

THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL



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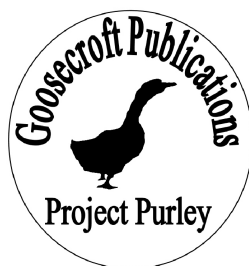
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The Storer Family Portraits

by Peter Fullerton

There are six known portraits of the Storer family, all of which once hung at Purley Park. Mrs Ivy Evans, daughter of George Frederick Fullerton and Leila Storer, inherited Purley from her grandfather, Major Storer, on the death of her mother in 1918. She sold Purley Park in 1920 and moved with her husband, Major Archie Evans, to Chacombe House, near Banbury.

In March 1920, without consulting her brothers, Cecil and Richard, Ivy sold all the Storer portraits at Sotheby's, together with many other valuable paintings. The auctioneer's copy of the Sotheby's 1920 sale catalogue, with the prices and buyers marked against each lot, is in the British Library.

These portraits were owned by the Storer trust created by Major Storer but Ivy (as life tenant of the trust) did not obtain the trustees' consent to the sale. It seems likely from the sequence of events that the trustees resigned in protest but before doing so required her to re-purchase the family portraits, together with some other paintings. Ivy then took the portraits with her to Chacombe House where they hung for 25 years. .

In 1946 Ivy sold Chacombe House and moved into Chacombe House Lodge. Most of the Storer portraits were included in the sale of the contents of the house and are listed in the sale catalogue of the auctioneers, Midland Marts of Banbury. There is no record of who bought the portraits although most have been subsequently traced and are described in the paragraphs below. There are photos of all the portraits taken at the time of the sale in the Storer archive.

It is thanks to the researches Dr David Wilson, an art historian, that we know what happened to the portraits after 1920. His article in *The British Art Journal* of Winter 2012/13 describes in detail how and why the portraits came to be bought back by Ivy after the sale in 1920. He did this research in order to write his article about the portrait of Earl Fitzwilliam by Reynolds which was also bought back. Although this is not a family portrait I have included the story of it because it led to the revelations about the series of sales of the Storer portraits.



Purley Park from the air 1984

The pictures

THOMAS JAMES STORER (1747-1792) Oil on canvas 46x61 cm
 Painted in 1770 by Nathaniel Dance (1735-1811).

Thomas Storer was probably on a visit to London at that time from his estates in Jamaica. It was amongst the portraits sold in 1920 at Sotheby's and then bought back and hung in Chacombe House. It was rescued from the sale at Chacombe House Lodge in 1964 by Mrs Myra Horsfall, sister of Mrs Evans. She presented it to Eton College because Thomas Storer was the father of Anthony Morris Storer who gave his library to the College.

Dr Wilson's enquiries at Eton revealed that they no longer had the portrait. They said that they did not know when it was sold or to whom. But Dr Wilson discovered that it was sold at Sotheby's (presumably by Eton) in February 1966, only two years after it had been given to them. It was bought by one "Douglas" for only £50. In 1988 it was sold again at Sotheby's. The estimate in the catalogue

was £8,000-£12,000, but it sold for £13,200. It was wrongly described in the catalogue as of Anthony Morris Storer MP (the famous son of Thomas Storer) which perhaps explains why it was then valued so highly. It is not known where the portrait now is. But there is an excellent colour photograph of it, probably taken at the time of the sale in 1988. An engraving was made of the portrait by Grozer. The original copper plate has survived and is in the Storer deed box. My father had the plate cleaned and about 50 prints made from it in the form of cards in 1936.

ANTHONY MORRIS STORER (1746-1799) Full length portrait, oil on canvas, 9ft x 7ft. Son of Thomas Storer above. Painted in 1794 by Sir Martin Archer Shee (1769-1850, President of the Royal Academy). This full length portrait shows Anthony Morris holding in his hand a volume of Granger's Biographical History of England. "Grangerising" meant illustrating that history and rebinding it with prints cut out from other books or publications. The remarkable set of 27 volumes of "Grangers" compiled by Anthony Morris is in the Eton College library. This portrait was sold by Mrs Evans in the sale at Chacombe House in 1946. The buyer is not known but it was later acquired by a dealer in Spain, Sr. Perez Ortiz. He sold it to the Prado Museum in Madrid in 1959-60, together with the portrait of Elizabeth Storer (see below). The two portraits together were sold to the Prado for 750,000 pesetas. The portrait remains on exhibition in the Prado Museum.

