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Forthcoming Meetings & Events

Wallingford Walkabout (Meet Wallingford Museum 7 p.m. cost £3 per head)	18 th May
'Twelfth Night' <i>Rain or Shine Theatre Company</i> (Tickets, if there are any left, from David Downs)	8 th June
Outing to Buscot Park (Free for NT members)	15 th June
Barbecue at Highveldt	20 th July
No meeting in August	
The History of St Mary's Church <i>John Chapman</i>	21 st Sept



25th Anniversary Issue

THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL

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Project Purley Publications

- 4 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 Index** (revised Feb 1989)
- 5 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 part 3** (items 39-61) (Reprinted and revised Sept 2005)
- 6 **Index Locorum to The Diary of Reading Corporation** (reprinted September 2005)
- 16 **Monumental Inscriptions at St Mary's Church Part B - Memorials in old churchyard**
- 18 **Beating the Bounds (£0.50)**

Please contact Ann Betts if you would like to purchase copies of the above publications. The costs, unless marked otherwise, are £1 per copy for members and £2 per copy for non-members, plus postage where applicable.

The following are being prepared for re-publication

- 1 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 part 1** (items 1-23) (revised Aug 1988)
- 2 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 part 2** (items 24-38) (Aug 1988)
- 3 **Monumental Inscriptions at St Mary's Church Purley Part C** (Feb 1989)
- 8 **The Early History of Purley C of E School** by Rita Denman (1993)
- 10 **The Place Names of Purley on Thames** by John Chapman (Sept 1990)
- 11 **Project Purley Newsletters 1-11** (Apr 1996)
- 12 **Project Purley Newsletters 12-16** (Apr 1996)
- 13 **Purley on Thames at the Millennium** compiled by John Chapman (Dec 1999)
- 14 **Monumental Inscriptions at St Mary's Church Part C - Memorials in new churchyard**

Other Purley Related Publications

- Tour Guide to Purley Church** (1988)
A History of St Mary's Church Purley by John Chapman (1988)

*Cover: The Church Dig
Frontispiece: One of the skeletons showing the
flint pillow head supports*

THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL



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The History of Project Purley

JEAN DEBNEY

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Project Purley was launched in 1982, two years after the initial project of transcribing and indexing various documents relating to Purley had started. In early 1980, Jean Debney put a request for assistance in the Purley Parish News and a group began meeting one evening a week to transcribe and index the parish registers and study local maps, etc. At the same time she also started writing a series of over 100 short articles entitled "From my History Notebook" recording interesting details compiled from the material found.

In 1981 the opportunity came to conduct an (amateur) archaeological dig in an area of the Parish Churchyard due to a planned extension to the church. This revealed early medieval pillow burials (with large supporting flints each side of the head) where none were expected. The first was labelled "Miss Ugly Face" and involved the local police - who agreed it was not a recent murder! - and the local paper.

In early 1982 the name 'Project Purley' and a logo - of a snipe or bittern standing on a history book - were chosen, a steering committee set up with a provisional chairman, treasurer and secretary, the subscription set at £1 each and a constitution drawn up. A notice in the parish magazine plus posters pinned up round the parish advertised an introductory public meeting in the Beech Road Social Club on 4 May 1982. The meeting attracted 42 people and commenced with cheese and wine and a chance to examine the small exhibition of documents, etc. In the meetings diary I kept, I recorded that we explained what Project Purley was all about and I talked about the projects we were involved with followed by John Chapman who read out a list of 36 suggestions. A note adds "There were no further comments from the floor ... they were probably all too stunned."

During the rest of 1982, we continued with our weekly sessions and held several meetings in members' homes, went on a visit to the

Berkshire Record Office and had two more exhibitions. At first we had 'in-house' speakers at meetings but from the start included a Christmas social and we also went on 'walk-about' to explore the history and topography of different areas in the parish and surrounding area on both sides of the river Thames.

Highlights from our past include the celebration, in October 1986 in the recently built north extension of the Parish Church, of the bi-centenary of the General Court Baron of Purley Magna of October 1786 with a slide show and a costumed re-enactment. This was repeated in the summer of 2000, using an altered script, in the Old Barn as part of the programme of Millennium Lectures by Project Purley. In March 2003, we celebrated our 21st birthday with a party in the Barn with past and present members and other prominent guests.

