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Project Purley

PURLEY'S LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 1996 NEWSLETTER

No. 40

HAPPY NEW YEAR



A Happy New Year to Project Purley members and also to friends who have supported us during the past year.

During 1995 we had many interesting meetings and we hope to continue to invite speakers to talk on a wide range of topics during 1996.

Project Purley's involvement with the opening of The Barn at its new site was the highlight of the year. It has also given us a worthwhile archival display source. We hope to add to this and set up further displays.

One of the main driving sources during that time was Jan Jones and we are sorry that she has recently had a spell in hospital. We all wish her well and look forward to seeing her again at the meetings before too long.

We would also like to thank Jan and Rick for their hospitality at the meetings, allowing us to descend on their home so frequently.

Pat Deane (Chairman)

REVIEW OF MEETINGS

The first meeting of the autumn programme on 15th September was local history of a different kind. We were very pleased to welcome member David Downs as our speaker, who gave a talk entitled Biscuits and Royals. David has made a comprehensive study of The Reading Football Club, and as a lifelong enthusiast he was well versed in its history and has also gathered together a considerable collection of memorabilia. We heard about the ups and downs of the club from its amateur beginnings in 1871 to date. The story behind each item of memorabilia was fascinating. The discovery of a discoloured metal disc at a car boot sale in the Midlands, which proved to be a gold Club commemoration medal was one such story. Also on display was the blue and white strip of one of the early members of the team. This was discovered underneath the bed on the demise of this particular player. There was much to interest the sporting and non-sporting among us.

On 20th October another member David Roscoe, gave a talk about the preserved Mid-Hants Railway The Watercress Line. This was a follow up to the Society Outing to the Watercress Line in August. To set the scene David referred to the transport of the past and the development of steam power. The Mid Hants Railway Plc is a charity which employs very few people. The Mid Hants Railway Preservation Society provides all the labour, which is voluntary, the object being to provide a pleasurable and educational experience and to preserve a tiny bit of the old railways. This is being done very successfully, as the enthusiasm of the Project Purley members can testify.

On November 10th Leslie Cram of the Museum of Reading, made a welcome return to tell us More about Reading Abbey. The talk was accompanied by slides of maps and pictures the object being to discover what can be learned about the Abbey from printed material. We learned of the enormous hold that the Abbey exerted over the town of Reading and the dissatisfaction felt by the burghers of the town, who

railed against this restriction for many years, eventually gaining a compromise.

The daily routine of the monks and the wonder of the abbey building coming to life in our imagination never fails to hold us spellbound.

The Christmas Social evening was held at the Gatehouse on the 8th December. Once again the home of Jan and Rick Jones provided the perfect setting for a relaxing evening. The mulled wine, to Jean Debney's recipe was delicious, and the buffet provided by members was of the usual high standard. The 1930's parlour games were a source of great amusement and the evening was voted one of the best ever.

FUTURE MEETINGS.

January 19th 1996. Humphry Repton - Landscape Gardener and Water Colourist - Ben Viljoen.

February 16th 1996. The River Thames - George Fielder.

March 15th 1996. Annual General Meeting.

Rita Denman Hon. Sec

BERNARD THEOBALD
Extracts from his Oral History tape - 1989

I originated from the other side of the river, a little area called Tokers Green, and I lived there with my parents until the end of the war when I joined the Royal Navy. And during the war I got married, I'm still married to the same woman, damned nearly fifty years, and at the end of the war we came here to Westbury, which is just 42 years ago, and I've been farming here ever since. We took over this old fashioned mixed farm, a good old fashioned mixed farm. We had a bit of everything. Two men milked 40 cows and thought they were going to be employed when I stopped milking, and I planted the vines over 20 years ago now. When I stopped, one girl and myself were milking 120 cows. In the early days apart from the cows we had a bit of everything. A small breeding herd of sows, laying hens, cockerels, turkeys, ducks, geese, guinea fowl. We grew wheat, barley, oats, maize, kale, mangles, potatoes, linseed, tobacco - you name it we grew it, - a good old fashioned mixed farm.

Did you say tobacco?

Yes! Good tobacco. I made lovely tobacco and I used to smoke it in my pipe. And we dried the tobacco on wires hung across the backs of the cows in the cowshed. When we only had forty cows they were tied up by the neck in the cowshed and we dried the tobacco beautifully in there. We can grow good tobacco in this country.

My vineyard is the first in Europe to be planned on this method. (Geneva Double) - something of which I am very proud. And the other bit of mythology I avoided, partly because of my training in the Navy which led me to question everything - I still do - I drive them all mad here because I say Why, why, why? and I said to the English growers 'Why aren't you growing red?' And they gave a shudder of horror and said 'You can't do it in England'. The stupid clots hadn't tried. That's the first thing I've got against them. And secondly they hadn't used their brains! Due second though would have told them that every country in the world where wine is grown, red and white are grown together.

