

# Project Purley.

PURLEY'S LOCAL HISTDRY SOCIETY

JANUARY 1991 NEWSLETTER

NO. 25

May I wish everyone a belated Happy New Year. Unfortunately, this newsletter has been produced later than usual for which I apologise. It also means we have one more meeting on which to report. However, the highlight of the year must have been our Open Afternoon on Saturday September 15th. There were comments made such as "When are you holding the next one?" This we felt was a measure of the success of our first Open Day.

SEPTEMBER  
MEMBER

OPEN  
AFTERNOON

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At one o'clock the doors of the Memorial Hall were opened and helpers appeared from all directions to assemble the displays. Although each person in charge of a display area had mounted as much as possible prior to the day, there was still much to be attractively set up. By two thirty everything was in place. Just!!!

At first there was a little trickle of interested people of all ages. The numbers grew and we had over a hundred visitors during the afternoon. It was interesting to hear the comments: - "I didn't know there was blacksmith in Purley at one time." "These maps are really fascinating." "I could spend hours looking at these folders." "I'm sure my dad would know a lot of the children on that old photo." ... and so on.

It was surprising to find how many people who came in at the beginning were still there at the end. We would like to say thank you to all those who helped to clear up at the end and to the refreshment ladies who manned the kitchen. Reading Chronicle took photos: however, in spite of much 'paging' Bill Fisher did not appear. It transpired that he was so busy gleaning information from visitors that he hadn't heard the call!

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LOCAL HISFORY SOURCES

Speaker - Margaret Smith

We often a-sk what local history or family history information we can find in Reading Central Library. Margaret Smith, the County Local Studies Librarian, introduced us to the many sources available at Reading. For example, there are census returns and newspapers on microfilm, Kelley's and other directories on the shelves, printed local histories, personal and place names card index and a newspaper cuttings section indexed by place. She also showed us some maps from the comprehensive NOVEMBER collection at the library. R609

ORAL HISTORY

Tom Robinson & Margaret Hughes

Once again Tom & Margaret put a great deal of thought and effort into giving us a glimpse of life in Purley through the research of the Oral History Group. I cannot hope to cover all the diverse characters they have captured on tape. Starting with occupations. Joe Kirton recalls changing from hand milking to machines - the worst thing he had done as the cows didn't like it! Later he recalled delivering milk by boat during the floods. Of course, Honor Gutch had much to say about the early Purley Park Estate days. One can imagine her confronting the would-be raider at the Post Office. Needless to say he was unsuccessful. David Martin gave some thumbnail sketches of the earlier vicars including the story of Rev. Skuse playing boogie-woogie and Charlie Kunz on the organ when the Archbishop was there. Not forgotten was the often "home-made" social life and the social problems that had to be solved. One thing was certain, they felt there was a great community spirit. Bob Skerri t said it was like being in a pioneering situation, everybody was in the same boat; they trusted each other and could, for example, go out and leave their doors unlocked.

DECEMBER

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY R b D

Jan and Rick Jones once again lent us their house in which to hold the Christmas party despite the hostess being late due to her childrens school Christmas activities! Unfortunately, other school events clashed with the party so that members were either late or could not attend at all. However, the mulled wine and goodies were greatly appreciated by everyone whether they arrived early or late. Some members brought items of curiosity to be identified - the answers being given at the end of the relaxing evening.

JANUARY

THE THAMES R b ||

George Fielder

Mention that George Fielder is giving us a talk and we find it is almost standing room only - everyone was able to sit down, albeit on the floor for some. George brought a collection of slides, many of which were of locks along the Thames. Some of these were copies of old postcards and pictures. With each one he pointed out many interesting facts such as the construction of the weirs with, for example, paddles and rimers. There were also "old and new" pictures of the same places. Besides the pictures we had an account of the goings on between the mill owners and the bargemen. The former needed a head of water to keep the mill going during the busy times and the latter were more than anxious to deliver their goods otherwise they would be out of pocket. We even heard the inside story of the beautiful lock gardens and the best kept lock competitions- there were those keepers who used their greenhouses to top up any extra plants they needed while others seemed to have the advantage of being supplied by big nurseries. At the end we were able to talk to George and discuss many points about the river and locks.

We are all very sad to hear that Margaret and Terry Hughes will, soon be moving away from Purley. Margaret has written the following item.