A head and shoulders version of this portrait was also commissioned by Anthony Morris of which at least two copies are known. He probably had these copies made and presented to friends. One of them was presented to Eton, possibly when his library was given to the College after his death. It was recorded in the College Library catalogue of 1910 as "Head and shoulders portrait of Anthony Morris Storer, Painter unknown. Seated to the right in dark coat and holding an engraving in his left hand". In fact the portrait was a half length copy of the original (standing) described above. Eton now have no trace of this painting. Despite being a portrait of a major benefactor of the College, it was almost certainly sold. It may have been the version sold at Bonhams in 2003 for £1900. That version

was dated 1794, which probably means that the original full length portrait was also painted in that year. It is not known where this head and shoulders portrait, or any other versions of it, are now held. A new copy of the original portrait was commissioned in 2011 by Charles Horsfall. It is a fine approximately half length reproduction of the original full length portrait. It is now framed and in his possession.

The Hon ELIZABETH STORER (nee PROBY) 1752 -1808. Full length portrait (oil on canvas, 240x148 cm) Painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence. (1769-1830. Elizabeth Storer was the daughter of John Proby, 1st Lord Carysfort and sister of John Joshua Proby (1st Earl of Carysfort) of Elton Hall. She married Thomas James Storer (see above) and was the mother of Anthony Gilbert Storer (see below). The portrait shows her as an elderly lady, seated, probably on the verandah of Purley Park. It was painted in 1806, shortly before she died in 1808. The portrait was commissioned in 1806 by her son Anthony Gilbert Storer but remained unfinished at Lawrence's death in 1830. Dr David Wilson has discovered from the papers of Archibald Keightley, the executors of Lawrence, that the price was £126 and that only £63 had been received on account. It is not clear why Anthony Gilbert, having commissioned the portrait of his aged mother, did not pay the balance to have it finished. He died in 1818 but it was not until 1830 that the portrait was delivered to his widow after correspondence with the executors.

This portrait was sold by Mrs Evans in 1920 through Sotheby's. It was bought by "Prothero" for £100 but was then bought back by Mrs Evans together with all the other Storer portraits (see under Anthony Morris Storer above). It was eventually sold by Mrs Evans at Chacombe in 1946. The buyer was not recorded but the portrait was later acquired by the Prado Museum, along with that of Anthony Morris Storer (see above).

There is another portrait of Elizabeth Proby as a young girl with her brother, the future Earl Carysfort at Elton Hall, (see the Catalogue of the pictures at Elton Hall page 69, in the bookcase in the dining room).

ANTHONY GILBERT STORER (1782-1818) Full length portrait, oil on canvas 9 ft x 7ft. Painted by Sir Martin Archer Shee in 1813. Anthony Gilbert was the son of Thomas and Elizabeth Storer (above). The portrait shows him, aged 31, standing on the verandah of Purley Park looking out at the view over the River Thames. The house had been completed only about 13 years earlier. This painting was sold at Chacombe in 1946 and was later also acquired by the Prado Museum in 1959 for 90,000 pesetas.

MISS ELIZABETH FANNY STORER (1809-1848) **MISS KATHERINE STORER** (1811-1900) and **ANTHONY MORRIS STORER II** (1813-1902) Oil on canvas 6ft 6" x 5 ft. Painted by Sir Martin Archer Shee in 1819. They are the three surviving children of Anthony Gilbert Storer. Their father had died in the West Indies in the previous year. The children came home with their mother to Purley where this picture was probably painted. This painting was sold at Chacombe in 1946. It is not known where it now is.

MISS ELZABETH FANNY STORER (1809-1848) Oil on canvas. 51" x 40". Painted by Sir Martin Archer Shee in 1811. The eldest daughter of Anthony Gilbert. She was at that time the only surviving child. The painting shows her aged two with her pet spaniel. It was also sold at Chacombe in 1946. It is not known where it now is.