As our membership increased we moved our monthly meetings to the Parish Room and, when that became too cramped, transferred to the Old Barn in Beech Road. Today we meet on the third Friday of each month and our current programme has developed. This consists of meetings with speakers during the winter months (September to April), including a very popular members' evening in January, a Christmas Social, a walkabout in May, a visit to a place of interest in June and a barbecue in July. No meetings are held in August.

Our membership and subscription have increased to over 50 in 2006 at £5 each and our twice yearly duplicated Newsletter has developed into a substantial Journal published three times a year.

The Church Dig

JOHN CHAPMAN

When the Church got permission to add the extension to the north, one of the conditions of planning consent was that the archaeologists must be given a chance to explore before building could commence. The Trust for Wessex Archaeology however made it plain that they did not have the resources to mount a full scale excavation and the most they could do was to pay the odd visit to the site while the foundations were being dug. They suggested however that the people of Purley might like to have a go themselves. The rector agreed and so a project was set up under the leadership of John Chapman which undertook both preliminary excavation and a detailed photographic record of the reconstruction.

Excavations commenced in July 1981 and continued through the summer until October. After a break for the bad weather, work restarted in June 1982 and went on until building work made it impossible to continue. Work was done mainly at weekends and over thirty people took part including visitors from the United States.

It had been supposed that the area to the north of the church had not been used for burials but this idea was soon dispelled as skeletons began to be discovered only 40 cm below the surface. The first came to light on Saturday 15th August 1981 when John Titterton was in charge of the dig. He first exposed a skull and then the rest of the skeleton appeared. He tried to contact both Newbury Museum and the Trust for Wessex Archaeology but being Saturday he had no luck. So he called the police who asked that nothing be touched until they could examine the bones. Rumours began to circulate about a murder in Purley and the forensic team arrived on site. The police took one look at the scene and asked John "What do you expect to find in a graveyard?" They concluded that the remains were far too old to be of any interest to the police so we were left to get on with it.

This first skeleton was christened "Miss Ugly Face" as it was

obvious she had suffered an appalling injury when she was young which left her with a very distorted face. Over the next weeks many more skeletons were exposed and we were able to see how one grave had cut into another as the ground was reused for later burials. It was not possible to date them accurately, but many of them exhibited the pillowing style of burial in which the head was supported by large flints, a Saxon practice which had all but died out by the 12th Century.

Altogether some 20 boxes of bones were excavated including 15 complete skeletons. We also found the charnel pit which had been used in 1870 to rebury bones disturbed when the church was rebuilt. They were examined by Hugh Carter at Reading Museum and exhibited a good spectrum of mediaeval disorders ranging from tooth decay to bone cancers. They were all later reburied in a new charnel pit by the east wall of the cemetery.

There was also a great deal of very early mediaeval pottery, mostly in the rubble above the graves. This was examined by several local experts but it did not seem to relate to other pottery found in the vicinity. It was finally sent to the Oxford Archaeological Unit where it was examined by Maureen Mellor who dated it from the second half of the 12th Century to the early part of the 13th. The collection consisted mainly of domestic pottery which had come from a large number of different potteries and related more to the Upper Thames and Chilterns than to Berkshire.

There was great excitement when a domed brick construction was discovered. We were at first convinced it was a tomb as there was a large stone on top which looked a bit like the base of a stone cross. After we had exposed a hemispherical dome of



beautifully fashioned brickwork we broke into it expecting to see buried treasure or at the very least a pile of bones; but it was completely empty. We found several more later and they turned out to be drainage soakaways from 1870. Large quantities of pegged roofing tiles were found and fragments were given away in exchange for donations to the building fund.

The footings of both the north walls were examined after demolition of the north aisle and the extensions to the 1870 vestry were noted. The structural engineers were appalled at the paucity of foundations for the north arcade of the church, they consisted of about five layers of brick on top of gravel. It had been planned to hang the roof of the extension from the top of the bath stone pillars but this was deemed unsafe so a large I beam had to be inserted and two new concrete pillars erected to take the weight of the roof. This detracted seriously from the visual impact of the new extension.

A major discovery was a fragment of 14th century tile which turned out to have the same design as some of the more modern tiles on the church floor. Also during rebuilding, the old north wall of the churchyard emerged as a major feature. The tile came from the Penn Tilery a few miles downstream of Purley and it was obvious that when the church was rebuilt in 1870, Street copied the designs of the ancient floor tiles and had modern copies made for the new church.

