



Project Purley

PURLEY'S LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

OCTOBER 1995 NEWSLETTER

No. 39

The Barn Project

Although the Opening of the Barn on its new site in Beech Road took place four months ago, this is the first time we have published a newsletter since that date and the first time I (as Chairman) have had the opportunity to put into print my thanks to EVERYONE who helped at any time during the six week project. Many members, quietly and unobtrusively, helped in different ways - cutting, pasting, getting laser copies made, casting their artistic eye over layouts etc. The turn out on "assembly day" was more than gratifying. We found several members had a flair for mounting the display boards (once the intricacies of assembling the boards had been mastered) and the operation was completed much more quickly than we had dared to hope when we began in the morning.

On the Saturday and Sunday there were yet more helpers who were able to talk about the exhibits with the visitors or take them to the section in which they were interested. We received many compliments and requests to repeat the displays as a regular event. As the last person walked out of the door a well organised plan swept into action and the place was clear in an hour. In fact we had timetabled people to help until at least 7pm and they were more than surprised to find everything finished.

On the following Monday morning I felt somewhat "lost". For almost six weeks I had made my way to the Parish Rooms and had become part of a group with common interests and aims and friendship. I think Jan and I will miss the times we spent poring over the minute details of pictures and the discoveries we made! Yes, we enjoyed the experience.

Project Purley has one more vote of thanks and that is to someone who is not a member - Ron Denman. Without his help in producing all the captions and text our project would have become a nightmare. It seemed that whatever size, shape or style we asked, he was able to do it at very short notice. Not only that, he deciphered our scribble and corrected our spelling mistakes! Thank you Ron from us all.

Pat DEANE



REVIEW OF MEETINGS

On the 19th of May, Clive Williams visited us to talk about our neighbouring village Basildon, bringing with him his portable exhibition. We heard how the seed of local history was sown, when Clive dug up in his garden a 19th century brick made in Basildon. The brick fascinated him and he was anxious to discover more about the local brick making industry. A good deal of research was done on this topic, until Clive felt that he was able to give a talk on the Basildon Brick Makers. One thing led to another and before long the brick making gave way to other local history, until he became totally absorbed in Basildon and its history, travelling to all parts of southern England in quest of missing links and confirmation of research. The exhibition of photographs and memorabilia was excellent. The talk, delivered with a great sense of humour was very enjoyable the basis of which is contained in Clive Williams published book, appropriately entitled "Basildon." There will be only one run of this book, so a quick purchase was advised.

On June 16th a party of 19 Members and friends met at the National Trust car park on Streatley Hill ready to walk-about at The Holies. James Heslop had done the preparation in readiness for a walk over territory which was new to most of us. The entrance to The Holies was across the road, through a lightly wooded area on a slight incline. The evening was perfect for walking. As we walked we came across a variety of large patterns set out in stones and flints. Imaginations ran riot and one or two members suggested that we needed black pointed hats! The terrain became steeper until we were on quite a high level before beginning on a slight descent down the other side of the hill when the river Thames and Goring and Streatley came into view. It was a picture post card view, despite the telegraph wires and a fitting climax to the walk. We retraced our steps and decided while the light held, to continue in the other direction onto Larden Chase. After a short walk we reached a point where there was a far reaching view across the valley. All in all it was a very interesting evening, but it was the scent of the wild honeysuckle at The Holies that I shall remember in the dark days of winter.

This year Ron and I were very pleased to welcome everyone to The Mimosas for the Society Summer Barbecue on July 21st. The summer had not yet developed into equatorial conditions and the evening was pleasantly warm. It was a relaxing and informal occasion when a barbecue meal was enjoyed in the company of other members and guests. The garden was at its best and everyone enjoyed the out of doors, until dark.

The Society's new venture this year was in the form of a summer outing. This took place on Tuesday August 15th, when Dave Roscoe led a party visit to The Watercress Line, the preserved Mid Hants Railway. It was an extremely hot day, and every little bit of shade was keenly sought. Once Henry Bordiss and Dave Roscoe had secured our tickets and the period cloakroom had been inspected, we set off in a group to see the watercress beds. In its season, the watercress was supplied daily to Covent Garden transported on the train which came to be known as the Watercress Line. We went our own ways to explore the lovely town of Arlesford, and for lunch, meeting up again for the delights of the steam railway and all the nostalgic sights and sounds and to remember how black soot is! Whilst the grown-ups were wallowing in nostalgia, the younger set were getting all excited about Thomas the Tank Engine and his friends Henry (or was it James) and Diesel who were busily puffing up and down the line. Dave Roscoe's brief on the facts and figures of the preservation of the railway was an introduction to the talk which he will be giving in October.

FUTURE MEETINGS.

