of Purley Magna with its farm was situated on the site of the marina. We know from the Norman census of 1086 that the manor was in existence at that time when 'Roger held it from King Edward'. It then passed through the Huscarle and Carew families but from the 1400s it was held by the St John family whose main residence was at Lydiard Tregoze in Wiltshire. In 1514 Nicholas St John became engaged to Elizabeth daughter of Richard Blount of Mapledurham on the opposite bank of the river Thames. The young couple settled in Purley when the then existing the manor house was rebuilt. The St Johns had a close connection with Purley for the next 300 years.

In those days barns and farm outbuildings surrounded the manor house. It was one of those barns that was transported to the new farm of Belle Isle built in the early 1800s. Many years later Belle Isle became the site of the Trentham Company. When the site was redeveloped, the barn was moved once again to its present home at Goosecroft. Dendrochronology revealed that some of the timbers are dated from 1509 to 1512. The Barn was officially opened in 1995 as a Purley community facility and has become a popular and beautiful venue for local events. I hope to meet you again to continue our tour recalling more of old Purley.

