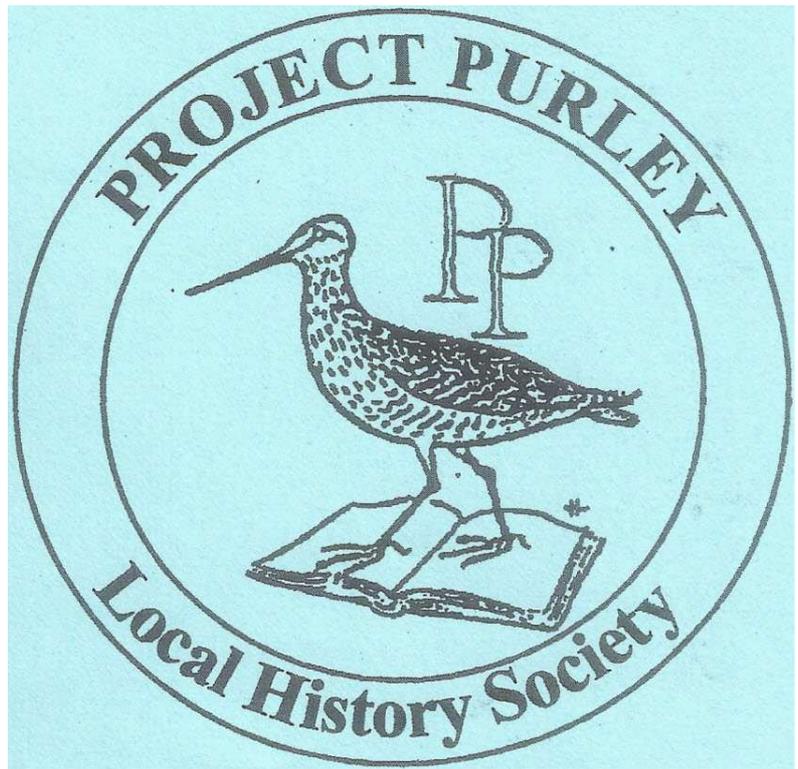


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PURLEY'S LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

JANUARY 2001 NEWSLETTER

No. 55

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

As this will be my last Chairman's message it is perhaps appropriate that I look back over the last 5 years and consider what the achievements of Project Purley have been.

The last 5 years have of course been characterised by two major events; the 500¹ anniversary of the Wilders living in the Sulharn Valley and the millennium celebrations and in each of these events Project Purley has played a major part.

What we have achieved could not have been done without the hard work and dedication of the management committee and members of the society. It has all been great fun and we have the satisfaction of knowing that we have played our part in helping to build a sense of community in our corner of the Thames Valley.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

19th January 2001

More Childhood Memories -
Jean Harland - 8.00 pm The Parish
Room, Beech Road.

16th February 2001

On being Chairman of the National
Federation of Family History
Societies - Cliff Debney - 8.00pm
The Gatehouse, Purley Lane

16th March 2001

Annual General Meeting followed
Jean Debney speaking about her visit
to Salt Lake City
8.00 pm The Gatehouse, Purley Lane

OUR MILLENNIUM CELEBRATIONS

As a society we can be justifiably proud of our contribution to the Millennium celebrations.

The five public lectures were well attended and presented the history of our parish to a far wider audience that we normally reach.

Both the historical and the art exhibitions were well supported and the feedback in the visitors book for these two exhibitions was very positive. What was particularly pleasing was the amount of time that people spent looking at the exhibitions and the number that returned for a second look.

Those lucky enough to get hold of tickets for the Court Baron had a wonderful treat. My only regret was that we did not have more than one performance. However, the video that Ron Denman made has enabled many more people to enjoy the evening.

The number of people that attended the parish perambulation was disappointing however the pamphlet that John Chapman produced will enable the intrepid to do their own perambulation.

The generous grant from the Millennium Festival Awards greatly assisted in all these events and has also enabled us to laminate all our historical display material.

The tea towel that we produced for the millennium has been a great success and the ones with the year 2000 printed on them have all been sold. The Venture Scouts and Charlotte at the Post Office have sold sufficient of the Millennium booklets to cover the direct costs.

It has all taken a lot of hard work by members of Project Purley but I am sure that all these activities have ensured happy memories of the Millennium year to very many people in Purley.