In addition to the portraits listed above, there are two miniatures of members of the Storer family. They are in the china cupboard in the sitting room.

MAJOR ANTHONY MORRIS STORER (1813-1902) This miniature appears to have been painted when he was about 50.

MISS LEILA STORER (1862-1918) Daughter and heiress of Major Storer. The miniature shows her aged about four. This dates it c.1866 which is probably the date of the miniature of Major Storer as well because they seem to be a pair.

Three other Storer portraits have also recently been described to me by Mr Brett Ashmead Hawkins, an American writer who has researched Jamaican families.

THOMAS STORER, (1717-1793). He was the father of Thomas James Storer (see above)

HELEN GUTHRIE. (1713-1770). She was the wife of Thomas Storer (above).

HELEN STORER (1749 - ?) She was the daughter of Thomas and Helen Storer (above) and married to Colin Campbell, owner of the New Hope estate in Jamaica.

THE EARL FITZWILLIAM By Sir Joshua Reynolds

This is not a family portrait but was commissioned by Anthony Morris Storer and was one of the most valuable and interesting paintings in the collection at Purley Park. Dr Wilson is an art historian who came to see me in 2012 when he learned that I had written the Storer family history. He was particularly interested in the way in which the Storer portraits had been sold by my Aunt, Mrs Ivy Evans because the portrait of Earl Fitzwilliam had been included in these sales.

The portrait was commissioned from Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1785 by Anthony Morris Storer who was a close friend of Earl Fitzwilliam going back to their time at Eton together. Earl Fitzwilliam was Lord President of the Council in the Whig government of Charles James Fox when Storer was an MP. The painting was in the dining room at Purley Park. It was sent for auction at Sotheby's in 1920 by Mrs Evans together with the Storer portraits and was sold to "Masterman" for £400 as a painting by Reynolds. It was then bought back by Mrs Evans as a result of the injunction taken out against her by my father for selling the paintings without the permission of the trustees. (See paragraph on Mrs Evans in main history). Mrs Evans then kept the portrait in her house at Chacombe, and later at Chacombe House Lodge. It was finally sold at Sotheby's in 1964 when Mrs Evans went into a nursing home.

By that time the portrait had been repaired to conceal a tear and the back of the canvas relined, obscuring the signature of Sir Joshua Reynolds and his inscription of the name of Earl Fitzwilliam. Consequently, Sotheby's did not believe that the portrait was by Reynolds; and Mrs Evans was too old to explain its history. So it was described in the Sotheby's catalogue merely as: "Sir W. Beechey. Portrait of a gentleman...in a landscape setting". It was bought by Agnews for a mere £200 and sold to a private collector. Dr Wilson established from Sotheby's records that the buyer was Sir

David (later Lord) King, an industrialist and later chairman of British Airways. In 2011 the picture resurfaced and was sold by Lady King's executors for about £13,500 to another private collector. By that time the picture had been cleaned and reframed. In the process the inscription on the back was revealed and its authenticity as a portrait by Reynolds confirmed. Dr Wilson played a leading part in this process. Hence his interest in how our family had come to sell the portrait without realising that it was a genuine Reynolds.

Dr Wilson, a former solicitor, has explained in his article the legal complexities of the Storer trust and how Mrs Evans was obliged by Court Order to buy back the portrait in 1920. Sotheby's had a record of the sale by Mrs Evans in 1920, and when the portrait was offered for sale again by her executors in 1964 they assumed that it must have been a copy. It was only when Dr Wilson discovered the evidence that Mrs Evans had bought the portrait back in 1920 that it was accepted in the sale in 2011 that it was the original portrait by Reynolds. The portrait is now in a private collection; the name of the new owner is known to Dr Wilson.

The irony of this story is that in 1964 Mrs Evans had offered this portrait to her nephew, Derek Fullerton, in the belief that it was by Reynolds. Derek declined the offer without even seeing the picture but subsequently learned that it had been sold for only £200 as a copy of the original painting. If Derek had accepted the portrait it would probably still be hanging in his house unrecognised as a genuine Reynolds. He would not have gone to the expense of having it professionally restored and thus been able to discover that it was after all a genuine Reynolds. Dr Wilson and I have enjoyed unravelling this intriguing piece of art history.

