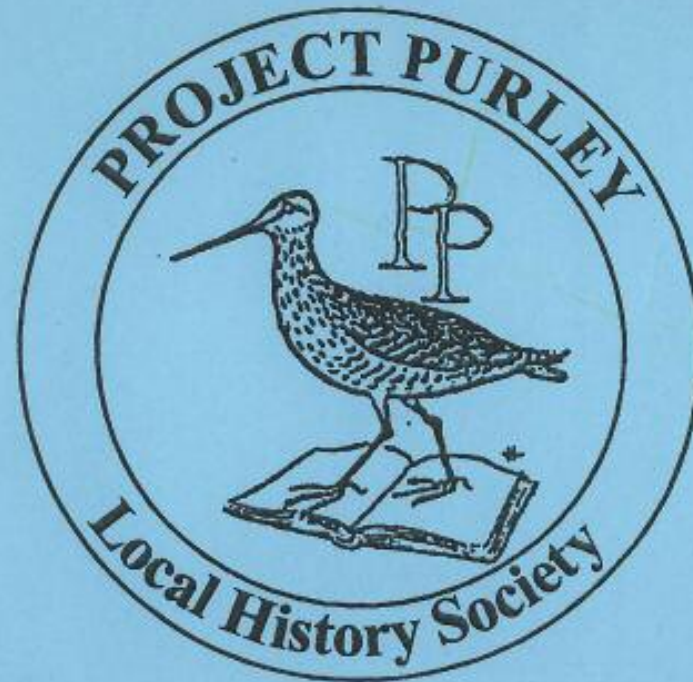


Swan Upping at Goring 2001

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PURLEY'S LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 2001 NEWSLETTER

No. 57

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

- 21st September 2001 "Early Days of Project Purley" -
Jean Debney - 8.00 pm The
Parish Room, Beech Road
- 19th October 2001 "The History of the Thames
Navigation" - George Fielder-
8.00 pm The Parish Room,
Beech Road
- 16th November 2001 "Rural Life" - Brian Eighteen

8.00 pm The Parish Room,
Beech Road
- 7th December 2001 Christmas Social - 8.00 pm
The Gate House, Purley Village

IN MEMORY OF BILL FISHER (1923 - 2001)

'Bill' (William Robert) Fisher was born in Wiltshire and attended school in Little Bedwyn. He had three sisters, Gwen, Evelyn and Dorothy. Later they lived in Upper Basildon and, in 1932, moved into one of 12 new council houses in Glebe Road, Purley. These had mains water, bathrooms, penny-in-the-slot gas meters and the rent was 7s.6d (35p) a week. His father, Charles, was a foreman ganger on the Great Western Railway.

At first he went to Purley Village School but soon transferred to Pangbourne, travelling on Lee's carrier's cart and walking home. He liked playing football despite once breknig his leg and for many years sang in Purley Church Choir. During the Second World War he served in the army, trained as an electrician and worked for British Telecom.

I first met him when he came to my Family History Beginners' class in the 1980s. Always interested in history he joined Project Purley, attending as many meetings as he could. In 1988, Margaret Hughes and myself taped an interview with him at his home in Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. As an aide-memoir, he prepared extensive hand-written notes which he afterwards gave me. With his sister, Gwen, their memories of Purley in the 1930s were extensive and were the subject of several "From my History Notebook" articles in the Purley News.

Bill was married twice but sadly had no children. Instead he devoted his attention to his many nephews and nieces and, latterly, their children. He cared for his first wife, Doreen, until she died of multiple sclerosis and then nursed his second wife Doris, who had a brain tumour. Bill was never happier than when he was helping people less well off or capable than himself. He was very generous with his time and money and invited many to use the swimming pool in his back garden.

He died on 17 June 2001 in Battle Hospital and, after a memorial service in Sulham Church, was buried with his first wife in Purley. He had served as Church Warden in Sulham for some years and recently rewired the church. Amongst his possessions was a file of coloured photographs and inscriptions of the gravestones in Sulham churchyard. Project Purley hopes to publish this in Bill's memory. In his will he left the Society his four-volume copy of the Victoria County History for Berkshire. This will be a marvellous asset for our members.

