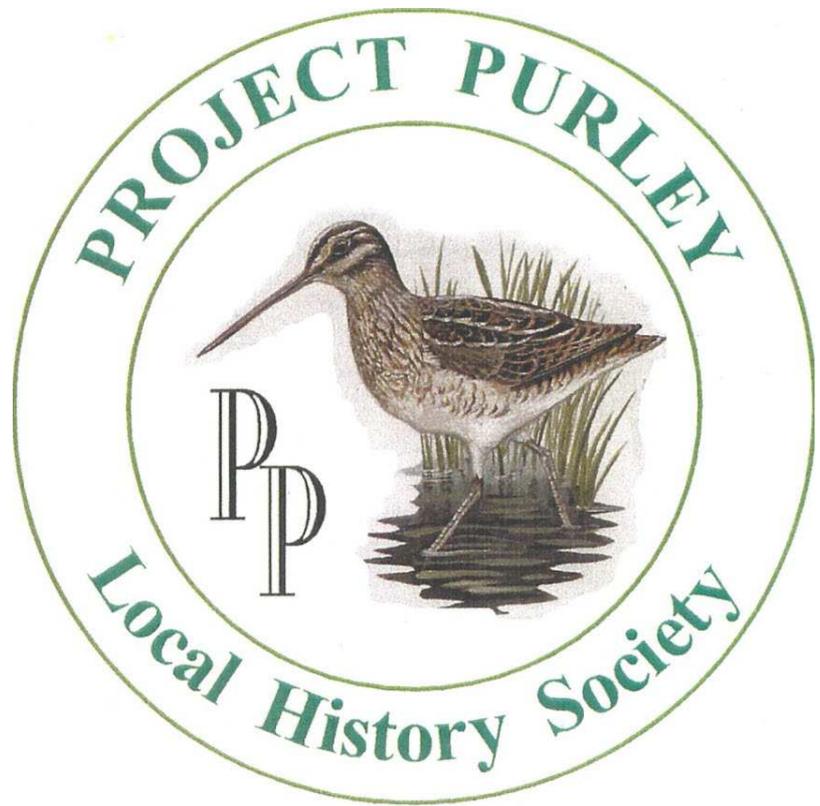


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PURLEY'S LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

JANUARY 2000 NEWSLETTER

No. 52

### **FUTURE MEETINGS**

Due to the special Millennium Events there will be no regular monthly meetings of Project Purley during 2000. Details of all events to be presented throughout the year may be found on page 14.

### **EDITORS NOTE**

Additional copies of this Millennium issue of the Project Purley Newsletter at £1.00 each, may be obtained from the Editor Tel. (0118) 9415777

## NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

As I write this all of Purley is covered in snow and Christmas and the new millennium is just a matter of days away. Now is the time to reflect on the year that is passing away and the exciting new year that is about to begin.

During the past year the committee has concentrated on planning our programme of millennium celebrations but has also found time to arrange a varied series of talks, walks and social occasions that have been informative and, we hope, enjoyable.

By now you must all be aware of the very full schedule that we have planned for the year 2000. Instead of a monthly talk we will be having a lecture every second month, a Court Baron, two exhibitions and a weekend of Beating the Parish Bounds. These events will be open to the public so do ensure that you get your tickets early to avoid disappointment.

Amongst all this we will also be having our summer barbecue and a Christmas social; events that will be restricted to members and invited guests.

One of the great pleasures of belonging to Project Purley is the enthusiasm of members and the generosity with which they give their time. I am therefore sure that the time that we will all have to give to ensure that all the events we are planning will be a success, will be forthcoming.

Already the sale of our millennium tea-towels has been a great success.

January will see the launching of the millennium booklet, a joint venture between Project Purley and the Parish Council and written by John Chapman. I am sure that you will all want your copy and that you will ensure that as many as your friends and acquaintances as possible know about it.

We do hope that you enjoy this special edition of the Newsletter and the memories that it invokes of past events.

A happy New Millennium to all.

Ben Viljoen.

## THE GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY COMES TO PURLEY (PART 3)

### The Gauge Problem

When Brunel conceived the GWR it was as a broad gauge railway using gauge of 7 feet rather than the standard gauge of 4' 8" which most other British Railways had adopted. As it turned out he made a mistake in specifying both rolling stock and track as being the same gauge and the track had to be eased out to 7' 0" to make them work together. This gave the GWR trains a much greater stability and they could run considerably faster because of this. However it became very difficult to transfer goods from one system to the other, necessitating unloading and reloading at transfer points. As a result of an enquiry into the problem, set up by Parliament in 1846, the Gauge Act of 1846 was passed. This decreed that outside of the territory of the Great Western Railway only standard gauge track could be laid.