The soil layers indicated that a very large amount of topsoil must have been removed during an earlier rebuilding phase. It would seem that the early church originally stood on a very pronounced mound and the top of this had been removed to accommodate a later church. This would also explain why the graves to the north were so shallow. If the bones we were finding were just a little earlier, say early 12th century, then it could have been the rebuild around 1150 following the sacking of the Saxon church during the time of Stephen and Matilda in 1135.

The excavation was a great success and the archaeology group became one of the founders of Project Purley. We learned a lot and developed quite a taste for archaeology but lacked the technical skills to write it all up. The pottery finds and the note books languish in the Project Purley archives to this day.

RON DENMAN
27.1.1929 15.9.2006

Here is a tribute by Rita Denman to her husband Ron who amongst his many other contributions to Project Purley was responsible for many years for the setting and layout of this publication.

An only child, Ron was born in Brighton, Sussex. He grew up in the Elm Grove area and attended Elm Grove School. He took the 'scholarship' in 1940 and passed with the distinction of gaining a Hedgecock Special Place at Varndean School for Boys. Ron had many friends and took part in the youth groups, which were attached to the parish church of St Wilfrid. Like so many boys of his age it was during the war years that he developed his interest in aeroplanes and aeronautics. He gained Matriculation standard in 1945 staying on to the 6th Form at Varndean leaving at the end of the summer term in 1947.

He decided to take a degree course in Electrical Engineering at The Brighton Technical College but this was delayed as he was eligible for National Service and in September 1947 he joined the Royal Air Force. His postings took him to RAF Leeming and Northallerton in Yorkshire and Aldergrove in Northern Ireland. He left the Service as a Leading Aircraftsman in 1949.

The next three years were spent at the Brighton Technical College gaining his Degree and his first employment was in 1952 with the Marconi Company at New Street in Chelmsford. His friendship with Rita, which began in 1947, blossomed into marriage in 1953 and they set up their first home in Chelmsford. His Department was transferred to the new town of Basildon, Essex which in 1955 was in the very early stages of development. Ron and Rita and their three-month-old son moved down to the new town. Three years later the Department was back in Chelmsford and Ron and the family, which had grown to two sons and a daughter, returned to Chelmsford. It was while Ron was with the Marconi Company that in 1959 he got his first taste of travel when he spent 6 weeks in Kenya where Marconi were installing a communications line.

In 1961 Ron was ready for a career move and was successful in obtaining a position with the British Communications Corporation a company that had been set up by Polish Air force personnel and technicians who had remained in this country after the 1939-45 war and who had developed some of the very early mobile communications. The Head Office was at that time in High Wycombe, later moving to Wembley. One of Ron's responsibilities was to organise an exhibition and hospitality marquee at the Farnborough Air Shows. These were very enjoyable occasions for him as he was able to combine his job with his continuing interest in aeronautics. For the next 15 years the family home was in Croxley Green in Hertfordshire where the three children grew up.

This was a time of rapid development in the communications industry and The British Communications Corporation became merged with the young Racal Company. In 1975 Racal started a new group in Reading named Racal Tacticom. Ron was offered a position with the newly formed group, which he accepted, and the family home moved to Purley in Berkshire. It was during the next 10 years or so that the travel aspect of Ron's career, setting up major contracts in many parts of the world took over, and every few weeks he was off on another open-ended trip. Although he visited most of Europe, Australia and North and South America his particular 'patch' was Africa. He was in Harare about the time of Independence and witnessed the early years of self-government of a number of the emerging countries. He had many travellers' tales to tell of his experiences and the natural beauty of Africa.

Following the rigours of overseas travel Ron spent the next few years travelling for the Company within the UK. He retired in 1992 enjoying his family and home and travel for pleasure. Settling down to a more relaxed lifestyle he became involved with local affairs taking on the Neighbourhood Watch co-ordination for Purley Village and following many interests. For a number of years his involvement with Project Purley included the setting and layout of the magazine. He played a part in the millennium year photographing of all the

buildings in Purley on Thames and made a video recording of the re-enactment of the Court Baron in millennium year. He was also a superb support for Rita's activities with the Society. He was a computer enthusiast and it gave him the greatest pleasure to be re-acquainted with members of his old school through the 'chat room' and the Old Varndeanian Association and keeping in touch with friends he made in his youth.

