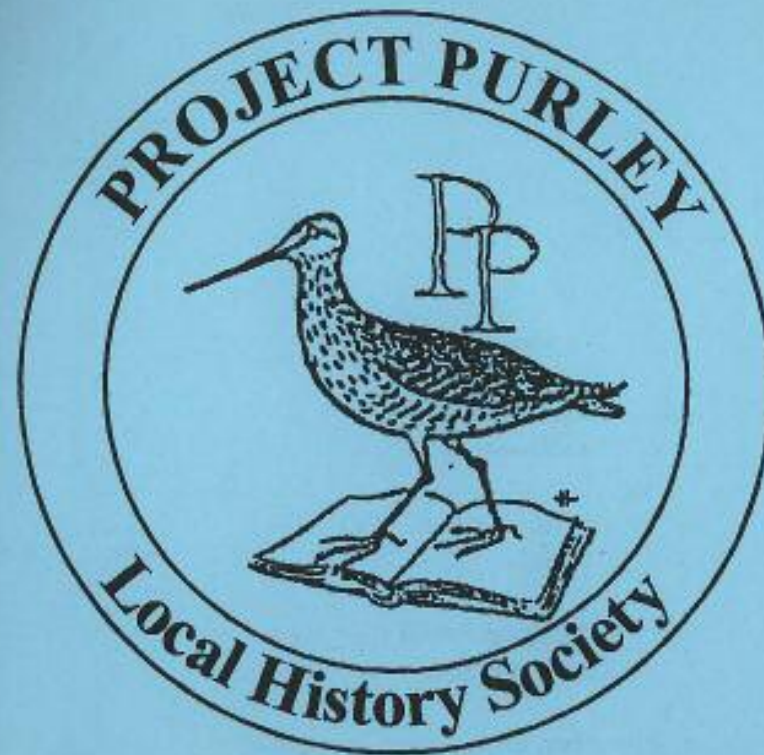


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PURLEY'S LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 2002 NEWSLETTER

No. 60

### FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Friday, 20<sup>th</sup> September - Ben Viljoen - Gardens of Historical Importance

Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> October - John Chapman - The History and Archaeology of Purley on Thames.

Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> November - Barbara Debney - Our Village of Spencers Wood.

Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> December - Christmas Social Evening at The Gatehouse.

N.B. The September, October and November meetings will be held in the Parish Office off Beech Road commencing at 8 p.m.

### REVIEW OF MEETINGS

On 19<sup>th</sup> April Dr. Martin Parsons talked to Project Purley about the true story of the evacuees, subtitled "I'll take That One". Martin is a Senior Lecturer at Reading University, and appears in 'Who's Who' as a world authority on the wartime evacuation. When Martin began to examine this period of our history, he got fed up with generalisations and decided to do something about it. This interest has become a major occupation and from his research The Evacuee Association has developed. The Association started in a small way as a coffee morning event and has grown into a countrywide organisation and meetings are held in various areas. The day events begin with an ecumenical service followed by an entertainment. At these meetings it is possible that siblings who have lost contact with each other for over 50 years can be reunited.

During the Munich crisis an evacuation took place but no evaluation was made and no lessons were learned from the experience. When the real thing happened three and a half million people were evacuated. Those who were offered the relative safety of evacuation were mothers with babies, expectant mothers, the infirm, teachers and helpers and the children. In this confusion it was possible that a six-year-old child was responsible for younger siblings. The cheerfulness that is portrayed in some photographs was mostly propaganda. There were many tears shed. The children had practised the evacuation for several days and taken their cases to school and gone home again at the end of the day. Unfortunately when the actual evacuation came, some children had gone to school with their case as for a practice, and left without their parent's knowledge or saying goodbye. The single carriage trains of the day did not afford toilet facilities. The journeys were sometimes very long and well meaning voluntary organisations provided drinks and buns at stops en route. Combined with the temptation of the chocolate that each child received as part of the ration to take to the host family as a meal on arrival, the inevitable took place, a state that gave rise to the popular conception that the children were dirty. An attempt in later evacuations was made to remedy this, and temporary toilet facilities were put up at stations, but these consisted of three sides of an awning with an open front. The natural reticence of the children stopped them from being used.