He was a lovely and generous man who had a sad life; he will be greatly missed by many people

Jean Debney
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SUMMER SOCIAL EVENING BARBECUE
JULY 20TH 2001

The weather for the barbecue must have set some kind of record for the event. Early morning, hardly a wisp of cloud. By midday clouds were forming from the South West. At 7-30 precisely, as we were about to be seated on the lawn at numerous tables and chairs large spots of rain started to fall. This caused a hurried retreat under Ron's 3 gazebos which easily covered 34 of us seated.

The ladies filled the two 6' long tables with a mouth watering selection of foods. We first had a 'starter' of melon and orange. Then to the main event--the well filled platters. Ann's curried eggs must have been a favourite, because they disappeared so quickly. Selection of salads, bowls of hot boiled new potatoes and hunks of french bread etc. Then Ron's barbecued chicken, sausages and beefburgers resulted in everyone having a delightful tuck-in. Wine bottles were uncorked, and the clink of glasses soon had folks eating, chatting, even singing was to be heard at Edna's end of the table!.. Why I even heard a loyal toast to the 'Queen' too over on my right.



It rained even harder but hardly anyone noticed, or even bothered. By 10pm. folks started to bid farewells to one another and a clearing up operation commenced. It was pleasing to see so many familiar faces enjoying themselves. There was an underlying common feature that ran through the gathered 'Projectors' - they all have such healthy appetites!

(All members appreciate and thank Rita and Ron for being such good hosts, and allowing us to use their lovely garden. Thanks too for Ron's cooking expertise over the charcoal, and to Rita who did so much behind the scenes and especially for allowing the ladies to take over her kitchen.. hopefully we didn't leave too much mess..)

Tom Hine

REVIEW OF MEETINGS

At our April meeting, we welcomed Linda Green who gave a talk on the history of Mill Lane in the hamlet of Calcot. The research for the history of this little known Berkshire gem came out of a Millennium project, which culminated in the production of a delightful booklet. Those who know about Mill Lane and its environs are passionate about it, and this passion has revealed itself through the ages in the form of cobnuts, wine, a rose, a blue sweet pea and of course, grain.

In 1086, three mills, Calcot Mill, Southcote and Coley Mills were driven by the Holy Brook, which runs beside the lane. It was in the reign of Henry 1st that Reading Abbey was founded in 1121, and the Abbey Mill was also driven by the Holy Brook. It is popularly believed that the Holy Brook was so named because of the connection with the Abbey Mill, however as far as one can tell the brook has always been known as either Holy Brook, Hollow or Hallowed Brook, and Holly Brook and no other name has been associated with it. The Mill at Calcot has a long and illustrious history and according to the politics of the day the ownership passed in and out of royal hands. In Victorian times the miller at Calcot was William Champion who also had a corn and seed business in Reading. Mill Cottage was built around 1760 and housed the mill workers. Holy Brook Cottage dates from the 13th century and also housed two families working at the mill.

On Sunday 13th November 1966 Calcot Mill was virtually destroyed by fire and remained a fire ravaged shell for nearly 10 years until the passion for the site, of a young married couple, overcame all obstacles and through their dedication and hard work the now restored mill and granary, a photographers dream, is the focal point of Mill Lane.

In the early 1930's, Charles Walter Berry bought the lovely Georgian Mill House standing on the banks of the Holy Brook at Calcot. Charles Berry with his cousin built up the famous London Wine Merchants business of Berry Bros and Rudd.

Gower Cottage, parts of which are believed to date from Elizabeth 1st, was home for many years to Alfred Gower, the Head Gardener at Calcot Grange. He won many prizes for his vegetables in local shows, but his great love was in growing and exhibiting sweet peas. He became well known as a sweet pea specialist. Alfred together with Robert Bolton, another celebrated sweet pea specialist, played a major part in propagating the first blue sweet pea.