He was first diagnosed with colon cancer in 2003 and underwent an operation and was successfully treated with chemotherapy and radiotherapy. The cancer was again diagnosed in August of 2006 but despite every effort by his surgeon and the medical staff he died following surgery. Ron and Rita achieved their 53rd wedding anniversary three days before he died.

A loving husband father and grandfather he is sadly missed by Rita, his two sons and daughter, four grandsons and a granddaughter.

From the Chairman

At our April meeting I was able to present George Fielder with Honorary Membership of Project Purley. This was, I believe, the sixth time he has spoken to us and he has always been excellent with something new and different each time. He had been presented with the Villager of the Year award by the Parish Council a few days earlier in recognition of all that he has done for the village over the many years he has been lock-keeper at Mapledurham. The meeting was also somewhat of a record with 54 people present.

This was also the last meeting arranged by Lee Hall who has had to step down as secretary. I am afraid that I got so engrossed in other matters that I forgot to thank her publicly for all that she has done for Project Purley in recent years. Our meetings programme is set until February of next year so we have a period of grace before a new secretary has to do the kind of things Lee has done for us. Lee will be a hard act to follow but we do need a willing volunteer (otherwise we may have to find an unwilling one!!) So please don't be shy in coming forward with offers or suggestions. Again thank you Lee!

Nature Notes

MICHAEL KING



December

The beginning of the month saw warm temperatures, but the third week brought frost and fog causing disruption to flights at London and Gatwick Airports. Christmas week was again mild. We had a pleasant walk on the Downs at Aldworth on Boxing Day and saw many birds and a few deer. Some Autumn flowers still blooming; trees still showing crops of berries and seed heads hanging like bunches of grapes.

A covey of partridges were seen regularly in the allotments. It was reported in the national press that swallows were still being seen and, in one stately garden, black swans were rearing young. Is this another sign of climate change? The parakeet population is continuing to increase and spread from the original escapees. We have seen them at Saville Gardens, along the banks of the Thames at Boveney Lock near Maidenhead and Hambledon near Henley. How long before they are seen in numbers at, say, Mapledurham/Purley stretches of water?

January

When the month ended it was stated to have been the warmest on record. Very wet and windy with river levels high and adjoining meadows/fields water-logged. The 17th saw very high winds felling trees and fences, causing much damage in the area and a loss of one life on the A329 where a tree fell on to a car. A slight dusting of snow on the 24th but this had melted by the time the children were out of school. The soft fruit growers are reporting that the lack of

frosts/cold spells affects the ripening of the fruits later in the year. Rhubarb growers of Yorkshire are seriously considering artificially freezing the crowns to ensure an early forced crop.

In middle of the month had a walk along the river and saw redwings and fieldfares taking the haws. Fields were still flooded. Rooks beginning to gather on the tree tops at Purley Lane and also Pikeshaw Copse, although not building nests as yet. On warm days saw the lone red admiral butterfly.

February

This month saw some frosty mornings and several inches of snow fell for the first time for a number of years, but as the month progressed temperatures rose with heavy rain and strong winds. Blackthorn trees in the hedgerows began to show their white blossom and each day the spring bulbs put on more colour in the gardens.

Rooks started to establish their nesting sites and squirrels played chase and catch-up, which is usually a prelude to mating. On bright, sunny mornings chorusing birds could be heard laying claim to their territories. Saw the lone butterfly and bumble bee making use of the warmth. Frogs arrived back in the garden pond with spawn appearing on the 27th. Will it survive this year? At the riverside watched a heron looking for fish in the raging torrents of the weir pool and, in the middle of a local road, observed a sparrow hawk with its latest kill of a wood pigeon. It was reluctant to abandon its kill to let us pass. Little egrets (small white heron) in the flooded meadows adjacent to Basingstoke Road by-pass. Another bird making its home in this country.

It was reported nationally that a pod of killer whales were seen in the Firth of Forth, Scotland catching seals, hundreds of miles south of their normal hunting range.

March

This month experienced spells of heavy rain and strong winds, coupled with warm sunny days, which encouraged the growth of spring bulbs and flowers. However, a sharp morning frost damaged the emerging tender blooms of magnolias, camellias and other early

flowering plants, as well as the frogspawn in the pond. No tadpoles again this year for the fish to gorge!

Those who were fortunate to witness the eclipse of the moon were treated to an excellent display of changing lights from bright creams to dark pinks.