Evacuees arriving at Reading Station

The country was divided into three zones, evacuation, reception and neutral but no explanation of what constituted a neutral zone has been found. Children were evacuated in and out of Reading. In some instances the evacuation area was less safe than the home address. In other cases what was originally considered a 'safe' area became unsafe and the children were moved to another area.

It is a sobering thought in modern times that no checks were made as to the suitability of host families. Some children were fortunate to be billeted on caring people. It is now considered that 15 - 20% of children were abused. Some children experienced better conditions than those at their homes. Some didn't go home and when the war ended some were never claimed. Some grew to love the area to which they were evacuated and chose to retire there.

This report is just a taste of the detailed research that Dr Martin Parsons has done on what was a traumatic event for so many children and young people. The Evacuee Association is providing an outlet for the memories and nightmares that these children have carried throughout their lives. The Association is open to anyone who was a wartime evacuee. If you have memories of evacuation, or would like to know more about the Evacuee Association please contact Rita Denman (Tel. 9844682) in the first instance.

Rita Denman

The annual 'Village Walkabout', by members of Project Purley, took place on the evening of May 17th starting from the car park at St Mary's Church,

The dull evening weather was no match for the far-from-dull atmosphere created by Jean Debney as she led the group along the route taken in a similar walkabout in the early days of the society,

The first of the points of interest was our church itself. Norman in origin, but with an imposing 17th century tower, it was mostly rebuilt and enlarged in late Victorian times before being further extended in 1983. It was built near the manor house of Purley Magna which was itself mentioned (with its companion manor of Purley Parva) in the Domesday Survey of 1086. Nearby, on rising ground, is Purley Park Mansion, built between 1800 and 1805 to replace the old manor house.

The parish was cut through in 1840 by The Great Western Railway. This was followed by much extensive development in the 20th century, various housing estates now occupying farmland formerly belonging to the Estate. The old fields

had picturesque names like *Wheathums*, *Churchams* and *Horse Croft Mead*. Some of the first (1930's) occupiers - many being Londoners - built holiday and weekend homes and were closely followed by evacuees at the beginning of World War II.

Little evidence remains of the evacuees and holiday-makers, most of their homes and bungalows having been replaced by modern houses along Mapledurham Drive and its surrounding roads.

At the Mapledurham Drive end of St. Mary's Avenue, was the old village pond - filled in during the late 1950s. Continuing on along Purley Village (the remains of 'The Streete' - Purley's medieval main road) are several old cottages formerly held by the two ancient manors. These include the oldest building in the village, Ivy Cottage, part timber-framed, and now restored and extended.



At the Start!

Opposite is Lister Close, its modern homes built on the site of the old Purley Rectory. The storm-damaged stump of the 1953 Coronation tree and the rather mysterious manger rings on the back wall of the Old Rectory stables are still visible.

Further on is the mid-19th century village school (with its Grade II listed toilet block) and, opposite, more old cottages including the 17th century Jasmine Cottage. At the turn into Purley Lane is the mid-18th century Purley Lodge (traditionally connected with Reading Abbey), its former service buildings now converted into a variety of dwellings.

Moving into the bridle way (recently given a good hoggin surface) are some remaining farmed fields with interesting names e.g. *Purley Hither Common Field*, *Butcher's Acre* and *Scrace's Acre* (now used as allotments).

Crossing the railway bridge, up Winston Way, the main road (known here as Purley Rise) is reached. The old Goosecroft Lane (on the South side, next to Yew Tree Farm Cottage), leads to the Recreation Ground with Purley's old Manorial Barn and new Burial Ground. The present A329 was the 14th century King's Highway, becoming the Reading-Shillingford Turnpike Road in 1763. Also on the south side is the old Trenthams site (now Sherwood Rise) which includes Belleisle (named after the Storer's sugar plantation in Jamaica).

Gathering at our ancient and majestic oak tree, opposite the road named after the artist Cecil Aldin who lived in Purley in the early 1900s, we noted where the Blacksmith had his smithy - near the traffic lights at the end of Long Lane.

Down New Hill, opened in about 1800, can be seen the different sizes of arch in Purley's railway bridges showing evidence of the way in which Brunel's broad gauge was converted to standard gauge.