Undeterred, the Directors of the Great Western continued to expand the network, although outside of the stipulated territory they were forced to adopt standard gauge. As far back as 1846 an agreement was reached which would bring Standard gauge to Reading when the line from Basingstoke to Oxford was authorised as part of the Manchester and Southampton Railway. This was effected by laying a third rail so that the trains ran on one of the three rails and the broad and standard gauge trains each used one of the other two. This made points and junctions very complicated and added considerably to the cost of track maintenance.

The final decision to abandon the broad gauge was not taken until February 1891 but by then most of the trains through Purley were standard gauge. The next year all the remaining broad-gauge-only lines were converted. The now useless third rail was left in place for a while but gradually it was all removed. It is assumed this was done at Purley at the same time as the new track for the widening was laid.

## The Widening in 1891

By the end of the 1860s the railway was in a very healthy financial position. Both the value of the stock and the dividends had peaked in 1872. There was a recession and a coal strike in 1873 which caused a slight set back but traffic was rising steadily and there was really no competition. The company sought powers to widen the railway from Paddington to Didcot and the first stage was approved in 1873 as far as West Drayton.

The section through Purley required yet more land acquisition to the south and the boundaries of the newly acquired GWR property were marked with cast iron plates set upon a length of broad gauge track and three of these survive in Purley.

As the new track was to be standard gauge only it was not necessary to build bridges to Brunel's standards. Hence if you look carefully at the four bridges across Purley cutting you can see the difference in the size of the arches with standard gauge to the north and broad gauge to the south. The new tracks through Purley were opened in 1891.



Purley Cutting - Note the two arches of the bridge over the railway at Purley Lane. The one on the left was built to span the broad gauge in 1837, while the one on the right was built in 1890 to span only a standard gauge line.

## The Trackwork

Initially the line was laid with standard broad gauge iron rails known as bridge rail which weighed 43 lbs. per yard. This was nailed to longitudinal timbers over thin wedges of hardwood so that the lines were canted slightly to the centre of the track. They also allowed a certain amount of give in the track. The longitudinal timbers were spaced by similar timbers or cross bars of iron which spanned the two tracks. These cross bars were then

spiked deep into the ground to secure the whole structure and then the track was ballasted. The timbers were soaked in biochloride of mercury in tanks beforehand in a process known as Kyanising. This was replaced by creosote in 1840 which remained the method of preserving sleepers until they were replaced by concrete in the 1960s and 1970s.

By 1867 the old iron rails were proving troublesome and so the decision was taken to relay all the mainlines with steel rails. The rails laid in Purley were double headed rails set in chairs and laid on lateral sleepers which had by now become preferred to the old longitudinal timbers. The idea was that when worn the rail could be reversed and the other side used, however in practice the weight on the chairs caused slight indentations in the undersurface, so that when reversed the wheels ran unevenly and chattered.

Another area where Purley is different is that the springs which take water from the hill above make the cutting very damp and as a result the railway have had to use special non-corroding metal for the rails in the cutting.

### **Finale**

The Great Western Railway has long gone. Yet its spirit is still very much alive. It became part of British Railways in 1948 and over the years its unique identity was eroded. Today however we can see once more trains bearing the Great Western livery travelling at speeds even Brunel would not have dreamt of. When Major Storer died in 1902 the Great Western was approaching its hey day, but despite having been given a gold pass for first class travel for life, he never ever used his privilege. However as his funeral cortege was passing over New Hill Bridge, a train running below sounded its whistle and startled the horses so that the major was borne at breakneck speed down to the church - As one old timer remarked at the time - *"That's the fastest the old b---- has ever travelled"*

John Chapman

## OVER THE YEARS - PROJECT PURLEY OUT AND ABOUT



Left: An Early Inhabitant of Purlev Skeleton known as KD discovered during the dig around St. Mary's Church in July 1982 prior to the building of the Church Extension

Right: Re-enactment of the General Court Baron held at "The Red Lyon" 10 October 1986