Saw the first of the baby rabbits down in the allotments. The partridges seen in December took a liking to my spring greens!

A national report stated that fewer songbirds visited our gardens this winter, with blackbirds, thrushes and robins at their lowest level for five years. However, collared dove and wood pigeon have increased by over 400%. Milder winter temperatures and bumper fruit crops in the hedgerows and woodlands meant more birds did their feeding in the countryside instead of visiting the food put out in our gardens.

Reviews of Meetings & Events

Family Heirlooms

The January 19th meeting of Project Purley in The Barn was well attended despite the threat of strong winds and heavy rain, and also the fact that this was the evening when our treasurer, Ben Viljoen, would be collecting members' annual subscriptions. The attraction was that this would be a "Members' Own" evening, when we could bring and show family heirlooms.

Collins' Concise Dictionary defines an heirloom as "an object that has been in a family for generations." No mention is made of value, and the objects that were shown varied considerably in intrinsic value, though each item was clearly precious to its owner.

The items varied in antiquity too and, by coincidence the first, displayed by David Downs was the most modern. It was a silver cigarette box presented to his uncle, Fred Marcham, by members of the Cornell University U.S.A. boxing team in 1953. Uncle Fred had graduated from Oxford and after service in World War One, had

emigrated to the States to teach history at Cornell, eventually becoming professor in the department. On his death in 1992, the memento was sent to David's mother, and when she passed away three years later, it was handed on to David. David had also brought a copy of his uncle's huge 975 page volume "A History of England," which he explained was his favourite book as a young child, not due to its content, but because its thickness enabled him to use it to press out the creases in any old football programmes.

Bernard Venners had a much older relic, a letter dated September 3rd 1880 describing the life of a coal miner in the area of Illinois and which had been preserved through many generations. Bernard needed a deep breath before reading it to us, as it contained no punctuation, but we were still able to gain a realistic flavour of the harsh working conditions of the men. Places of worship were closed due to lack of support, but the pubs were full on the Sabbath. Workers were plagued by flies and mosquitoes and, in some areas where accommodation was scarce, the workers simply slept in a hole dug in the ground. Marion Venners had also brought an heirloom from her side of the family, a willow pattern plate from the hotelware of the Oxford House Hotel at Wallingford. Her great-grandfather, born in 1880, had owned the hotel, which provided amongst other things, accommodation for boating and beanfeast parties as well as hiring out horses, traps and brakes.

Valerie Hutchings showed a small but beautiful watchchain which had belonged to her grandfather. He was killed whilst working on the railway, leaving his wife with eleven children, and the watchchain was passed to Valerie's father and then on to her. Ben Viljoen had a photograph taken of Dorothy's mother and grandmother. Her grandmother could be seen wearing the brooch which Ben had brought to show. It will be passed on to Ben and Dorothy's granddaughter and so will have travelled through at least five generations.

The great-grandfather of Rita Denman was born in 1831 and after service in the Royal Hussars, became an attendant in a mental asylum, as did his son. Rita displayed photographs of the two men,

as well as a contemporary newspaper report describing an outbreak of typhoid, and also showed us the original police-type whistle which attendants could use to summon assistance in an emergency.

A World War One memorial plaque gruesomely nicknamed "The Dead Men's Penny" was Catherine Sampson's contribution. She had completed extensive research into the fate of her great-grandfather, Private Frederick George Sampson, killed on October 26th 1917 whilst on active service with the Border Regiment just two days after returning from leave in England. Catherine also has his British War Medal and, during an informal discussion after the meeting, said that she may now contact the Ministry of Defence to try and claim the medals due to her uncle killed on flying duties with the R.A.F. in World War Two and which have apparently never been issued.

Bibles are among the most common of family heirlooms, and the one belonging to Sylvia Conquest dates back to 1634. The first family names were written in it in 1817 under the title "Goldsmith," but the most recent are those of Sylvia's father and brother. She also let us see a newspaper from 1943 which mentioned that the will of the late Duke of Kent amounted to £157,000; that Adolf Hitler had stopped boasting about how he would conquer the world and that the upbringing of children should be the responsibility of the parents not the schools.

