

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 2018

Hello again. The last time we met we were looking forward to spring. Little did we know that we would experience arctic conditions before it arrived.

The Purley Village school was opened on the 13th of February 1875. On the 24th of that month the school log book records 'Very small attendance due to a heavy fall of snow. The recent fall of snow in Purley coincided with a full moon and the bright moonlight shining on the snow covered hills and fields was a memorable sight. We will be taking stock in our gardens and hoping that our favourite plants have survived the extreme cold. We are fortunate that in Purley we have excellent growing conditions.

It may have been those conditions that attracted an unlikely fruit farmer to Purley. Many residents will remember the fruit and carnation farm in Long Lane. It was begun in the early 1900s by Mortimer Menpes at a time when Long Lane really was a country lane just wide enough for a farm wagon. He built 40 large greenhouses to grow carnations, roughly where Apple Close, Devonshire Gardens and Warley Rise are situated. He also built 8 cottages for his workers which still stand. His residence was Iris Court. Pangbourne.

Mortimer Menpes whose father had emigrated from England was born in 1855 in Port Adelaide Australia. At a young age he attended art school in Adelaide. The family came back to England in 1866 and Mortimer began his serious art training at The School of Art in London and was a pupil of Rex Whistler with whom he had a life long friendship. Whistler was Godfather to Mortimer's daughter Dorothy. He traveled widely and became internationally renowned as an artist, war artist, etcher engraver and printer. He died in 1938 and is buried in Pangbourne churchyard.

Mind how you go and I will look out for you again.