A welcoming warm drink at the Church, with some interesting old and new maps to look at, completed our tour of the old village.

We were left with plenty of thoughts about further research and discussion, stimulated by Jean's amazing knowledge of Purley's long history.

Janet Southall

For the summer outing this year Project Purley chose to visit Kelmscott Manor, the one time country home of William Morris.

A group of members met on a fine June day at the Trout Inn beside St John's Bridge over the Thames near Lechlade and, after a delicious lunch, a couple of miles drive brought us to the tranquil village of Kelmscott. The car park was some distance from the Manor, and we enjoyed the walk through part of the village with time to admire the gracious old houses built of the local limestone.

Kelmscott Manor, a beautiful and interesting building, is a fine example of the architecture of the region, and contains most of the original fireplaces and timber work. The house is carefully maintained in the capable hands of the Society of Antiquaries. William Morris with his wife, Jane, and their two daughters

(continued on page 10)

## MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

Re. Article entitled "The Gleaners" by Roger Stanley published in the May issue of the Newsletter - members may be interested to hear that this item has been accepted by the magazine, "This England" for inclusion in their Memory Lane feature sometime in the future.

Extract from the April 2002 edition of the newsletter of the Mills Section of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings :

"Tom Hine...in 1935, sat in his pushchair while his parents passed buckets along a human chain to quench the fire at West Blatchington Mill, Surrey.

(Thanks to Jean Debney for producing this gem.)

## THE CHURCHYARD RAILS

At the end of the 17th century, the Rev William GOSTWICK, MA, was appointed Rector of St Mary's, Purley, Berkshire. He had previously been a master at the Free School in Reading and for a few years he seems to have held both posts simultaneously.<sup>(1)</sup> He remained at Purley for almost 35 years until his death in 1719 when he was buried in the parish.

A literate and well-educated man, he has fortunately recorded two memoranda and part of a terrier in the spare pages of the earliest surviving parish register.<sup>(2)</sup>

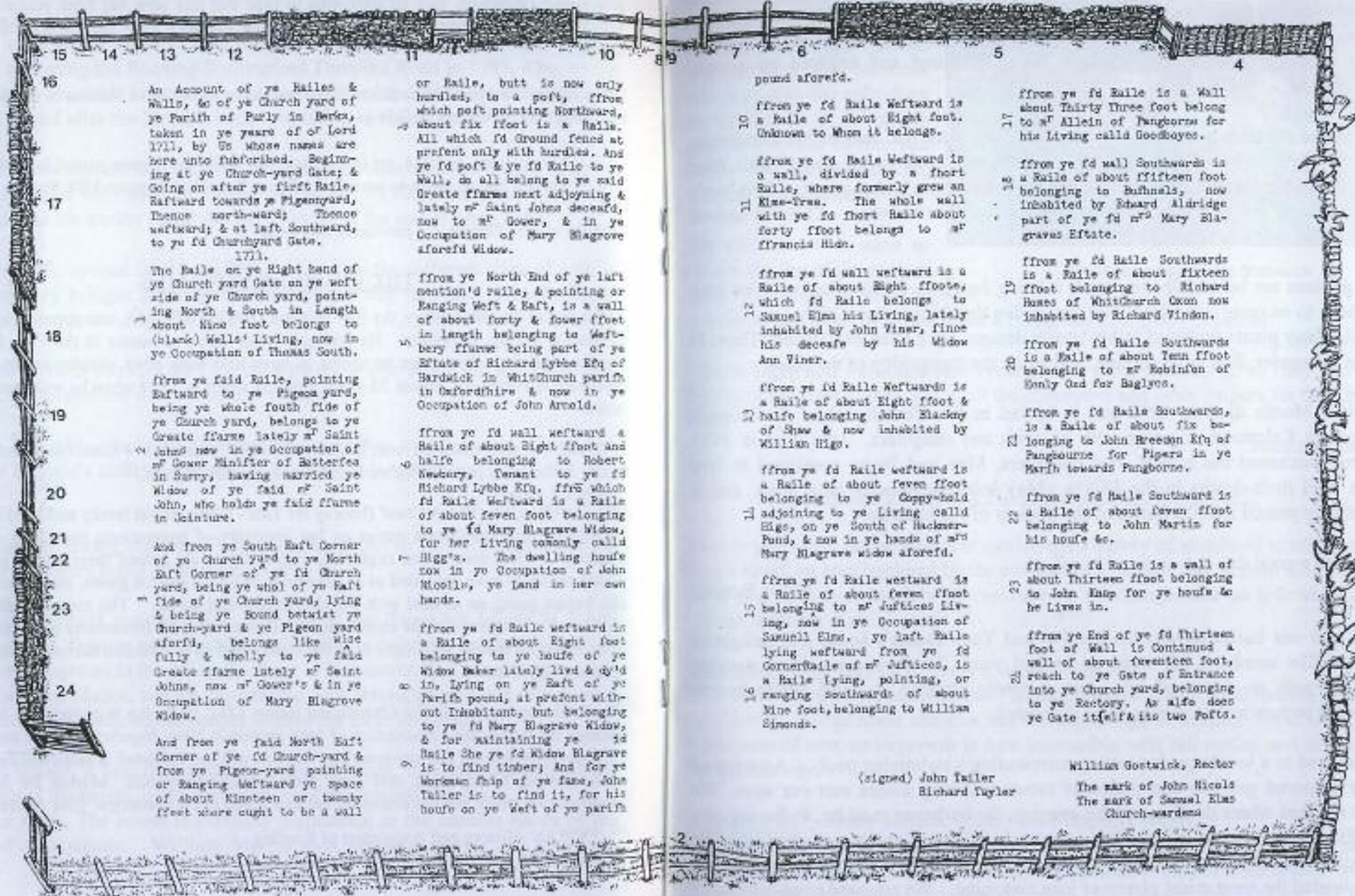
W E TATE in 'The Parish Chest' (hooray for Tate - where would family and local historians be without him?) defines a terrier as "an inventory of possessions, especially of landed property". The unrecorded beginning of this terrier (if indeed there was a beginning) would probably have consisted of an inventory of all the church goods, plate, bells, books, etc. before going on to deal with the churchyard and so on. The responsibility for the repair and maintenance of the churchyard rails rested with the freeholders of the parish who often expected special privileges from the church and so in common fairness accepted their special obligation.