Hazel King recalled a sad journey she had to make in 1977 when she drove her mother to Leeds to go through the effects of her late aunt. Hazel had recovered a book of postcards sent by her grandfather from France and Belgium in World War One and also a memorial plaque. Then Cliff and Jean Debney produced some of their ancestors' belongings which have been passed down through so many generations, including a couple of walking canes (specially cleaned for the meeting!), a sampler made by Jean's grandmother in 1880 at the age of 9, various items of jewellery, a bone china plate whose value they did not appreciate until they saw a similar example on the "Antiques Roadshow," and a superb cabinet maker's shush box, in which many of these objects could be kept.

Finally it was the turn of our Chairman, John Chapman, to tell us

about a parchment he possesses which documents the apprenticeship of his great-grandfather to a London printer. John has also kept an autograph book of his late mother, who started it at the age of thirteen in 1915. The opening page is decorated with the flags of the Allied Forces fighting in World War One and many of the following pages of poems, drawings and paintings reflect the military theme, including a blank page with the humorous title "A Zeppelin that has just gone by." As with many autograph books, there was keen competition among the writers to make the final entry on the very last page.

Our Chairman closed the formal part of the evening by thanking all those who had taken the trouble to bring so many precious and personal belongings. As members of a history society we are all, I suspect, natural hoarders who enjoy this kind of reminiscence. Our hope for the future is that our younger generations will be similarly inclined.

David Downs

Purley Through the Ages

Project Purley has attracted a considerable number of new members in recent years, so it was entirely appropriate that the meeting on February 16th should be devoted to Jean Debney's talk on "Purley through the ages." Her comprehensive knowledge of the village's history was first demonstrated in a similar talk given as part of the programme of Millennium Lectures in 2000, and offers an overview of the changes that have occurred in Purley during a period of almost one thousand years.

Jean's lecture was backed up by a series of 77 slides, several maps and a table laden with reference books and family card indexes, so it became clear that the audience would need to pay rapt attention if we were not to miss any significant piece of information. As it was, Jean's meticulous preparation meant that she covered the period from 1086 to the present day in just under sixty minutes, so this review only has the space to highlight the most important events and dates.

Purley - the name means "snipe or bittern found in a woodland clearing" - existed in Saxon times as evidenced by its mention in the

Domesday Book of 1086, when the village population was just 80. The area was divided into three manors identified as Purley Magna, Purley Parva and Purley La Hyde. The manors changed hands several times, but by the Middle Ages, the manorial lords had leased most of their estates to tenant farmers and copyholders. Some future members of Project Purley made an exciting discovery in St. Mary's churchyard in 1980 when they excavated several "pillow" graves, where large flints are placed alongside the skull, a custom dating from the Middle Ages.

The 1500s was a time of religious turmoil, but record keeping was becoming more extensive and accurate, so we have more evidence in the form of wills and inventories of possessions. These tell us that most Purley villagers lived in houses with just two or four rooms and that the husbandmen produced their own food, bread and ale, whilst keeping cows, sheep, pigs and poultry.

The seventeenth century was dominated by the English Civil War and we know that villagers suffered at the hands of both Royalist and Parliamentary armies as soldiers from each side seized horses, crops and other food from local inhabitants. Parish registers were destroyed too and Purley's earliest surviving registers date only from 1662. At a time when non-conformist religious groups such as the Quakers and Baptists were being formed, there is little if any evidence that anyone from Purley was joining one of these new movements.

In 1711 the Rector of Purley, William Gostwick, made a list in the parish register of those responsible for maintaining the churchyard rails, the length of which corresponded to their status in the village. Many of the same property-owning men were charged with improving the road from Reading to Wallingford (now the A329) and building a bridge over the Thames at Shillingford. Money for this came from four tollgates along the way. As transport developed, Purley Lock was built to improve navigation along the river and, in 1794, the Thames Commissioners set up a horse ferry which crossed to the Oxford bank near the church and returned near to the Roebuck where Ferry Cottage can still be seen. Purley Lodge was built in the 1750s by John Liebenrood and the Red Lyon public house was the

setting for a Court Baron held in October 1786, prior to the walking of the estate boundary. A costumed and scripted re-enactment of the Court Baron was held in the Barn in 2000 as part of the Millennium celebrations.

Ownership of land in Purley changed hands several times in the eighteenth century and the family names of St.John, Mackreth, Martindale and Storer all feature prominently in the village history. Anthony Storer M.P. bought Purley Magna for £15,000 in 1793 and, in his will, left another £15,000 to ensure Purley Park was built to a design by James Wyatt on the high ground overlooking the Thames Valley. Elyham House was built on the south side of the Oxford Road and, in 1914, the farm became the home of the celebrated artist, Cecil Aldin. The Barn was used as a remount stable in World War One and moved to its present site as recently as 1995.