Ben Viljoen - Chairman

A49)

MORE MEMORIES OF THE OLD DAYS IN PURLEY

In July 1984 the late Mrs Elizabeth Pryor and her daughter Sybil were interviewed and the conversation recorded on tape and subsequently transcribed. It is a fascinating account of Purley and its people from around 1926. Sybil Pryor has given permission for parts of the transcription to be included in The Newsletter.

Mrs Pryor's connection with Purley began in 1926 when her widowed mother, Mrs Lister, brought her family of seven children to live at the old Rectory. Much later, Mrs Pryor, who had moved away after her marriage in 1933 but then lost her own husband in World War 2 bought the house from the rest of the family and lived there from about 1948 with her children, including Sybil until it was sold in 1964, and demolished in 1966.

It was the late autumn of 1926 when we moved into the old Rectory. The first thing that comes to mind is walking to church on a summer Sunday morning, starting early so as to pick the mushrooms in the meadow on the left along to-wards the church, and hiding them behind one of the big trees until one came out of church and picked them up hoping no one would see you. Another is going with my mother Mrs Lister up to the little cottage on the Oxford Road, just about where the bus shelter now is opposite Trenthams (which was then the Aldins'), to visit Mrs Kirton still in bed with her baby Charlie, the first newly born baby I'd seen.

Another was sitting in the shade, and not many I think can remember this, on a hot day under the row of huge chestnuts in the field just above the lock on this side of the river. I think I have pulled the jerry across on its chain above the church where the towpath had to cross back to our side of the Thames, after the coming of the railway had caused it to be moved along the bit from the little ferry house above the Roebuck

I remember we were still allowed to dive off the lock piers below the lock, and a good deal of showing off was done, and I think we were allowed to swim in the weir pool. Certainly we were allowed to swim in Whitchurch weir pool by the Swan in the late 1920s until someone got drowned, when both pools were banned for bathing. Funny enough, returning to Purley as I often do, I am much more conscious of how it still gives me the same feel, than of the changes.

Of the old Rectory itself my early recollection is of seeing the backs of my mother and my Auntie Evelyn Palgrave who built Lane Cottage to be near her, behind, over the great and beautiful rockery which sloped steeply up from a little stretch

of lawn and crazy paving outside the drawing-room window. How grateful we were to the Rector, now unknown, who took the drive round to the north side of the house and left that lovely secluded south side in peace. We had good old Mr Heath to do the garden. He and his wife lived in the near side of the Rawlins' house, which was then two cottages, the further one being the school teacher's cottage.

When we came at the end of 1926 there was no electricity in the Street, and there was an engine in the annexe in the backyard of the rectory to make enough light for the house, but otherwise it was all gas. Old rectories were always perfect for bringing up large families. We were seven of us children when we first went there. My father was a doctor in Aberdeen and died in Alexandria in the first World War, and my mother had the job of bringing us south and finding a roof for us. We had an old vicarage in Dorset for seven years where we had a happy childhood, the vicar then being a bachelor. Then came a vicar with a family so we had to turn out. After endless hunting the old rectory at Purley was found, which made another roomy home for us. That was at the end of 1926.

The point about old rectories, and very much so in this case, is that there are always two staircases for playing hide and seek, lots of little boiler rooms and boot rooms and lamp rooms, all with unspoiled brick or flag floors, for storing wellingtons, mending punctures, and nursing sick cats, or for use as dark-rooms.



Purley Rectory

Huge old cellars, too, with vaulted wine stores where the big old coke boiler lurked, and its coke. We couldn't afford to have it on very much so the house was often cold, though never damp, because we were told that the gravel was just below the surface ... except when the roof leaked in the lead gullies; there was hardly a time when it didn't leak somewhere.

After losing my husband in the last war I was able to bring my six children to this old rectory when we had to leave our rectory in the midlands so it made a good

of lawn and crazy paving outside the drawing-room window. How grateful we were to the Rector, now unknown, who took the drive round to the north side of the house and left that lovely secluded south side in peace. We had good old Mr Heath to do the garden. He and his wife lived in the near side of the Rawlins' house, which was then two cottages, the further one being the school teacher's cottage.