The following terrier of 'The Churchyard Railes 1711' in Purley is particularly interesting because the length and construction of each section is given together with the name of the person responsible for the maintenance. As you will see the detail is sufficient for a partial scale drawing to be made, and I am most grateful to Vanda Morton for her artist's interpretation which she has drawn for me as a frame to the transcript. (See centre pages)

<sup>(1)</sup> DORAN -History and Antiquities of Reading

<sup>(2)</sup> Parish register 1662-1773 - BRO reference D/P 93/1/1

Transcribed by Jean Debney. First published in the journal of The Berkshire Family History Society Vol.7 No.1 (Aug. 1981) - reproduced by permission of the Editor.



An Account of ye Hailes & Walls, &c of ye Church yard of ye Parish of Purley in Berks, taken in ye yeare of 1711, by Us whose names are here unto subscribed. Beginning at ye Church-yard Gate; & Going on after ye first Haile, Raftward towards ye Pigeonyard, Thence north-ward; Thence westward; & at last Southward, to ye sd Churchyard Gate.

The Haile on ye Right hand of ye Church yard Gate on ye west side of ye Church yard, pointing North & South in Length about Nine foot belongs to (black) Walls' Living, now in ye Occupation of Thomas South.

ffrom ye said Haile, pointing Eastward to ye Pigeon yard, being ye whole south side of ye Church yard, belongs to ye Greate ffarme lately of Saint Johns now in ye Occupation of Mr Gower Minister of Bicester in Barry, having married ye Widow of ye said Mr Saint John, who holds ye said ffarme in Jointure.

And from ye South East Corner of ye Church yard to ye North East Corner of ye sd Church yard, being ye whol of ye East side of ye Church yard, lying & being ye Bound betwixt ye Church-yard & ye Pigeon yard aforesd, belongs like wise fully & wholly to ye said Greate ffarme lately of Saint Johns, now of Gower's & in ye Occupation of Mary Blagrove Widow.