Calcot Grange is a mid 18th century grade II listed building although its history isn't entirely clear and there is a suggestion that a house on this site was built around 1695 and was known as Blagrave House.

The Old Cottage built in 1648 was once known as Calcot Gardens, and in 1877 had the distinction of being recognised as the most celebrated nut gardens in England. It was Richard Webb born in Tilehurst in 1798 who lived here who bred and improved the humble hazelnut. His seedlings became so important that they remain the standard of quality to this day. The Marechal Niel Rose, also excelled in this garden. It also abounded with spring flowers, with fig trees, mulberries, peaches, plums, apples and apricots which grew in marvellous profusion. When Gertrude Jekyll visited the garden she subsequently wrote "It was the only nursery I ever saw where one would expect to see fairies on a summer's night."

On the evening of the 18th May, an expectant group of Project Purley members gathered outside the Madjeski Stadium where we were to meet David Downs for a conducted tour of the complex. It was a fine evening and there was an air of excitement as Reading Football Club supporters queued for tickets to the important 'play-off' at the Cardiff Millennium Stadium. The drama of the local team, which was first founded in 1871, leaving their traditional home at Elm Park had been played out over the last few years, and the eventual transformation of the old club ground into a housing estate was a wrench to many supporters. However, the prospect of a new stadium with all the facilities that a successful club requires was a dream come true. Countless numbers of motorway drivers watched the rising of the new tent like structure on the horizon viewed from the M4.

From the outside the building is functional, and also includes an hotel, and a megastore, where everything 'royal' is obtainable. The structure is held by massive vertical girders, which from a distance give the impression of guy ropes, and it is this series of girders on the outside, which obviate the need for posts and pillars on the inside of the ground and ensure that every spectator has an uninterrupted view of the game. The seating and arrangement of the stand is the last word in safety design and has become the standard for new stadia.

On entering the building, which is spacious and bright, the first surprise was the view onto the atrium of the hotel, which seen from a height was very attractive, with tables set out under a group of trees which were ablaze with white fairy lights. There are a series of suites set aside for the use of Club officials, all with catering facilities, and all with a view of the ground.

The Vice Presidents' room, houses the few mementoes which were brought from the old club house, a happy link between the old and the new. We viewed the Chairman's suite, and ventured into the Chairman's stand where we were able to watch a 'friendly' game in progress and caught the enthusiasm and excitement of the supporters, when the roar of the crowd rose up as two goals were scored. The Princess suite is capable of holding functions catering for up to 300 seated guests. There are 24 hospitality rooms with views onto the ground, which, with their glass walls seem to reach into infinity. We also visited the laundry, the kit room and the boot room.

There is very little in the way of pictures or unnecessary luxury, the main object being to make the Club financially viable, and to this end the whole complex is geared to a seven day week enterprise, and not just for 'home game' days. The Hotel being near the motorway is popular for company conferences and seminars. The various suites are available for hire for private parties and celebrations. The hotel caters for the private functions, and if necessary the Club laundry can take on work from the Hotel.

In addition the ground is used for Rugby football. There is an education and welfare programme that benefits the players. School children are always welcome to apply to become Young Royals, when they receive certain privileges and discounts on purchases from the megastore



Project Purley members in the Chairman's Stand.

At a cost of £40 million pounds, which was paid for by Mr Madjeski, the Madjeski Stadium is a fine example of the new generation of purpose built football stadia in England.

The Project Purley day outing this year was to Milestones, Hampshire's Living History Museum, and on Saturday June 16th a convoy of cars set out from the Purley Barn car park and headed off to Basingstoke. The weather was rainy and

dreary but as the museum is entirely under cover, we felt that the correct choice of visit had been made. The museum is a Civic/Heritage Lottery Fund creation, which has provided one of the Country's finest Museums for the new Millennium. Opened in November 2000, it is already proving a 'hit' with visitors and is the culmination of a 30-year-old dream.

