

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 April 2017

Hello again, Although it hasn't been a harsh winter we do seem to have had many dull and dreary days but spring is here and the gardens in Purley will soon be ablaze with colourful trees and flowers to lift our spirits. I expect that Purley people through the ages have welcomed signs of spring, no more than in the year 1205 when the Thames froze over in a cold spell that lasted from 1st January to March 20th. The land could not be tilled and in Reading beer and wine was sold by weight as it all froze. It is hard to imagine coping in those conditions when water was from a well or pump and without gas or electricity.

We often talk about the manors of Purley and you may be wondering, what is the definition of 'a manor'? The general pattern was an area which encompassed fields for growing crops, pasture, woodland, housing for tenants, possibly a church or chapel and a manor house where the Lord of the Manor, that is the person in charge lived. The system dated from Anglo Saxon times and was adopted by the Normans. The then existing manors were recorded in the census of 1086 known as the Domesday Book. A Manor had the right to hold Courts. The Court Baron was where the Lord of the Manor enforced his rights to rents and services such as work on the land and where tenants were protected by the customs of the Manor. The Court Leet was where petty offences were tried. Without these Court Rights there was no Manor, just an estate. Usually the Courts were held in the ' hall ' in the Manor House.

The founder members of Project Purley did a great deal of research into the Manors of Purley. In 1786 Purley Magna was passing between various owners at the time when the old manor and farm near the river was being vacated and before the new mansion on the hill was built. On October 23rd 1786 a Court Baron was held at The Red Lyon, the 'house' of John Emmons. The proceedings began with the Steward for the Manor explaining the need for a perambulation of the boundaries and there followed various land transactions for the villagers witnessed by the Jury. The Court Leet followed commencing with the villagers swearing an Oath of Allegiance to King George 111. A Constable and his Tythingman were elected and their functions were explained. Among many duties it included making sure that villagers attended church. Villagers committing any offence were reprimanded or fined and Widow Dench was recorded in history for allowing her dung heap to spread onto the public highway.

Now mind how you go, until we meet again.