*Reminiscence****Early Days of Long Lane School******by Pat Deane***

Pat was one of the founder members of Project Purley and taught for many years at Long Lane School. This article was originally published in Purley Parish News of June 1999.

On 26th April 1966 New Purley Primary School opened its doors to fifty five pupils whose ages ranged from five to ten years, with Mr Palmer as Headteacher and a temporary teacher. At the first Managers' meeting a month later the name was changed to Long Lane Primary School. The first stage consisted of three classrooms, two open areas and a temporary office/staff room (now the caretaker's room). The use of black bricks and the design, which was to include a hexagonal hall, was a talking point in the neighbourhood.

The land for the school was compulsorily purchased and the school was built on the site of the old kennels belonging to the South Berks Hunt which was part of Belleisle (originally Elyham), owned by the Storer family. Trenthams started buying the Belleisle property in 1953 for their Head Office. The Hunt was the last section to be bought and the kennels were removed in 1960. Trenthams were good neighbours to the school - providing equipment for fetes, allowing visits to the barn and farmhouse for local studies and showing civil engineering workshops and laboratory in operation.

Initially the shouting of children at playtimes, the sound of recorder lessons and general noise gave rise to a complaint from a neighbour. However, as Long Lane had only recently been widened from a quiet, single track, tree-lined lane, this was not surprising. Nearly fifty years later it has become a busy commuter route as well as a dropping-off point for two schools. The catchment area now includes several housing developments of various sizes.

Education was now going through a further period of change. Open plan designs were designed to allow co-operation between children, also the timetables became flexible. Class lessons were few

and far between as children were supposed to complete work at their own rate, finding information for themselves. This philosophy influenced the third stage of the building (completed in November 1970) where we see complete open plan areas with two tiny rooms for quiet work or story time or discussions. It was basically an open plan school incorporating team teaching, vertical streaming and an integrated day. Visitors came from many parts of the south and from abroad to see the system in operation.

The second stage was construction of the kitchen, changing room and the hall - now to be a square one due to lack of finances. The kitchen was welcomed as until then meals had to be delivered to the school from Wantage! The Log Book records on one occasion that the lunch was very poor and a pupil of that time remembers the food tasting of diesel! During snowy weather the food could not always be delivered so Mr Palmer and some pupils had to make expeditions to the local shop to buy whatever they could for 71 pupils and 9 adults.

By 1968 the roll had risen to 142 and a teacher recalls arriving at school on a Monday morning to find several new children added to her class. In 1969 a terrapin classroom was erected to cope with the influx. The children had become used to life with construction work going on around them. In fact some enterprising lads were quite sad when it all came to an end; they had found a little job at lunchtimes carrying buckets of water for the workmen, earning sixpence for themselves in the process.

Music featured prominently in the life of school and this aspect continues to the present time. The school has joined up with other schools for musical productions as well as regular concerts at school. A caring attitude has always been fostered so we see the children have given their time to entertaining and raising funds for less fortunate people and also wild life. Long Lane has also taken part in many sports events which have been held in the area.

*Meeting Reports****Project Purley's Visit to Waddesdon Manor***

Project Purley members were due to enjoy a walkabout in Sutton Courtenay on May 16th but unfortunately we were forced to cancel a few weeks beforehand due to the poor health of our intended guide. Instead we kicked off our summer season of outings and events with a hastily arranged trip to Waddesdon Manor near Aylesbury, one of the former homes of the Rothschild family. Waddesdon was built in the 1870s in the distinctive style of a Loire Valley Chateaux and contains an extensive collection of antiques and family memorabilia.

It was a gloriously sunny day, one of the best of the year to date, and as we pulled up in the car park it was clear that we had chosen a good time to arrive – a thousand-space car park almost to ourselves. A shuttle bus was already waiting for us and in no time we were standing in front of the main drive to the house with its uninterrupted views of the house frontage. First stop was tea, coffee and plentiful supplies of homemade biscuits in the restaurant before free time to explore the gardens and aviary. At noon we reassembled in the restaurant for what turned out to be a delicious lunch of hot salmon quiche with a green leaf salad and minted potatoes followed by panacotta and berry compote and then tea and coffee to finish.