- 15th Sept. 1995 Biscuits and Royals- David Downs. A review will appear in the next edition of The Newsletter.
- 20th Oct. 1995 The Preservation of the Mid Hants Railway- David Roscoe.
- 10th Nov. 1995 More about Reading Abbey - Leslie Cram.
- 8th Dec. 1995. Christmas Social Evening.

Rita Denman Hon. Sec

TALES OF THE BARN DISPLAY **OR** **YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AN EXPERT**

As an ignoramus, or at least a less knowledgeable member of Project Purley, I thought others might be comforted by my experience of working with our 'expert historians' on the Barn display. When John Chapman suggested the idea of a display for the official opening of the Purley barn on the 24th June I volunteered as a willing pair of hands, but was acutely aware that I had neither knowledge nor material to contribute. They say a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but I was soon to find out that no knowledge at all can be a great advantage! Most of the material came from John himself with a large helping from Pat Deane and Cliff and Jean Debney, but our first problem was what to leave out. Between them they have so much material that given enough time and energy we could have filled six barns with displays. And this is where I came in. I found no difficulty at all in playing the role of uninformed villager and therefore influence what was included and also the way it was to be put over. Even our experts sometimes get carried away with quoting reference numbers for sources or defining exactly how wide a lancet has to be to become a window. What we want is to be told a story, isn't it?

Trying to keep this in everyone's mind meant that I had to be quite bossy at times, and as Rick will tell you, that's an area where I am an expert!

I know I am not alone in feeling slightly intimidated by the skills of our experts, as other members have mentioned being very nervous about volunteering small displays of their own, but is so worthwhile. I learnt a tremendous amount during the five or six weeks but the most important lesson was that our experts didn't look upon me as an ignoramus but more as a new audience for their knowledge that they were all more than ready to impart.

So next time we are looking for volunteers, come and join in. Remember, no knowledge at all can be a great advantage.

Jan JONES

ECHOES OF THE MENPES FAMILY

Members may recall the piece in the September 1994 Newsletter where John Chapman reported on the visit of Joan McBride and her husband to Purley, from Australia, seeking information about her well-known ancestor, Mortimer Menpes, who had connections with Purley and Pangbourne. Joan's Great Grandmother was a sister of Mortimer Menpes who was, of course, born in Australia.

I had occasion to contact her in July because I had seen in the Daily Telegraph of 4 July a notice inserted by the Treasury Solicitor London, which I felt would be of interest to her.

The notice referred to one Michael Mortimer Menpes who had died intestate in October 1993 at Oxford, leaving an estate of about £50,000. The kin of the deceased were asked to apply to the Treasury solicitor otherwise steps would be taken to administer the estate which would then go to the Crown.

From the records at St Catherine's I learned that Michael Menpes was born at Oxford in 1939 and died there in 1993, a bachelor aged 54. His father was a Walter Menpes who I think would be a grandson of Mortimer Menpes.

I have subsequently heard from Joan McBride who had written to London with the relevant information, and they had replied to the effect that she is a blood relative of the deceased, indeed a distant cousin. The degree of relationship is insufficient in English Law of Intestate Succession to share in the estate in priority to the Crown.

A disappointment for the McBrides and indeed for me as I had started the whole thing off.

Joan has asked me if there is any means of finding out if anyone was eligible or whether the Crown benefited. I shall make some enquiries about this. I am keeping in touch with her.

Millie BORDISS

THE OLD OAK TREE

A Romance

How many winters have you known?

How many springtimes have you grown?

How many swaines have dallied here

And how many lasses shed a tear?

When were you in your prime?

When was your summertime?

When did you hear the huntsman's cry?

When did you see the falcon fly?

When did the forest disappear

and leave you lonely standing here?

Your body now is but a cage,

Your branches show the hurricane's rage.

Youth treated you with scorn

And left you burnt, scarred and torn.

At last, revered by Purley's folk,

Still - you have the heart of oak.

Rita Denman



THE KITCHENER BATTALIONS PROJECT

Just over two years ago Reading University Extra-mural Department advertised a workshop on World War One. As it looked interesting I signed up for it, little realising that it was going to change my life. What had looked at first like a well organised study course with a lecturer having all the materials to hand turned out to be research project with no starting point and no ground rules. A small group of us met at Bulmershe and spent several weeks thrashing out what we were going to do. There was general agreement that we would be studying the Royal Berkshire Regiment and that in order to provide some focus we would concentrate on the three Kitchener Battalions which served on the western front, the 5th, 6th, and 8th.

We were a mixed bunch. Three were already quite knowledgeable about the subject, two of us were computer buffs, one was only really interested in the Boer War, one a police inspector and another was a mediaeval historian. We were joined later by a librarian. Our first step was to troll around to see what materials were to hand. One group looked up the war diaries at the Public Record Office, another group read through all the local papers of the period another started tracking down the present day families of the men whose names arose out of the research. Very soon an impressive amount of material began to accumulate and it was then that the computer came into its own to store index the information.