And from ye said North East Corner of ye sd Church-yard & from ye Pigeon-yard pointing or Ranging Westward ye space of about Nineteen or twenty ffet where ought to be a wall

or Haile, butt is now only hurdled, to a post, ffrom which post pointing Northward, about six ffote is a Haile. All which sd Ground fenced at present only with hurdles. And ye sd post & ye sd Haile to ye Wall, do all belong to ye said Greate ffarme next adjoining & lately of Saint Johns deceased, now to Mr Gower, & in ye Occupation of Mary Blagrove aforesd Widow.

ffrom ye North End of ye left mention'd haile, & pointing or Ranging West & East, is a wall of about forty & sower ffote in length belonging to Westbery ffarme being part of ye Estate of Richard Lybbe Esq of Hardwick in WhitChurch parish in Oxfordshire & now in ye Occupation of John Arnold.

ffrom ye sd wall westward a Haile of about Eight ffote and halfe belonging to Robert Newbury, Tenant to ye sd Richard Lybbe Esq. ffro which sd Haile Westward is a Haile of about seven foot belonging to ye sd Mary Blagrove Widow, for her Living commonly call'd Higg's. The dwelling house now in ye Occupation of John Nicolls, ye Land in her own hands.

ffrom ye sd Haile westward is a Haile of about Eight foot belonging to ye house of ye Widow Baker lately liv'd & dy'd in, lying on ye East of ye Parish pound, at present without Inhabitant, but belonging to ye sd Mary Blagrove Widow, & for maintaining ye sd Haile She ye sd Widow Blagrove is to find timber; and for ye Workman ship of ye same, John Toller is to find it, for his house on ye West of ye parish

pound aforesd.

ffrom ye sd Haile Westward is a Haile of about Eight foot. Unknown to Whom it belongs.

ffrom ye sd Haile Westward is a wall, divided by a short Haile, where formerly grew an Elm-Tree. The whole wall with ye sd short Haile about forty ffote belongs to Mr ffraunce Hyde.

ffrom ye sd wall westward is a Haile of about Eight ffote, which sd Haile belongs to Samuel Elms his Living, lately inhabited by John Viner, since his decease by his Widow Ann Viner.

ffrom ye sd Haile Westward is a Haile of about Eight ffote & halfe belonging John Blackey of Shaw & now inhabited by William Higo.

ffrom ye sd Haile westward is a Haile of about seven ffote belonging to ye Copy-hold adjoining to ye Living call'd Higs, on ye South of Hackmer-Pond, & now in ye hands of Mrs Mary Blagrove widow aforesd.

ffrom ye sd Haile westward is a Haile of about seven ffote belonging to Mr Justices Living, now in ye Occupation of Samuel Elms. ye left Haile lying westward from ye sd Cornerhaile of Mr Justices, is a Haile lying, pointing, or ranging southward of about Nine foot, belonging to William Simonds.

ffrom ye sd Haile is a Wall about Thirty Three foot belong to Mr Allein of Pangborne for his Living call'd Goodboyes.

ffrom ye sd wall Southwards is a Haile of about ffifteen foot belonging to Bussnals, now inhabited by Edward Aldridge part of ye sd Mrs Mary Blagrove's Estate.

ffrom ye sd Haile Southwards is a Haile of about sixteen ffote belonging to Richard Huses of WhitChurch Oxon now inhabited by Richard Vindon.

ffrom ye sd Haile Southwards is a Haile of about Tenn ffote belonging to Mr Robinson of Only Oad for Baglyes.

ffrom ye sd Haile Southwards, is a Haile of about six belonging to John Bredon Esq of Pangborne for Pigeon in ye Marsh towards Pangborne.

ffrom ye sd Haile Southward is a Haile of about seven ffote belonging to John Martin for his house &c.

ffrom ye sd Haile is a wall of about Thirteen ffote belonging to John Knep for ye house &c he Lives in.

ffrom ye End of ye sd Thirteen foot of Wall is Continued a wall of about ffewteen foot, reach to ye Gate of Entrance into ye Church yard, belonging to ye Rectory. As also does ye Gate itself & its two Posts.