After lunch it was time to enter the house and the system of timed tickets seemed to work well at keeping the crowds down and giving you time to savour the exquisite furnishings and works of art. Successive generations of the Rothschild family have built the collections now on show in Waddesdon and a private family trust continues to add further items, even though the house is now managed by the National Trust. Waddesdon's creator Ferdinand de Rothschild was especially fortunate to be able to buy up the family treasures of families such as the Dukes of Hamilton, Buccleuch, Devonshire and Rutland, and the Earls Spencer and Fitzwilliam who were facing financial hardship in the 1870s and 1880s due to the agricultural depression. Their treasures are amongst those which fill the thirty plus rooms and corridors open to the public, each with their own guide and guide cards although audio and visual handsets were



Project Purley members at Waddesdon

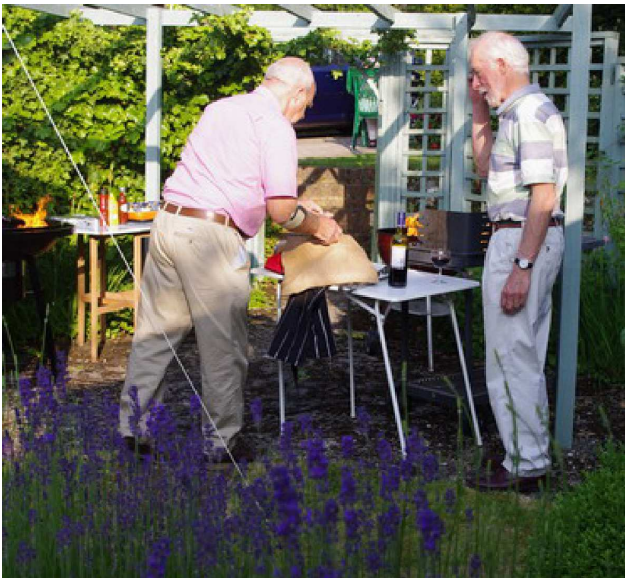
also available to hire for a small fee. The visual feast of antiques on display was almost overwhelming. Here a desk used by Louis XVI in the years before the French Revolution, there a rare Savonnerie carpet dating to 1683; whilst every room seemed to contain paintings by the greats such as Gainsborough, Reynolds, Guardi and Vermeer. Up on the first floor Alice de Rothschild's collection of arms and armour was on display in the bedroom corridor, whilst one room was dedicated to Léon Bakst's paintings telling the story of the Sleeping Beauty, commissioned by James and Dorothy de Rothschild, and another held a vast collection of Sèvres porcelain, much of which were ordered by Marie-Antoinette from Sèvres in 1781.

Buzzing and foot-weary from the house, there was time for a quick or in some cases slow peruse of the shop and a leisurely ice cream in the sun before setting off home. All in all it was an excellent day and many of us plan to return.

Catherine Sampson

Annual Barbecue

The evening of Friday June 20th saw the second of Project Purley's summer events with the annual barbecue, courtesy of our generous hosts Ben and Dorothy Viljoen. Preparations for the evening reached a peak in the afternoon of the 20th as Ben, David, David, Richard, Tony and Catherine gathered at Highveldt to erect the gazebos and build a new barbecue brought especially to boost cooking potential. Elsewhere Lee and Ann were busy preparing and pre-cooking the onions and chicken which would be reheated and browned in the evening whilst the sausages and beef burgers cooked.



Ben and David doing the cooking

By 6pm the tables were up, tablecloths in place and the 'delicate art' of preparing the melon boat starters was underway, skilfully assembled by Dorothy, Marjorie, Angela, Lee, Ann and Catherine. The first of the forty-five members, family and friends arrived at 7pm, all bringing with them beautifully prepared contributions for either the salad or desert tables. At half-past it was time to welcome everyone and

serve the starters and as that was cleared away our chefs for the evening – Ben Viljoen and David Green – announced that the meats were ready and people began to make their way to the buffet tables and barbecue for their choice of food. For the next few hours the tables of food slowly emptied, conversation and wine flowed, groups of people took the opportunity to have a wander round Highveldt's stunning garden and everyone enjoyed the rare occasion of the barbecue falling on a balmy summer evening. All too soon the evening began to draw to a close, our hosts and chefs were thanked and everyone made their way home, some to return the next morning to restore Ben and Dorothy's garden to its normal state. Once again we had enjoyed an evening of wonderful food, laughter and friendship.

