

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 January 2017

Hello. it's good to meet you again. A very happy New year to you. For generations it seemed that nothing happened in Purley and we can only surmise what effect the plague, battles about religion, and the Civil War had on the small community of Purley, or Purleigh as it was known in the past. Perhaps some of these events have given rise to the old village myths of a secret tunnel and monks escaping across the river, the rumbling phantom coach and a headless horseman galloping furiously through the village street. On a night when there is a full moon lighting up the village and surrounding fields and shadows play tricks it is possible to imagine anything.

It was in the 19th century that everything began to change when Brunel brought the Great Western Railway through Purley. It was opened in 1840 and physically cut the village in two. The Education Act of 1870 brought change to every family when it became compulsory for all children to attend school to receive an elementary education to the age of 13. The village school was opened in 1875. The 1920s brought more change when The Manor of Purley Magna was sold. The tree lined walk to the church through open fields was built up. The area of the kitchen garden and the gardeners cottage eventually became the Riverside Estate, and later in the 1980s the area on the north side of the parish church was developed. For a time, in the first half of the 20th century the mansion was owned by the Farmiloe family. Some residents may remember Farmiloe's Nine Elms brand paint. During WW2, the Sanger Pharmaceutical Company evacuated their offices and Staff to Purley Mansion .A period of stability followed when the Duncan's set up the Purley Park Trust there. Later the mansion and ancillary buildings were sold in order to provide facilities better suited to the needs of the residents. In the early 2000s the mansion was faithfully restored to its' Georgian grandeur by the T A Fisher Company and converted to apartments. When I came to live in Purley in 1975 there were open fields into Tilehurst on the south side of the main road all of which have now been developed. The Trentham Company, who were Building and Civil Engineering Contractors, came to Purley in 1951 and took land over from the South Berks Hunt and the Belle Isle Farm site. Mr Donald Trentham, the Head of the Company was a traditionalist and he retained many of the buildings and features of the site, including the Purley barn and adapted them for re-use. Trenthams were at the site for 50 years becoming part of Purley life and although the whole area has now been redeveloped it is still fondly known by many older Purley residents as Trentham's.

Fortunately on the north side of the main road in the old village there are bridle paths and public footpaths so that all Purley residents may relax and enjoy the countryside and wildlife of the beautiful Thames Valley. The place that we are fortunate to call home. I will look out for you again. Mind how you go.