

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## A Bit of a Tell

R3020 21 20/10/2018

*This is one of a series of short articles written by Rita Denman for the Purley Parish News February 2018*

Hello, it is good to meet you again. It has been a busy time in Purley since we last enjoyed a chat. There has been some uncomfortable wintry weather but not as uncomfortable or as difficult as it would have been for villagers in the past. We take our mod cons for granted, but not so long ago lighting was by oil lamp, heating probably one open fire in the house and water from a well or pump. There are some known sites of old wells in Purley but as almost every cottage would have had its' own well, the sites of many must have been lost.

In 1896 Mr and Mrs Leath came to Purley with Miss Ella Baker who had taken the Queen Ann house at the top of the street. Mr Leath had been her gardener in Herefordshire and he and his wife were to be employed as gardener and cook at Purley Lodge. The Leaths lived in Purley Lodge Cottage for many years where they brought up their family. The well for the cottage was rediscovered in recent times. Miss Baker died and the Leaths stayed on as gardener and cook for Mr Hodgkin the new owner. As we are all aware, Purley isn't often short of water but in a very dry season the springs feeding the wells could be low and it could take a while for enough water to collect to be able to draw up the well water. Mr Leath decided to build a 'back house' in the garden so that he could collect rain water from the roof. This was called the soft water, which was used for doing the laundry and cleaning. It seems hard to believe that such necessities as running cold water, and gas and electricity to ordinary homes was not general until mid 20th century.

In 1878 The public Health Act was passed obliging Parishes to supply 'wholesome water' within reasonable distance to every home. It wasn't until 1958 that all homes in Purley were served with cold running water. In 1925 a spur from a 12" steel gas main along the Oxford Road was laid down Purley Lane to Purley Lodge and to Purley Lodge Cottage, at the request of and expense to Mr Hodgkin who was then resident at Purley Lodge. By 1947 most of Purley was served as a matter of course. The first electricity cable to Purley was laid from Pangbourne in 1937 and a sub station was built in Beech Road and over time the various areas of Purley were connected.

I expect your home will be warm when you get back from your walk and that the kettle will soon be on for a welcome cuppa. I will look out for you again for another tell.