(signed) John Toller  
Richard Toller

William Gostwick, Rector  
The mark of John Nicolls  
The mark of Samuel Elms  
Church-wardens

moved into the Manor in 1871, together with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, poet and painter, who shared the lease with Morris. Morris was a man of extraordinary diversity and application, with mastery of many skills. He was an artist in oils, stained glass and ceramic tiles. He was a weaver, poet and a textile designer of great repute. His ideas and designs are still valued and enjoyed by people everywhere.

The house contains a collection of some of his work and that of his associates, together with some of the work of Rossetti, who was much struck with Jane Morris and her great beauty. He painted her many times and examples of his work with some of his drawings and paintings of Jane are on view. There is indeed much to be seen and admired in this house.

The gardens are beautifully kept and, it being June, were full of colour. The idea has been to recreate some feeling of the garden that Morris knew and loved. Many plants included in his textile designs have been introduced. There is space to wander, find quiet corners, and enjoy the tranquillity of the place.

William Morris died in 1896 and is buried in the Churchyard of St George's Church in Kelmscott, together with his wife and daughters. Jane died in 1914 having purchased the Manor. Her daughters, May and Jenny continued to live there until their deaths in the 1930's. May left the property in a Trust, and it eventually passed into the hands of the Society of Antiquaries.

This was a good day out, enjoyed by all.

Millie Bordiss

This year our barbecue was held at Pat and Tony Deane's house and delightful garden. The numbers, 46, were up on last year's 34. It was a perfect summer evening with no threat of rain, just a lightly clouded sky and gentle breeze allowing jackets and cardigans to be discarded.

We arrived to a lovely garden setting surrounding a swimming pool. An array of gaily coloured gazebos and plates of mouth-watering dishes met our eyes. We soon realised where the focus of the evening, the barbecue must be, as the savoury smelling fumes of grilled chicken, sausages and beefburgers reached us. The cooking was all under the culinary control of Cliff Debney and John Chapman as they tended the meat midst plenty of joke swapping. We renewed acquaintance

with familiar members and met new ones. We chose deliciously ripe melon starters from the buffet. We sampled the barbecue offerings with the refreshing choice of 8 or 9 salads followed by the sweets and finally the enticing cheese, biscuits, fruit and cake.

The children were soon to sample the fun of the swimming pool. The sunset giving way to a brilliant and peaceful moon made a fitting end to a lovely occasion.

What a happy and well-organised evening! Our sincere thanks go to Tony and Pat for providing their garden and to all the committee and other helpers for their hard work.

Margaret Smith

#### PROJECT PURLEY NATURAL HISTORY GROUP

Twenty years ago, Barbara Mercer carried out a survey of woodland to the west of Beech Road, an area bordered by the parishes of Tilehurst and Sulham. She visited the area at roughly fortnightly intervals to note the changes and the following is an excerpt from her diary.

September 10<sup>th</sup> (1982) - hot, sunny after early a.m. fog.

Very little change in general scene. Burdocks have dried. Still masses of ripe elderberries. Large horse chestnut has the beginnings of autumn colour. Access to the area of new undergrowth is now impossible with tall nettles and brambles barring the way.

September 26<sup>th</sup> - sunny periods. Heavy showers, very windy.

The north field has now been ploughed. Ash keys brown. Spindle berries pink. Nettles are dying back. Numerous newly fallen small branches from several trees. "Conkers" mostly fallen - very few this year. No flowers observed for the first time since survey commenced (June). New catkins forming on hazel. Still some elderberries.



Members enjoying the Barbecue

October 9<sup>th</sup> - Dull but warm. Hazy sunshine.

Woodpecker heard. Great Tit, Blue Tits, Hedge Sparrows, Wren, Blackbird seen. As this was a morning visit, more birds seen as dog-walkers disturb them later in the day. No conkers left - horse chestnut more yellowed.

Some flowers are re-opened - Herb Robert, Scentless Mayweed, White Archangel, Ivy, Woody Nightshade, White Bryony fluffy. Some ripe elderberries still. Fresh rabbit droppings by burrows on north side in the "oak section." The mature trees were counted. Ash - 20, Field Maple - 21, Beech - 34 and Oak - 14 predominate. Hawthorn, elder, hazel and sloe are fairly numerous as shrub/trees and there are 25 plus young spindly elms with about 3" diameter trunks.