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?t U I had enjoyed Parish Magazine articles written by Jean Debney when I spotted a request for all interested to go to a meeting at the Beech Road Pavillion on 4th. May 1982. The hall was full, 35 joining that night to help in various groups:  
Archaeology - the church dig, which had just started before the church extension came.  
Maps & Topography.  
Natural History.  
Heraldry - mainly based on the church and Purley

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#### Census & Demography

By July there were 45 members and I had joined the census group. We had an instructive and enjoyable time at the Reading Reference Library checking the Purley census returns that had already been extracted, probably by Jean. We then had meetings at Marvin Clark s helping to sort out the information and add it to the index cards Jean had for each resident.

The whole society went to the new Shire Hall one evening and the Purley archives were set out for us to explore. I later went to one of the map evenings at Cliff and Jean's where maps from different years had been superimposed so that you could see how the land use had changed from time to time.

Other meeting places for the society or group have been Sylvia Conquest 's , John & Isabel Sykes, Arthur & Eileen Greenwood's and now Jan and Rick Jones' with occasional visits to the Titterton's, Chapman's and Deane's.

I have been amazed at the enormous range of talks we have had. I particularly remember a series at the church on its history and the dig, by John Chapman; Peter Trentham about the history of G.Percy Trentham,Civil Engineers; Life With Father - Heath Robinson, by Tom Robinson; Birds in Purley by Neil Bucknell, a talk on bats when there were many outside, wartime memories and various types of old transport and the railways.

The re-enactment of a Court Baron of 200 years earlier, played out the village trial (in the former village pub,The Red Lyon) of various people who had offended and was one of the occasions when we dressed up in clothes of the past.

We also frequently dress up for the Christmas parties, some people look really good, and there have been competitions about Purley including a crossword puzzle.

In the summer we have explored the village thoroughly with many previously unnoticed things being pointed out to us. We have covered the roads all over the village, the church, the school, Trenthams, the river, the field with the old field names and features pointed out to us and Sulham Woods. We joined in the Parish Walk round the boundary when we became Pur Ley-on-Thames in May 1986. Two notable walks out of the village were, one, Whitchurch and Mapledurham when we had a superb view from the hills above the lock, stretching over the whole of Purley and into Reading and Tilehurst; the other was at Sulham when Mr. Moon took us into his old farm office, the church and later into his home for a drink and a look at Mrs. Moon's Wilder family tree.

When the census work was nearing the end we decided to expand into interviewing residents so that we could build up a picture of particular aspects of the village or just impressions of life when Purley was just a small village.

This has been most enjoyable and when transcribing these recordings the interview comes back clearly. There are still more people to be interviewed by the group over a cup of coffee.

Project Purley has had stands at various village occasions and with so much material even had its own exhibition last year which attracted much interest among villagers. Because of Project Purley motivated me I was able to display W. 1. records and am still working on a thorough research into their minute books from 1936 which I hope to complete in rough form before leaving the area. Within a few years you will, hopefully, receive from me the results of this work but to do this I may have to learn to type and use the computer!

One year I found myself recording all the birds that came into my garden for the natural history group. There is the ongoing collecting of all articles and references to Purley I find in newspapers or leaflets, to be entered in the Purley scrapbook for use by future residents or maybe descendents of Purley people. I hope many of you will help to keep this record going when we have left the village.

One advantage to the society and the village will be the removal of confusion by having two Terry Hughes. However, Kirkcudbright has a local history society and after our enjoyment of being members of Project Purley we may well decide to join them and find out about our new surroundings.

Margaret Hughes.

We would like to thank Margaret for all the hard work she has put during her time as a member of Project Purley. We wish you well in your future home and hope you find a niche in Kirkcudbright's local History Society. Ed.

Recently Rita and I were discussing things which were central to our lives as children but are now not known at first hand by the later generations. Coal fires in particular have disappeared from most homes. Rita has vividly recalled memories connected with fires, perhaps we should remember to pass them on to our descendents. Ed.

### MEMORIES OF 'DIE FIRESIDE

As our lifestyle changes and we enjoy all the conveniences of a modern home, how easy it is to forget the old routines and traditions.

There was so much tradition and folklore connected with the hearth from time immemorial, when the fire was at the heart of the family circle

I can just remember the kitchen range, or kitchener as it was called. It was kept gleaming black with "Zebo", the steel parts bright and the hearth whitened with hearthstone. I remember the noise of riddling the fire through the front bars, and the continual battle with the damper and the wind in the chimney.