Catherine Sampson

Rain or Shine Performance of The Merchant of Venice

The Rain or Shine Theatre Company made their annual visit to The Barn on Friday, June 6th, for an evening performance of *The Merchant of Venice*. There was to be no matinee this year as Kendrick School, the regular afternoon audience had booked their own private performance to enhance the girls' studies for their exam curriculum.

The eight-strong cast arrived at 4pm on the Friday afternoon, by which time Ben, Richard and I had set up the chairs and tables, and Angela, Ann, Jean and Lee had organised refreshments in the small hall. The actors assembled their stage, lights, costume rail, props and music, ate the snacks we had provided for them, did their vocal warm-up, then there was time for everyone to have an hour's rest before the audience began to arrive.

The only actor making his debut with Rain or Shine this year is Michael Skellern taking the role of Bassanio, but the performance in Purley was the opening night of a three-month long run for all the performers. The play is one of the most controversial as well as one of the most acted of all Shakespeare's works. It contains strong elements of anti-Semitism, and because all the characters are prone to prejudice as well as nuances of genuine altruism, the entire cast have the opportunity to project considerable depth of feeling. (They might possibly have performed a different play – *Treasure Island* – in the afternoon, but that's another story, in more ways than one).

Not specified as a comedy, *The Merchant of Venice* has comic elements, especially in the way director James Reynard, who also plays Shylock, has interpreted the script and even introduced glimpses of slapstick, for example with the selection of the caskets and the quest for the missing ring.

In true Rain or Shine style the actors are able to hold the attention of the audience as they switch from the ridiculous to the sublime, most markedly in the scene where the disguised Portia (Claire Tucker) delivers the powerful "quality of mercy" oration and brings about the final humiliation of Shylock, who is denied his

pound of flesh. An interesting confrontation here, as the two actors are married in real life!

The general opinion after the play was that although the hilarity of previous productions was not evident, the quality of acting was as good as we have come to expect from this talented company and the issues raised in the story give much opportunity for subsequent reflection. Perhaps most important of all is the fact that the event, including Project Purley's share of ticket sales, Catherine's refreshments, plus a very generous leaving collection, meant that a net profit of £570 could be donated to the Alexander Devine Children's Hospice.

I express my sincere thanks to everyone who helped to make the evening such a success.

David Downs

Purley in The Park

Bucknell's Meadow was the venue for an extremely well-attended 'Purley in the Park' family day on Saturday June 14th, which was organised by the Purley Primary Project to raise funds for the proposed building works to Purley's new primary school. Saturday's events began with a football match in the morning before a range of stands, food and beverage stalls, games and activities, together with a large display arena were steadily erected in the run-up to the 2pm grand opening by M.P. Alok Sharma.

Project Purley supported the event with a small display of exhibition stands featuring Purley Infant School and the River Estate. These proved very popular as did the tithe map which we displayed on a table in front of our gazebo and a selection of folders containing back copies of the Purley Parish News and photographs and memorabilia relating to the Storer family of Purley Park. Several people expressed an interest in joining Project Purley and we sold another two copies of Purley in Old Images. Overall we were blessed with hot and sunny weather, despite the drops of rain as we began to erect our gazebo; however our corner position together with the exposed nature of Bucknell's proved hazardous for the gazebo and its contents when the wind unexpectedly rose strongly

on occasions.

Before the event had even opened we nearly lost the gazebo as the wind got underneath it and pulled it off its pegs, and we were forced to borrow bricks and string to hold the display stands in place. It was not until we came to take the gazebo down however that we discovered that the plastic mountings of the frame had become so mangled that it is now unusable. Ours was not alone in suffering such a fate; at least two others close by were similarly rendered unusable. Despite these set-backs the day itself was well-organised, extremely enjoyable and brought all sections of the community together. My thanks go to: Ann Betts, Marjorie Butler, Roger Butler, Angela Edwards, Jean Debney, Lee Hall and Richard McDonald for their help on the day.