November 6<sup>th</sup> - no visit owing to illness.

November 13<sup>th</sup> - Sunny but colder after mild windy weather.

Most of the leaves have fallen from beech and horse chestnut in that section but not from sweet chestnut. Ash at northern end still has leaves as has oak, which are always late to fall. North side field crop is well up now. A long-haired golden retriever had caught and was consuming a rabbit. A number of white deadnettle (archangel) are in flower. Spindle berries deep pink, but have not opened. Branches and leaves have fallen copiously since last visit and the woodland area looks more wintry than autumnal now. A few birds glimpsed but not identified apart from two wood pigeons.

November 28<sup>th</sup> - Bright but cold.

The first severe frost this winter occurred last night. It had thawed by my p.m. visit leaving the waterlogged ground very muddy. Leaves are still clinging to undergrowth, including elder but nearly all gone from larger trees. The exceptions are the oaks which always shed late. No flowers seen. A magpie and five or six blackbirds observed.

December 18<sup>th</sup> - Sunny but very cold. Strong north west wind.

Sharp overnight frost which has only dispersed where sun has melted it. Very few leaves left now. A large number of small branches fell in recent severe gales, but no large trees. Two blackbirds were the only wildlife seen. Some fungi on dead boles.

## IN THE STEPS OF SIR JOHN BETJEMAN POET LAUREATE

*The English language has such range,  
Such rhymes  
and half-rhymes,  
Rhythms strange,  
And such variety of tone,  
It is a music of its own..*

Extract from Preface to "High and Low"

Thus is the bronze tablet inscribed which is sited at one of the entrances to the John Betjeman Millennium Park in Wantage. It was the talk given to Project Purley last February by Roy Burton, a devotee of Betjeman, that inspired Henry and me to go to Wantage and seek out this place. The Park, an idea thought of by the Letcombe Brook Trust, is dedicated to the memory of Betjeman, who from 1951 to 1972 lived in Wantage close to this area.

On a warm April day we visited Wantage, and the Park, which is beside the Letcombe Brook and close to the Parish Church, is a delight. Several stone Tablets featuring extracts from his poems are placed throughout the Park, together with other standing stones. It was interesting to look for these tablets which carried verses from the poems "Uffington" "Upper Lambourne" "Distant view of a Provincial Town" "On leaving Wantage" "The Last Laugh" and "preface to "High and Low", as shown above. The stone work has been carried out by the Sculptor, Alec Peever.

There were to be seen the last of what must have been a glorious display of daffodils and snowdrops amongst the trees and, as we walked around, we could see the promise of primroses and bluebells to come. The paths are well defined, but otherwise the Park is a place of woodland glades, and gives an air of quiet serenity. This place is indeed a fitting tribute to a great poet, and well worth a visit.

Farnborough was to be our next place to visit in search of memories of Betjeman. A village high above Wantage on the Berkshire Downs basked in the warm afternoon sunshine. Betjeman had lived at The Old Rectory with his wife and family from 1945 until 1951, when they moved to Wantage. But it was the window at the west end of the village Church that we had come to see.

This window designated the Tree of Life, and designed by John Piper, is quite beautiful. The stained glass depicts symbols of the Resurrection, with a Tree of Life in the centre panel, and flanked with fishes and butterflies. The inscription below the window indicates that it was placed there in 1986 as a memorial to Sir John Betjeman, Poet Laureate. Designed by his friend John Piper, and executed by Joseph Nuttgens.



"The Tree of Life" Window

We spent some time in the Church, which is indeed graced with this beautiful window and, when we emerged into the late afternoon sunshine, we found a lady sitting in the Churchyard taking in the glorious views across the Downs.

We paused and talked with her of many things; of the ancient village and its history, and, of course, The Window. Then it was time to part, she, as custodian of the Church, to lock up and we, somewhat reluctantly, to wend our way homeward.

One of the best of days.

Acknowledgement to John Murray, Publishers, for the quotation from The Collected Poems of John Betjeman.

Millie Bordiss

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PICTURE QUIZ



Do you know where this is?

No prize is offered for the first correct answer received.

Solution to May 2002 Picture Quiz: -  
The Barn before being moved to its present position