And there is nothing in the physiology of the vine itself, or in wine making, which says that red wine requires any conditions different from, or

different to the conditions required for making quality white wine. And I believe in the power of reason, and when I put down the vineyard out there I put one third down to black grapes for red wine, and in 1976 I became the first English vineyard to sell red wine commercially, and I'm still the only one with red wine in commercial quantities, and the only one with a high quality red.

As a tenant farmer do you have to get Julian Rose's permission to change it and to plant a vineyard or do you just organise it as you want?

Mm, mm.

How come you got hooked on this wine growing thing?

This is where we came in.

From wine growing you make a lot of money?

Milking was becoming more and more difficult and growing wine is much more interesting.

Do you tread the grapes?

Mm, mm. This year, in fact, we did it literally. The crusher broke down, the spare part I couldn't get for a couple of days, so we disinfected our Wellington boots

Did you

.....and climbed into a tank and crushed them by foot. It worked very well, in fact it didn't take any longer than the crusher and made a better job of it. It was very hard work.

You'll get a prize for that, for the unusual flavour in a few years

of the disinfectant!

OBITUARY

KEN MERCER

Ken Mercer died on the 14th December 1995 and with his death Project Purley lost one of its founding members and a friend.

Because of failing health he was not always able to attend meetings but he never failed to take an interest in the society's activities. He made several contributions to the Society's Newsletter over the years and we shall also miss the various missives that he fired in our direction about things he considered important.

Ken didn't only write letters, he spoke out at meetings and, most of all, gave advice on the historical matters of Purley and the surrounding area, especially relating to things which had taken place during his long life in the district. He was also a generous man and the archives of the Society have benefited from his gifts of photographs and papers.

Our thoughts go out to Barbara who has lost her lifes' companion and we wish her strength and good health for the future. Like Ken, she also takes a keen interest in what is happening and we are pleased she continues to take part in Project Purley's activities.

Cliff and Jean Debney

PROJECT PURLEY NEWSLETTER

Interest in the local history of Purley on Thames in Berkshire was stimulated initially by a series of talks given to the Pangbourne WEA at the Memorial Hall by Mr Turner in 1970. Following on from this an exhibition of Purley Past was put on as part of the Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1977. This exhibition yielded an enormous amount of materials in the form of scrap books, photographs and maps and stimulated a lot of reminiscing. A few years later Cliff and Jean Debney moved into the village and Jean set up a project group to transcribe the parish registers. In 1981 a decision was taken to build an extension onto the church and as the professional archaeologists were not interested in doing an exploratory dig a group of parishioners led by John Chapman decided to do it themselves. As a result of these two initiatives a number of people found themselves sharing a common interest in the history of Purley and began to meet more regularly. Finally it was decided to form a society and following an inaugural meeting on 4th May 1982 Project Purley was formed with the objective 'To study and document the history of Purley'.

The first Newsletter was published in July 1982 and both Project Purley and the Newsletter are still going strong. Several booklets have been published over the years to record some of the findings of members of the society and now there has been a request that we make available earlier copies of the newsletters to enable people to complete their collections. As this will be a strictly limited edition please let either Pat Deane or Millie Bordiss know that you would like a set so that we can print sufficient quantities.

The first volume reproduces the first series which were produced in A4 format between 1982 and 1985. The second volume covers the period January 1986 to September 1987 by which time the format had switched to A5 and the historical interest in the contents had greatly increased. Further volumes are planned to cover the period to the end of 1993.

The project was stimulated by a decision made by the Committee to get an ISSN number for Project Purley Newsletter. This we applied for and it has now been issued to us and this edition is the first to bear the new number ISSN 1361 5599. As we had been asked for back-numbers it was thought sensible to do a special set on acid free paper so that it would not crumble away over the years as almost all of the paper publications produced since about 1880 are doomed to do. But once we had gone to all the trouble to set up a print of back numbers it seemed sensible to extend the availability. So here we are!

John Chapman

EDITOR'S NOTES

We hope members enjoy the contents of The Newsletter. We are always in need of articles, and members are very welcome to write a piece for inclusion.

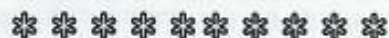
I am quite sure that many of you have memories of times past in the Purley/Tilehurst area, and maybe you may have something to tell us of your own family history, again with Berkshire connections. So Please! Put pen to paper!

Members will be aware that the Berkshire Family History Society has opened its research centre in Prospect School, Honey End Lane, Tilehurst. Volunteers from B.F.H.S. are on duty Tuesday evenings from 7.00 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. and on Wednesdays 10.00 a.m. until 4.00 p.m.

Everyone is welcome during those times to use the facilities for their own research.

There is a wealth of information to be seen, including the 1881 Census on Fiche, received as the Counties are completed, and a great deal of material referring to Berkshire, and much, much more. To B.F.H.S. members admission is free and to non-members a charge is made of £1.00 per session.

It is well worth a visit for anyone interested in our County and indeed, their own family history research.



Members are reminded that the subscription to Project Purley is now due. The amount remains at £3.00, and Henry Bordiss will be pleased to collect as soon as possible.

COMMITTEE

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The river is a living thing which gives Purley its character. Our picture is a more unusual view of Mapledurham Lock taken from north of the island, looking south.