Catherine Sampson

Visit to Houses of Parliament

Monday 28 July dawned bright and sunny but it was quite cool when 44 members of Project Purley, some with family and friends, gathered by the Old Barn at 8.15 am to catch the coach to London. Our destination was the House of Commons. After driving through torrential rain and several traffic jams we arrived in dense traffic with police everywhere. Before entering The Palace of Westminster we were subjected to intense security checks before we congregated in our two groups inside Westminster Hall.

After passing through important rooms with glorious pictures and statues, etc. we first visited the House of Lords where the Queen announces her Prime Minister's proposals to Parliament. The seats are red leather seats but the Queen walks on a blue carpet up a wide staircase to the Robing Room before being seated on an ornate golden throne surrounded by a golden arch. Interestingly, Prince Phillip's throne is ½ inch lower than the Queen's. Next stop was the House of Commons where we were again not allowed to sit on its green seats. There was a forest of hanging microphones and numerous speakers on the crowded seats so all could be seen and heard on our TV.

Our guide, Nathan, had a good sense of humour and told us so

many things. A statue of Charles I prompted our guide to say 'that he was too tall and it was decided to make him shorter' - here Nathan put one hand on top of his head and the other under his chin and explained that this was what he told visiting school children! A bust of Mrs Thatcher made of bronze prompted the comment that it should have been iron.

The tour ended back in Westminster Hall and we returned to the coach to eat our packed lunches en route to Kew Gardens. After reviving cups of tea, etc. we split up in different directions to look at things, enjoying what was by now a hot and sunny afternoon. One couple decided they wanted to view the 'Climbers and Creepers' but were very surprised to find it was a children's playground! Several folk (including myself) visited Kew Palace which was beautifully furnished in the time of George III, its most famous resident. A number of young ladies in period dresses and bonnets answered questions and were very helpful. On my way to the Palace I found a couple of huge trees wearing colourful "Tree Cosies" round their trunks. They had been knitted - and crocheted - by 50 women for those with special mental health problems and were very colourful.

After a final cup of tea we returned to the coach and were back at the Barn by 7 o'clock, tired and happy. Our thanks are due to our MP, Alok Sharma, who set up the visit, to Val Jones who organised everything, plus our driver, Wendy, who was very cheerful and helpful.

Jean Debney

Heritage Open Days

11 - 14 September 2014

It is hard to believe it but Heritage Open Days celebrate their twentieth anniversary this year and this year's events have a suitably festival feel in celebration of this big milestone. Once again in mid-September thousands of unique and historic sites across England will be throwing open their doors to visitors for free, including many not normally open to the public. This year events include Elizabethan garden parties, a 1950s tea-dance, walks, tours and picnics.

As I write so far over twenty sites across Berkshire have advertised their participation in the scheme on HOD's website although this is likely to rise substantially in the run up to September 11th. I am certainly tempted to head down to Bisham Abbey and the nearby All Saints Church which will be opening their doors to visitors on the Thursday, whilst closer to home a guided historical and architectural tour of Sonning takes in both the church and buildings associated with the Rich and Palmer families. Reading's Ribbon of Green is the inviting title of a guided walk organised by the Berkshire Gardens Trust which takes in some of Reading's historic parks, gardens and open spaces. The walk ends in Caversham Court Gardens which is also participating in the Heritage Open Days. Alternatively you can take in a tour of Reading's Quaker burial ground, meeting house and garden in Church Street, a site of worship since 1714. It would be remiss of me not to also mention the open day for anyone interested in researching their own family's history at Berkshire Family History Society's Research Centre at Yeomanry House - especially as I shall probably be taking a turn to help at some point.

There's plenty to see further a field too but a couple particularly caught my eye. Whale Island, Portsmouth is an island constructed by convicts which became the first naval gunnery school ashore. You can tour the grounds, visit the Victorian buildings, the Church of St Barbara and museum, and inspect the state gun carriage. Slightly closer to home is Cadland House Gardens, which boasts spectacular views across the Solent to the Isle of Wight from the gardens designed by Capability Brown circa.1775. Guided tours will be taken throughout the day, and Head Gardener Peter Chadwick will be on hand to field any questions. Light refreshments will be available and picnics are welcome. All sounds like a pretty good day out to me.

