

Account of Purley on Thames

A Bit of a Tell

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Hello again. Early summer in Purley couldn't have been more enjoyable. At dawn all the birds in the valley began their chorus and the blackbirds sang their beautiful solos to greet the new day. The sun rose a crimson ball casting a rosy glow upon everything, a signal for a flock of rooks to come to feed in the farm fields.

By the time you read this mid-summer's day will have passed. It was once a time of celebration, when dancing and revels were held on village greens throughout the land. The tradition of Morris dancing still survives but in recent years the old country dancing seems to have been forgotten. I expect that readers of my generation remember country dancing at school. Black Nag was a favourite. It was easy to learn the pattern of the dance to a repetitive tune. Another popular dance was Dashing White Sergeant. The melody was adapted to a quick march for The Royal Berkshire Regiment.

Pupils of all ages will have completed their tests and examinations and be looking forward to the long summer holiday, a tradition that began in the early days of general education, including at our village school which opened in 1875. As soon as the harvest began, school attendance started to drop as the children joined their mothers in the fields. A child could earn a few extra pence, a welcome help with the family budget. School closed for the harvest holiday in late July and early August. If the harvest was late or particularly good, or the weather poor, the harvest sometimes overran the allotted holiday and attendance was low at the beginning of the new term. When the harvest was gathered in Major Storer, the Lord of the Manor of Purley Magna provided a tea when the children were taken to the 'Park'. Harvest Home was cause for great celebration and thanksgiving.

It is a sad reflection of our times that many children do not know how their food is produced. Purley children are fortunate as they can see the grain growing and being harvested at Home Farm and other farms in the area, not laboriously by hand as in the old days but with smart modern machinery.

Mind how you go and we will meet again in September.