The Great Western Railway extended its network as far as Purley in 1840, the line bisecting the parish, though few villagers could afford the fares until Tilehurst Station was opened in 1892. Before then, the post had been brought from Reading by cart, but now the mail arrived at 6.24 a.m. and was collected at 7.30 p.m. Purley Post Office happened to be wherever the postmaster or postmistress lived.

The first school in Purley was set up by the Rector, Charles Manesty, in 1818 for poor children. A new school was opened in 1873 for all local children aged from five to ten and this building still survives today, with of course, much modernisation.

St.Mary's Church was virtually rebuilt and restored in the 1869-70 period at a cost of £2,000. The Norman font was moved into the chancel and a new vestry and north aisle constructed. A new east window donated by Mrs.Cecily Storer in memory of her sister was installed and the lych gate was given by Caroline Sherwood as a tribute to her parents.

Purley changed dramatically in the twentieth century as a result of two world wars and the lasting effects of the industrial revolution. It was still a small village with few houses, but the old order began to break up with the sale of Purley Park in 1920. Geographical and social mobility increased as motor buses from the village to Reading

were introduced, replacing the slower horse and cart. Council houses were built too in the 1930s in Glebe Road and the old blacksmith's shop at the end of Long Lane was demolished for road widening. At the beginning of World War Two, evacuees arrived from London, but stayed for only a few days. Their names are nevertheless recorded in the Purley School register.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Purley Memorial Hall was designed and built in tribute to those local residents killed in both world wars and the community spirit was further enhanced by the founding of the Purley Park Property Owners' Association. The District Council was keen to clear the freehold sites in the large field near the church, but the River Gardens estate had become too widespread and mains water, sewerage, electricity and finally gas were provided for the area and the road improved. Local organisations, such as the Women's Institute, Mothers' Union, drama groups, Girl Guides, Brownies and indeed Project Purley itself have been formed in the last century as the village has grown in size and spirit. The only recent loss to the community has been the sale of Westbury Farm which, since the death of wine expert, Bernard Theobald, means the vineyard has been cleared.

The 1991 census showed Purley to have a population of more than 5,000, a vast increase on the 80 villagers of Saxon times. It may still be considered small by some standards, but was given additional status when it was renamed Purley on Thames to distinguish it from a similarly named area in Surrey. As Jean had said right at the start of her talk, our village is indeed rich in history, and it is thanks to the enthusiasm and expertise of her and people like her that we are able to share in it.

David Downs

Annual General Meeting 2007

The 25th Annual General Meeting was held on the 16th March 2007 at The Barn. The Chairman, John Chapman, welcomed the 20 members attending and summarised the past year's programme. In

April Leslie Grout gave a talk and slide show on the graveyards of London and in May some members braved the elements on the walkabout in Reading. The outing to Milestones Museum in Basingstoke was a successful trip and the July barbecue was enjoyed by those attending. An enthralling talk was given by Dick Greenaway on Woodland Archaeology in September, followed by a slide show given by Sidney Gold in October on statues and monuments in Reading. In November, Kevin McCormack enlightened the audience to the trials and tribulations of restoring a railway carriage, which once stood in Purley as someone's home. The Christmas party went off very well, even if the quiz created a period of silence.

The January members evening was felt to be one of the best, with individual stories and family keepsakes on show bringing back memories to all those present. A re-run of the Millennium lectures started with Jean Debney in February giving a sweeping review of 1,000 years of Purley history.

David Downs organised another production by The Rain or Shine Theatre Company in June, which eventually raised £500 for Dogs for the Disabled. The 2007 production of Twelfth Night will be on June 8th and the charity collection will be for Macmillan Nurses.

Ann Betts and Ben Viljoen were thanked for their hard work in producing the Journal and much work is being done by the Publications sub-committee in capturing as much of the Society's archives as possible in electronic form, thus making it available to a wider audience. The Society will also be participating in the Local History month to be staged at Newbury Museum in May 2007.

The Society's financial position remains sound, with a steady membership.

Two of the present officers of the Society, John Chapman (Chairman) and Ben Viljoen (Treasurer), were proposed and duly re-elected to continue in these posts and the present Executive Committee were proposed and duly re-elected en bloc to serve for another year.

Hazel King

Executive Committee

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