The exhibits celebrate the lives, the industry and business that was carried on in Hampshire, and has resulted in a mini town, which one can wander through. The attention to detail and realism really transports one back to the early 19th century when the Tasker Ironwork Company took advantage of the new technology and the coming of the railway.

There is the Thorneycroft Works, the tram shed, the railway station, an early post office and so much more. There are small terraces of authentic cottages demonstrating the way of life of the population, rows of shops all stocked with period goods. A camera shop which has a collection of cameras from early models to modern times, as with the electrical shop which has the kind of gramophone which was the centre piece of granny, or great granny's parlour, to up to date models.

The toyshop had the ladies glued to the window, where there was a display of dolls and a magnificent dolls' house. The jewellers, the ironmongers and the tobacconist shop were all similarly stocked with treasures from a bygone age. Each exhibit has its own audio guide which visitors can listen to at their own pace. There are plenty of seats if the legs get tired and a cafeteria when a hunger has been worked up. There is also plenty to interest the younger members of the family. All in all it is a very happy and interesting experience, which can only be appreciated by a visit.

Rita Denman



Three members "Underneath the Lamplight
at Milestones

PURLEY GARAGE

In the Spring of 2001 I telephoned John Edwards of 'Purley Garage' to set aside 10-15 minutes for us to have a chat about the history of the garage.

He told me his father Charles Edwards of Essex came to Reading in 1937 when he bought Purley Garage, and the family also came to Purley Village. The garage had been built 18 months prior to Charles taking over. A Mr T. A. Stephenson owned the garage in 1936, so it seemed that this gentleman was the original owner and had it built in 1935. The brick and concrete block built garage has been extended over the years and is today around 2000 square feet. (about 37' wide and 55' deep under a corrugated 'tin' roof).



Purley Garage, Oxford Road, Purley

The machine tools Charles Edwards bought with the property were then valued at £4-10s-0d. Charles was a precision engineer, working during the war making machine parts for the war effort for Mr C Hodgekin, the then last surviving member of the founder family of Pulsometer Pumps in Oxford Rd, Reading, (near Norcot Roundabout). Later as the war progressed he also made parts for Spitfire fuel tanks for D.J. Hawkins, and parts for Miles Aircraft Ltd. Charles Edwards was also a keen amateur photographer, and had a large collection of cameras which he kept in the garage.

When John left school he joined his Father at the garage and was taught the trade where together they continued to make precision parts for local firms. Charles was still working until his death in 1980 at the age of 73.

The peak time of the garage was in the 50's when about ten people were employed there. The garage sold National Benzol petrol until 1970. In 1985 David Webb started car sales on the forecourt, which is now run by his son. Today John Edwards continues with small engineering works at the garage.

John remembers the Bungalow Stores, Purley Rise (which closed down this year) being in the hands of several different owners. In the 40's the Stores had a tea room, which touring cyclists and walkers were grateful for. In 1942 it was run by Sidney Taylor, and listed as 'Fancy Goods and General Draper' in the Kelly's Directory. Peter Fitchew is also recalled as an owner sometime in the 40's. During the 50's a Mr Mumford was there and the Store was managed by his daughter Mary and Peter. Also remembered is Pearl Sutherland who went to work for Mr Mumford in 1958, and continued to help at the shop until 1995. Les and Isobelle Annetts took over the store in the 60's, and were there until the 1980,s. In 1995 Grenville Annetts (Les Annetts son) sold the business to Tony Pollock. Tony and Gill Pollock were the last owners.

Rita Hine

SNIPPETS

An extract from the Berkshire Chronicle of 7th July 1916.
In addition we are informed that Private Harry Robey, a native of Ardington, Wantage, who joined on 30th June 1915 was injured by shrapnel in both knees shortly before Christmas and invalided home. As one of his legs is still stiff he is now on canteen duty. Robey was for some time stationed at Purley in the Reading Division.

John Chapman

A total of £91.00 has been forwarded to Cancer Relief charities as a result of sales of the Court Baron video. Copies can still be made available to those who have not yet got round to ordering their copy.

Ron Denman

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