Left to Right: Ben Viljoen (Joseph Scrace, farmer & village constable), Tom Robinson, (John Sherwood, farmer & Jury member), Vincent West (Robert Macreth Esq. Lord of the Manor of Purley Magna), John Chapman (John Emmons, victualler of The Red Lyon), John Titterton, (Mathias Deane Esq. Steward of the Manor & Attorney of Reading)



Left: "Villagers" relaxing after attending the Court

including Jean Debney, Ben Viljoen, Barbara Mercer, Pat Deane, Peter Debney, Margaret Hughes, John Titterton, Cliff Debney, John Chapman & Sylvia Conquest



Left:

Christmas Party 1988

Jan & Rick Jones at

The Gate House

Right:

Visit to Sui ham House  
July 1989

Various members  
including Jan Jones,  
James Heslop, Ben  
Viljoen, Dorothy Viljoen  
and Pat Deane



Left:

Visit to Hardwick Hous.  
June 1992

Members in front of th  
fireplace in Queen Hizobi  
reception chamber, inclu  
Trevor Cotton, Cliff Debr  
Ben Viljoen, David Downs  
Jan Jones

Right:

Barbecue at 183 Long Lone  
July 1994

Members relaxing include  
Ron Denman, John  
Chapman, Henry Bordiss,  
Millie Bordiss, Trevor Cotton  
& mother, Joan Ash, Jan  
Jones and swimmers Edna  
Bint and Katie Jones



Left:

Christmas Party at The  
Gate House - 1994

Edna Bint, Dorothy  
Viljoen, Ann Betts and  
Millie Bordiss

Right:

Preparation of Exhibition for  
Barn Opening in June 1995

John Chapman, Pat Deane,  
Jan Jones, Henry Bordiss and  
Millie Bordiss





Left:

Visit to Englefield - June 1996

Back Row: Cliff Debney, Pau Osborn, Marian Dabbs, James Hes Rita Hine, Pat Heslop, Jean Debney

Front Row: Tom Hine, David DO\ Marion Peer, Rosemary Wigmore, Viljoen, Rita Denman, Dorothy Vilje Millie Bordiss. Henry Bordiss

Right:

Visit to LocQQ- May J 99]

Dorothy Viljoen, Barbara Mercer.  
Ben Viljoen, John Chapman



Left:

Visit to the Inchnes Pollee Museum, sulhornste.  
February 1998



Back views of Jean Debney, Ann Betts, Edna Binta Henry Bordiss while John Chapman talks to the Curator of the Museum

## REVIEW OF MEETINGS

On September 17th, Gordon Raeburn, Chief Executive of the Purley Park Trust, gave a talk about the work of the Trust since its beginnings in 1948, when Hugh Duncan and Tom Parry decided to combine their efforts in caring for disadvantaged young people. As an outcome, Purley Park was purchased, the aim being to provide a family atmosphere where disadvantaged residents could lead a full and happy life. At the outset the residents were teenagers and young men. Mr Raeburn told of the highs and the lows in the fortunes of the Trust, the difficulties and successes that had been experienced in the 50 years that Purley Park has been its home, bringing us up to the present time, when a way has to be found to bring the facilities up to modern standards. Mr Raeburn spoke passionately about the Trust's care and responsibility for its residents and the determination to give them a happy home 'for life' as promised by Hugh Duncan and Tom Parry.

On October 15th Barry Boulton gave a talk about his ancestral village of Shinfield. Barry has traced his forebears in Shinfield to 1742, seven generations having lived there and where he also was born and spent the early years of his life. Shinfield has many name derivations and it is believed that there was a Roman Road in the vicinity and also a 'green lane' which ran to Silchester. Barry had many anecdotes about his forebears and their life in the village. The talk was accompanied by beautiful slides taken in the early part of the 20th century.

Sue Handscombe's talk on 19th November was a story of perseverance in getting her book published. Sue arrived in Tilehurst from London in 1966. A teacher of home economics, she had no background in either local history, or publishing and her introduction to local history came in 1988 when St Michael's Tilehurst celebrated its 800th anniversary. As part of the celebrations an up-date of the church history was suggested and Sue was asked to take this on. This was the start of a growing interest that extended from the church to the whole of Tilehurst. Sue related the trials and tribulations of getting into publication and which eventually resulted in her very successful 'Tilehurst' books.

The Society Christmas social evening was held at The Gatehouse, at the kind invitation of Rick Jones. The Christmas meeting wouldn't be the same anywhere else. Once again we experienced the warmth of a house we have all come to love. The buffet provided by members was varied and delicious and the traditional mulled wine met with all round approval. The highlight of the evening was the magic lantern show, given by Jean and Cliff Debney using a family heirloom lantern and slides.