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After losing my husband in the last war I was able to bring my six children to this old rectory when we had to leave our rectory in the midlands so it made a good

continuity from 1926 to 1964. The garden was also a perfect family garden with room for biking, sledging, gardening, and playing not-at-all Wimbledon tennis on the rather bumpy tennis court. A little point of interest perhaps was that, when I read the deeds of sale when I bought the old Rectory off the rest of my brother and sisters after my mother died at the end of the war, I found that it was an agreement between the Archbishop of Canterbury and my mother, Mrs Sybil Lister, because it was passing for the first time out of ecclesiastical hands.

I also remember the smell of soot on all the curtains on the south side of the house because of the puffer trains, which it took years of washing to get rid of, and the great yew hedges for hiding Easter eggs in, and the huge old elms. The tallest (all was blown down on the night of the 17th March 1947, right across the road bringing down Mr Bucknell's electric wires and shutting off one end of the fan from the business end... the farmhouse - for a fortnight, because of the terrific floods that were right up to the front gate of the old Rectory.

The children were all very small and they relished walking across the floods on the great elm. My mother always maintained it was the tallest in Berkshire. There's a lovely picture of it by Elliot Hodgkin, before it came down. Willy's got it I think

At this point Mrs Pryor was asked how much the smell and the smoke from the railway affected them.

Certainly the picture cords in Lane Cottage wore out much quicker than they do with us because of vibration from the trains, and they all had to be inspected often. Mrs Pryor went on to explain that the drive was originally on the south side of the house but was moved to the north side.

It probably had been ever since the drawing room was built, you see. It would have been too narrow for turning a carriage and pair. The old folks' houses in Lister Close is where the old drive was, and the bank behind them is where the rockery was. It's the same bank still. I don't know who's got that ancient photograph. I dare say I have it in what I call the archives.

There was much discussion at this point about the house. Mrs Pryor thought that the new part of the Rectory was built in about 1806 which they considered to be late Georgian. But the kitchen and offices were two storey and old and there were cellars underneath the hall and study. The oldest part of the building was erected circa 1743 by the Rector in Purley at that time.

(To be continued)

PROJECT PURLEY CHRISTMAS GET-TOGETHER

With Christmas approaching fast Project Purley members were once again afforded the delightful setting of Rick Jones' lovely old house on Friday 8th December.

Due to get under way at 8.00 pm some 15 minutes prior to this food began to arrive on assorted platters and dishes. Rick's large table was soon laid out with mouth watering seasonal 'goodies', all to be consumed a little later on.

The theme for the evening was 'The 1920s', and very soon we were joined by gentlemen wearing straw boaters together with colourful striped blazers. Then some 'flappers' were soon passing amongst us complete with long cigarette holders in one hand and eagerly grasping a glass of Jean Debney's mulled wine in the other - which was being served by Cliff Debney seemingly eager to keep their glasses well topped up - I'm pleased to say.

The Christmas spirit certainly was to the fore, and then to complete this lovely atmosphere Rita Denman proceeded to hold us enthralled by showing some slides of 1920s Purley. One particular photograph of a fancy dress party group taken inside the little village school really held our attention as Rita was able to pick out many of the individuals, including Cecil Aldin and his wife. Rita also related many interesting, and at times amusing anecdotes, about them.

All too soon the evening drew to a (late) close, and well fed, after lots of conversation and a few photos taken, we bade our host our thanks one by one - he in turn made it clear that he would like us to meet more often at his home during the coming year. Ahhh ... it was a perfect evening.

Rita Hine

EDITOR'S NOTE

Members are reminded that the subscription for 2001 is now due. The subscription remains at £4.00 for this year. Our Treasurer, Tom Hine, will be on hand at the January meeting to take payment.

Tom Hine has contributed this delightful story for inclusion in The Newsletter.

FROM THE LYMPHAM PARISH MAGAZINE

"WEDDING BELLS and the SCHOOL"

Here's a tale of a Wedding and the school at Lympsham from the past.

