

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 March 2017

Hello, it is good to meet you again. Despite the poor state of our roads, past and present, this area has always been at the centre of road and communication systems. In pre-history Stone Age people traveled along the Kennet Valley and The Ridgeway is said to be the oldest thoroughfare in Europe. In modern times the canals, railways and motor ways have put Purley at the heart of the south. With Windsor Castle within easy travelling distance and the influential Great Abbey of Reading on the doorstep it is no wonder that through the ages tiny Purley Village, situated in the beautiful valley of The Thames, has had connections with people from many walks of life. Royalty, diplomat, artist, craftsman, yeoman and farm labourer, all have left a mark on Purley.

Early Project Purley research revealed that in the 1780's wealthy merchant John George Liebenood was living in the Queen Anne house at the lower end of Purley Lane. He had family in Holland and Germany. He settled very happily becoming a benefactor to Purley and its' inhabitants. Among his kindly deeds he championed the poor and donated a treble bell to the parish church .When he died in 1795 he made many bequests including a sum of money each to 24 poor inhabitants of Purley. He was buried in St Mary's Churchyard .

Researches also uncovered the story of Mortimer Menpes. He was born in Port Adelaide South Australia in 1855 and eventually settled in this area and was well known as employer and owner of the fruit and carnation nursery that was situated just off Long Lane. The nursery has gone, but the row of workers cottages survive.

What was less well known in Purley was that he was an artist of world renown and had association with Whistler and Sickert and held many glittering exhibitions of his work in London. He lived in Pangbourne for the last years of his life where he died in 1938 and is buried in the churchyard of St James.

History is made by people and what we do today will become part of Purley's story. Now mind how you go and I will look out for you for another tell.