

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## A Bit of a Tell

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*By Rita Denman published in Purley Parish News June 2018*

Hello again. Its the time of year when the countryside turns white. The May (Hawthorn ) is in flower and the hedgerows are billowing with the lacy flowers of Cow Parsley. In times past, when children could play in the street, a game for this time of year was 'Here we come gathering nuts in May-on a cold and frosty morning'. May mornings can be frosty but where are the nuts in May? The most popular explanation is that the original words were knots of May referring to posies of May flower which was gathered as part of the May Day celebrations.

We are very fortunate to have a map of Purley which was prepared by William Moss when he surveyed the Purley Magna Estate lands in 1786. At that time the land on the right hand corner of Long Lane and the main road looking toward Tilehurst was named Ealy Ham. When Anthony Morris Storer became Lord of the Manor in the late 1700s he transferred the farm from the site by the river to Ealy Ham. A farmhouse was built and an eight bay barn was transferred from its original site by the river to the new farm which was Belle Isle. It is hard to imagine taking a huge barn apart and transferring it up the hill by horse and cart.

Shortly before the First World War, Cecil Aldin, the well known artist, became Master of Foxhounds of the South Berks Hunt. He established the Headquarters at Belle Isle where he had everything he needed as an artist and a sportsman. During the war the eight bay barn was used as a Remount Depot preparing horses for the Front. Sadly Cecil Aldin's son was killed in action at the age of nineteen at Vimy Ridge.

In 1951 Belle Isle became vacant and was purchased by and became the Headquarters of G Percy Trentham Ltd Building and Civil Engineering Contractors. The Company became part of Purley life, employing local people. They also helped with village events by providing immaculately turned out lorries for local processions and carnivals.

The Company Chairman, Mr Donald Trentham, was a traditionalist. He loved trees and made sure that those on site were protected and that the open areas were always attractive with plenty of spring bulbs. Mr Donald died in 1983 and the Company left Purley within a few years. The site became a modern residential area, although it is still fondly remembered by locals as Trentham's. The farmhouse was retained and the barn was once again moved to its present home at Goosecroft

Mind how you go.