It was a memorable day when the range was removed and an open grate installed. As children my sister and I spent many happy evenings sitting by the fire while mum read aloud to us. Sometimes we would knit dishcloths, and as the heat of the fire increased the knitting made us very hot and the bakelite needles bent as they got warm and made knitting very difficult. A favourite game was finding pictures in the fire which kept us quiet.

Saturday evenings were wonderful as the old hip bath was brought in before the fire, and we children took our bath in the warmth of the kitchen and listened to the wireless broadcasting "In Town Tonight" and "Music Hall".



A Sunday teatime treat was bread toasted by the fire - an uncomfortable task as the long handled toasting fork was never long enough to prevent faces and hands being too near the fire. But what delicious toast it was, providing it didn't catch light or fall into the fire altogether.

The day the chimney sweep came was a day to dread. Curtains, carpets and furniture were removed altogether or disappeared under dust covers. The aftermath was nearly as bad, when the all pervading smell of soot changed to one of carbolic soap. The only interesting thing about the chimney being swept was waiting in the garden for the brush to appear from the chimney.

It was said that:-

- a bright fire and sparks flying up the chimney was a sign of frost.

- sparks on the fire-back in the shape of a letter (no matter how vague), meant a letter in the

- to let the sun shine on the fire would put post.  
it out.

- a few crystals of sugar on a sulky fire would help it to burn.

If the wind was in the "wrong" direction the room would frequently be filled with smoke. Sometimes the wood or coal would send sparks flying into the room and it was necessary to be quick to stamp them out. Vigilance against the risk of fire in the home was very important and many precautions were taken to keep the fire safe.

Perhaps this item will stir your memory and take you back to happy times by the fire.

Rita Denman

## AUTUMN IN SULLHAM \0005

A very early morning stroll through Sulham woods, pleasantly rewards the visitor with the aromatic incense of a typical autumn morn. Here, great oaks stand in silent majesty. Dappled sunlight struggles fitfully through the canopy provided by the statuesque beeches, while underfoot the carpet of russet and gold illustrates the passing of yet another season, confirming nature's preparation for the onslaught of winter. The hawthorne, adorned with gossamer threads possess a beauty peculiarly its own.

The tranquil peace is profound; suddenly a startled jay raucously indicates displeasure at man's intrusion into its worldly solitude. At the crescendo of its tirade, other denizens of the wood join in; the magpie vies successfully in a cacophony of strident discord, paradoxically the wood pigeon's monotonous note falls silent, in a bid to escape detection. I thrill to catch a glimpse of the timid muntjac indicative of the scarcity of its natural cover; there is evidence of the passage of the fox but daylight sightings are infrequent due to its adroitness in camouflage. The badger's spoor is readily detected where its four claws have soured the soil. Its nocturnal habit makes a sighting extremely rare. On an earlier occasion I was fortunate to chance upon one with its mate near the old site of Sadlers Farm. On seeing me he displayed unbelievable selfishness towards his mate by ambling as fast as he could towards the cover of the wood. At the boundary line, only when he felt safe, did he bother to turn to see how his mate fared, who was some thirty yards in the rear.

A little further on I see an industrious squirrel intent upon secreting its cache of nuts, oblivious of human approach until the last moment, then quickly ascending a tree to its natural habitat, whilst nearby its cousin hastily retreats with a flash of white tail signalling warning to other members of the colony.

Traversing the escarpment on the southern section of the wood, I encounter a splendid stand of fir, completely untouched by the ravage of storm or fire. I delight in tracing part of the old road which existed prior to 1826 (the date when the present Sulham Hall was created), the indentations faint in places, testifying to the passage of numerous carts of yesteryear. Standing on the summit, I mourn the passing of the pine marten, prolific within these woods a couple of centuries ago. here it is not too difficult to imagine rural life at the turn of the eighteenth century.

My walk completed, I am very conscious that my largely untrained eye must have missed a wealth of wild life present in these delightful woods. Nevertheless, I feel very grateful that, despite the havoc wrought by the February storms and the summer fires to the northern section, Sulham Woods remain largely unspoiled by the passage of time: it is truly a heritage to be treasured.

Bill Fisher

## FUTURE PR<XIWF.tE

15th. February Place Names & their Meanings -  
Michael Bayley  
at The Gatehouse. Bpn,

15 th. March AGM at The Gatehouse. 8pm.  
Followed by an evening browsing  
through material brought in by  
members - a chance to see some  
of the "archives".

19th. April 'Rabbit's Friends & Relations" -  
Catherine Davis  
(A title to keep you guessing)  
at The Gatehouse. 8pm.