After about a year we decided to concentrate on the Battle of Loos and see whether we could publish a booklet to commemorate the battle's 80th anniversary on 25th September 1995. This we eventually managed to achieve through the good offices of the University's Graphic Arts Department as two students used our material for their course work project. The result was entitled "Heeding the Call" and was published just in time for the anniversary. A small number of us paid a visit to the battlefield on the anniversary date and joined in the local commemorations which was attended by representatives from France, Belgium, Germany and Britain. The commemorations focused on planting a tree in the middle of what was the no-mans-land to replace the one which had been shot to pieces 80 years ago.

In many ways the information we managed to dig out has radically changed our perspective of the First World War. The men we were following were ordinary people from all walks of life who responded to the call of King and Country with an enthusiasm that would be virtually impossible to match today. We were using personal letters and papers which had never been made public before. They revealed a great deal about how the men felt and the appalling conditions under which they were obliged to live. Cold food, rain, mud, rats, the stench and the noise let alone the constant fear of being blown to bits at any moment. We began to appreciate the raw courage which they exhibited, the fear of letting down their friends was far stronger than the fear for their own safety. What started out as a short-term study workshop has for most of us turned into a lifetime interest. We are now moving from Loos on to the Somme and hope to publish the next book in time for its 80th anniversary on 1st July 1996.

John CHAPMAN



The Kitchener Battalions of the
Royal Berkshire Regiment
at the Battle of Loos 1915

we sailed" [from Jamaica]. This refers to Anthony Morris, who died on 11 June 1809 aged 7 months 15 days. He wrote again in October that the body pickled in rum would soon be arriving on Captain Sowden's ship. "Phillip & Janet" were to dress him and place him in a cedar and lead coffin at the Wharf when 10 guns were to be fired. After a day in Belleisle House, prayers were to be read as the baby was placed in the "Belleisle Family Vault" next to his sister. At the same time, all the plantation negroes were to have a holiday and, wearing "Scalves and hat bands", to attend the ceremony at the Vault.

The money required for living expenses were controlled by Messrs Armstrong and the letters include several applications to them for advances. Despite promises to keep his spending down, AGS received a gig from Robert Giles, coach maker, in September and ordered a landau lined with blue "mor" and leather with patent axles to be delivered within two months at a maximum cost of £300 for Mrs Storer's use.

Captain Sowden on whose ship they had sailed from Jamaica to London, seems to have retained some of their "cloaths" in the Docks. In September AGS asked Messrs Armstrongs to make enquiries and later, when nothing had arrive, to advance money for replacements. In October he drew £150 on them to "purchase many things....for the little stranger" with a promise not to draw any more.

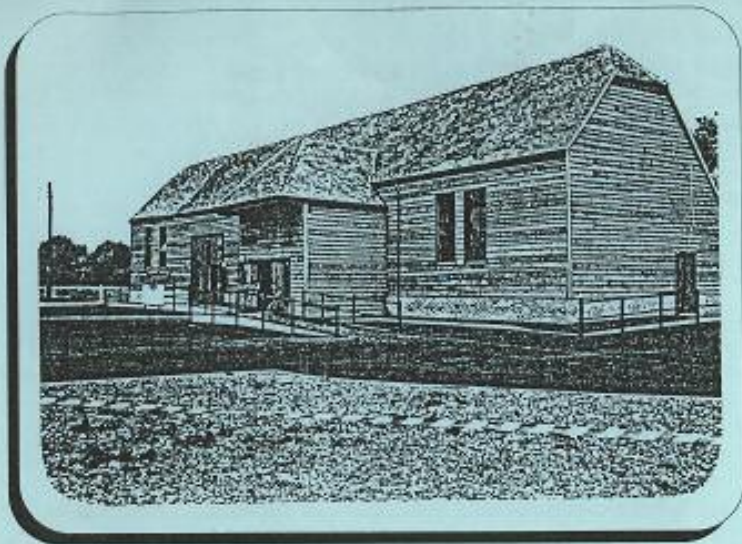
There is a gap in the letters between 30 November and 18 December when he wrote "Mrs Storer & my little one are doing as well as possible". This refers to Elizabeth Fanny Storer who was born at Purley Park on 3 December and baptised at Purley Church the following January. This baby and 4 more, including the Major, all born at Purley survived to adulthood. The 8th and youngest child was born and died in Jamaica.

Further work needs to be done to identify the addresses, etc. of the correspondents and the persons named in the letters.

Jean DEBNEY

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Dismantling work on Purley's ancient barn
at Trenthams old site
began at the beginning of January 1995
This photo shows rebuilding completed
at Beech Road Recreation Ground
just before the opening
on 24th June 1995