Rita Denman

## AUTUMN IN SULHAM

A490

With the arrival of Autumn, we are favoured with the hazj warmth of the declining sun which sporadically achieved its zenitl during summertime. A kaleidoscope of colour now dominates tlu countryside.

A very early morning stroll through Sulham Woods pleasantf rewards the visitor with the aromatic incense of a typical autumn mom Great oaks stand in silent majesty. Dappled sunlight struggles fitfulf through the canopy provided by the statuesque beeches, whils underfoot the carpet of russet and gold illustrates the passing of ye another season, confirming nature's preparation for the onslaught o winter. The hawthorn adorned with gossamer threads possesses , beauty peculiarly its own.

The tranquil peace is profound. Suddenly a startled ja: raucously indicates displeasure at man's intrusion into its world: solitude. At the crescendo of its tirade, other denizens of the wooi join in with strident discord. Paradoxically the wood pigeon': monotonous note falls silent in a bid to escape detection. To catch onf a glimpse of the timid muntjac is indicative of the scarcity of its natura cover. There is evidence of the passage of the fox but daylight sighting are infrequent due to its adroitness in camouflage. The badger's spoor i readily detected where its four claws have scoured the soil. It nocturnal habits make a sighting extremely rare. On an earlier occasioi I was fortunate to chance upon one with its mate in the vicinity o Sadlers Farm. On seeing me he displayed unbelievable selfishnes towards his mate by ambling as fast as he could towards the cover o the wood. At the boundary line and only when he felt safe, did hi bother to turn round to see how his mate fared. She was some thirt yards in the rear. A little further on I see an industrious squirrel inten on secreting its cache of nuts, oblivious to human approach until th. last moment. It then quickly ascended a tree to its natural habita whilst nearby its cousin hastily retreated with a flash of white tai signalling a 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 ravages of nature.

I delight in tracing part of the old road which existed prior to 1826 (the date when the present Sulham Hill was created). The indentations are faint in places testifying to the passage of the numerous carts of yesteryear. Standing on the summit I mourn the passing of the pine marten, prolific in 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 within these delightful woods. Nevertheless I feel very grateful that despite increased human activity, Sulham Woods are still largely unspoilt by the passage of time. It remains truly a heritage to be treasured .



**GONE: A pine marten**

Harvest festival celebration at the Church remains a very happy occasion with the congregation thanking God for the lovely fruits of the Earth and enjoying singing the well loved hymns. As the period of Autumn draws to a close we remember and honour those who served and died in both world wars, a solemn occasion keenly felt at the Sulham Remembrance Service.

## SCHEDULE OF PROJECT PURLEY EVENTS DURING THE MILLENNIUM YEAR

An Exhibition on the History of Purley, Saturday 17th to Saturday 24th of June. This will be held at the Barn (in the Recreation Ground off Beech Road) and show many aspects of the rich and varied history of our Parish.

A Court Baron, Saturday 24th June at 8pm. For this occasion the year will be 1786 and the Barn will become The Red Lion, the Purley public house where the last Court Baron was held. Come and witness how the agent of the Lord of the Manor deals with parish indiscretions and be part of this historic presentation.

Beating of the Bounds, guided walks on Saturday and Sunday 1st and 2nd June. Pamphlets prepared by Project Purley will be available showing the routes and the boundary of our Parish together with a commentary on interesting features.

A Series of Lectures throughout the Year. These will start at 8pm and will be held in the Barn unless otherwise indicated.

4) Cottages of Purley Village by Rita Denman, Saturday 22nd January.

- The History of St Mary's Church by John Chapman, at the Church, Saturday 18th March.  
(John Chapman's lecture will be preceded by our AGM starting at 7pm)

- The History of Purley HaD by Ben Viljoen, Saturday 20th May.

4) Purley Through the Ages by Jean Debney, Saturday 17th June.

4) Purley Punch Ups by John Titterton, Saturday 18th November.

An Exhibition on Purley Artists Past and Present on Saturday 24th September. During the day there will be short talks on important artists that have been associated with Purley in the past and an exhibition of the work of contemporary artists. The venue will be the Barn.

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Jasmine Cottage (above) and Ivy Cottage (below) are just two of the Purley Village Cottages referred to in the Project Purley Millennium lecture at The Barn on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2000



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