17th. May To be arranged

21st. June Walkabout to Whitchurch. 8pm.

19th. July Informal Evening  
at The Gatehouse. 8pm.

At the AGM there will an election for the new officers and committee. A form is enclosed for you to nominate one or more people if you wish to do so. The present members are willing to stand for another year

COMMITTEE

Chairman: Cliff DEBNEY, 8 Huckleberry Close,  
Purley on T. 0734 413223

Secretary: Rita DENHAM, The Mirnosas, Purley lane,  
Purley on T. 0734 844682

Treasurer: James HESLOP, Thornwood, Purley lane,  
Purley on T. 0734 842982

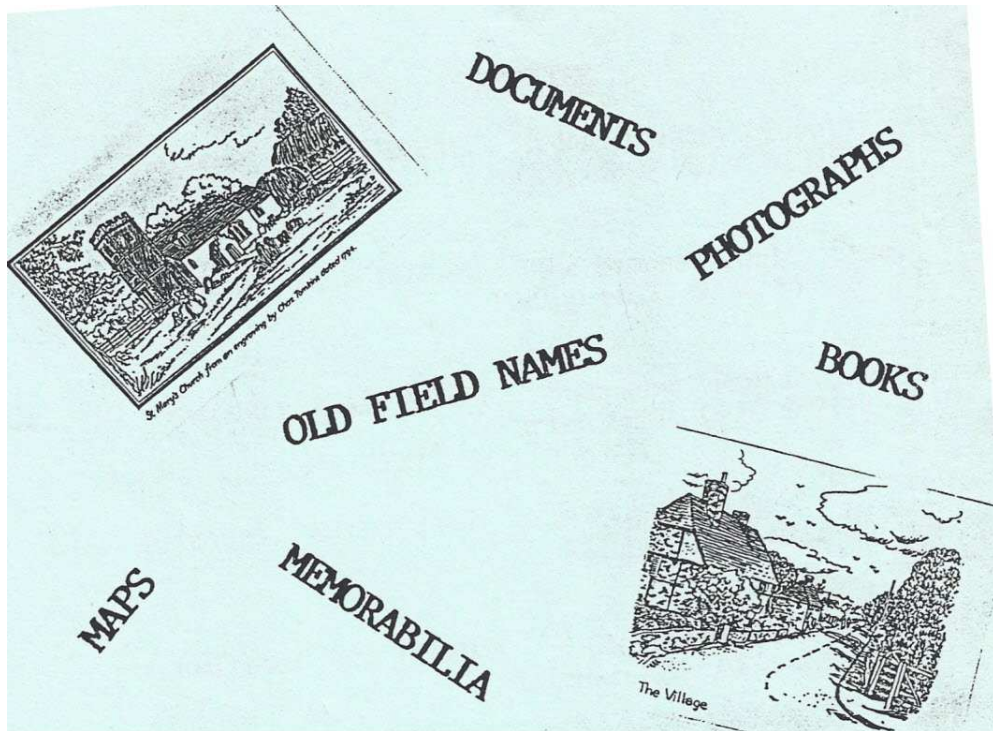
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Committee: John CHAPMAN 5 Cecil Aldin Drive,  
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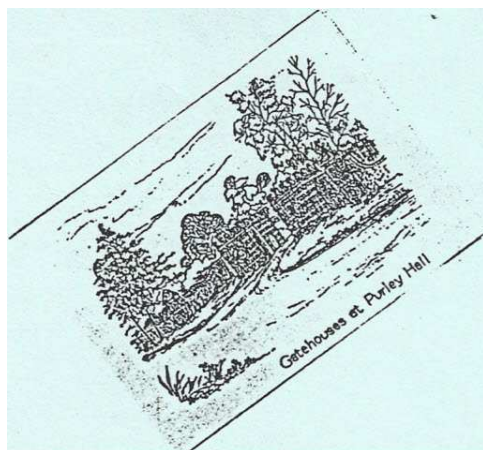
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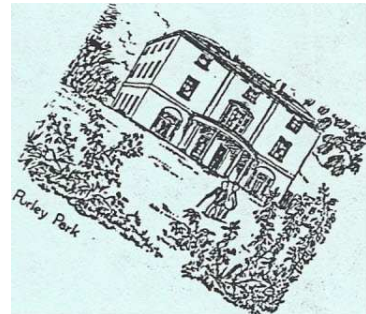


## RESEARCH



## TRANSCRIPTS

## PURLEY PUBLICATIONS



## PAMPHLETS