A day or so ago I had a visit from Mr & Mrs Tom Hine of Purley on Thames. Tom's maternal grandmother was the splendidly named Alexandra Janet Albini Sutton, who was Christened at Lympsham on 22nd April 1864. Alexandra's mother was Clara Emma Margaret Harrison who was the Schoolmistress of the 01, school at Lympsham and is shown in the 1881 Census to be living at the first Grange Cottage in Rectory Road. On her own, and born at Hadley, Middlesex. The old School at Lympsham was built by the Rev. Joseph Adams Stephenson Rector of Lympsham 1809 - 1838 and stood to the south east of the Church roughly where the garden of Sycamore House is today.

Writing in 1805, 'The Churchgoer' a Bristol Journalist describes the old school as follows:

"At the East end of the churchyard is the parish school, and as I walked round the burial ground I was tempted by the juvenile buzz that reached me outside, to peep into this little hive. Independent of the regular master and mistress, there were some young ladies of the parish amusing themselves with a perfect harmless attempt 'to teach the young idea how to shoot.' This school which is plain neat cottage-like building, was erected by the father of the present Incumbent, and bears upon it an inscription somewhat to the effect; the words as well as I can recollect (I quote from memory), 'In gloriam Die Salvatoris huj. parochiae Rector'. So grandiloquent a dedication, or commemoration, whatever you choose to call it, seemed to me somewhat out of place in front of plain little cottage, It would be more in keeping on Wells Cathedral or York Minster. "

I am most grateful to Mr Tom Hine for taking the trouble to visit my Grandmother's birthplace and for his information in bringing to light the following nice tale of another Lympsham School Wedding from the past, as recorded in the Weston Mercury of 1st March 1863. **Emma Margaret Harrison followed Jarr Holloway as head of the school; Emma was replaced by John Sutton in March**

1862 and a year later the pair of them, Emma and John, were headline news; the Mercury report for Saturday 7th March 1863, needs no embellishment.

"WEDDED BUT NOT BEDDED - about 12 months since, a young female named Harrison, was governess of the National School of this village, of which the Rev. J H Stephenson is the principle supporter. For some cause or other the young person left, and a young man named Sutton was appointed instead.

Miss Harrison went back to her friends in Herts, where it would appear she remained in happy seclusion for 12 months, when at the earnest solicitation of her friends, she paid them a Visit, and as the sequel will show, her successor became enamoured of her charms, and although too delicate to express his by word of mouth, conveyed a missive to her in the shape of a billet doux containing an offer of marriage. Letter followed letter, each couched in more affectionate terms than its predecessor, and at length the happy day was fixed, the lady accompanied by her sister coming to Weston-super-Mare, where they remained the night previous to the ceremony.

On Tuesday last they went in a fly to Lympsham. (the driver of which sported wedding favours), where they met the expectant bridegroom and his best man. They were specially united in the bonds of



holy wedlock, and all went "merry as a marriage bell" until evening, when the lady retired to her bridal chamber, and here commences the strange part of the proceedings, for the newly wedded Wife fastened herself securely in, and absolutely refused admittance to the unfortunate bridegroom, whose feelings may be better imagined than described.

The next morning, however, as we are informed, the lady appeared somewhat to relent, and prepared breakfast and dinner for her spouse, declaring she was his "maid and manager". The husband's horizon was doubtless much brighter, and it is more than probable he returned to his

avocation in a pleasant and antictpatory Slate of mind.

During the afternoon, the lady decided upon taking a stroll, having for (i) companion a female named Fanny Harris, the walk was extended to Weston-super-Mare, where it appears the newly made Mrs Sutton entered the shop of Mr

Bradbury, in St. James Street, and pledged her wedding ring. With the money thus obtained she went to the railway station, and there took the train for, "somewhere ", but where, the deponent saith not.

What state her disconsolate lord - but by no means master - is at present, or how this domestic mystery will end, we are unable to say; nor are we in a position to inform our readers whether the gentleman, in the words of a once popular melody, has put the doleful question to any of his friends of 'Have you seen my missus? '

The story ended happily, the groom's anticipations were fulfilled and the couple blessed with issue christened Alexandra Janet Albinia on 22nd April 1864.

COURT BARON VIDEO

To date, £81.00 resulting from sales of the Court Baron video has been forwarded to MacMillan Cancer Relief. Copies can still be made available to those of you who have not yet acquired one. A £5.00 note and a blank cassette to Ron Denman will secure your copy.

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PROJECT PURLEY 1920s CHRISTMAS PARTY - 2000