For full details of all the events, opening times, and any restrictions check out the website: <http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/>.

Catherine Sampson

Nature Notes

by Rita Denman

4th April 2014 We have heard again that the future UK weather will probably be hot dry summers and warm wet winters. The past winter was very mild and dormant plants are coming into strong growth now. The week has been notable for the very poor air quality, which in some parts of the UK has reached our highest register of 10. Weather conditions, pollution emissions from the Continent, UK emissions, plus warm air and wind bringing sand from the Sahara Desert have combined to make a very uncomfortable environment for those with breathing problems who were advised to take great care and not to overdo any physical exercise. There was permanent fog pollution over Purley for a few days and motorists complained of the Saharan dust collecting on cars. Today (Friday) is a much better day and according to forecasts clean air from the Atlantic will blow away the pollution.

18th April. I watched a pair of kites dancing in the air. Flying around each other, almost touching wing tips, gliding and falling. It was a joy to watch. Tim Metcalfe tells me that all the wheat and barley is up to date with spraying and fertilizing. Now he could do with some rain.

April 25th Easter Saturday began beautifully and remained a sublime spring day all day. I was up early and gazing from the window I noticed that there was a muntjac deer by the steps into the meadow. This is a very busy area for wildlife so there was nothing unusual in that but it was the way the animal was behaving that caught my attention. Pawing the ground and nuzzling into the grass it moved to where the grass was shorter and I saw that it was nuzzling a tiny kid which was no bigger than a puppy. It pushed the kid along and out of sight. I believe the kid may have just been born. Later in the afternoon I went out to do a few tidying up jobs, in the garden and meadow. Walking back down the meadow path the setting sun caught something shining in the grass. Investigating, I found a little ball of russet fur shining in the sun, and two large ears of the baby muntjac curled up in a nest of grass. I couldn't believe my eyes. Fortunately I have learned my lesson and never go down to the meadow without a camera, so I was able to record this

wonderful moment. Leaving it undisturbed I didn't see it again.

Easter Day was dull to begin and deteriorated through the day. During the Rector's address about Noah and the flood it became as dark as night the heavens opened and during the thunder and lightening all the electrics failed. I thought of the muntjac kid and hoped that it was strong enough to follow its mother. The weather remained wet and thundery.

2nd May Foggy mornings have developed into sunny days, but there has also been a lot of rain. The River Thames is very sensitive to heavy rainfall and a couple of warnings have been issued in the last few days. The ground is still saturated and we really need a good spell of dry weather to settle everything down. The countryside is very very green and the hedge parsley is beginning to come into flower.

9th May The meadow is looking wonderful with hedge parsley all around, the May (hawthorne) in blossom and more buttercups than usual. The roe deer frequently visit the barley field and stand for hours with their heads in the hedge. I think they are young animals and now that the barley is quite tall only their heads are visible as they leap through the field. The colour in the garden has changed from the yellow of daffodils to blue forget me nots and bluebells.

16th May. The Project Purley visit to Waddesdon Manor was a great success. Ann and David Betts kindly gave me a lift. The journey was an important part of the day. It was a lovely English summer morning. The lush serenity of the Thames with miles of un-clipped hedgerow thick with cascades of white hawthorne blossom, the distant hills and beautiful cottages was a picture to fix in the memory.

17th May In the south we are enjoying perfect summer weather with misty mornings and heavy dew, deep blue skies and temperatures reaching up to 75°F. Dawn in the river valley reveals a pink flushed sky and sombre trees floating in a sea of mist with here and there the delicate tracery of an ash tree branches, late coming into leaf. Strong winds across the barley fields bring to life the 'Sting' song", You'll remember me when the west wind moves among the fields of barley" Life in the meadow is approaching high summer with trees and flowers resplendent in their fresh colours and skylarks singing high overhead.

In Pangbourne there is an infestation of the processional caterpillar.

30th May Rain, rain and more rain, some of it very heavy is spoiling the first flush of roses. So far, I have heard the cuckoo only once this year and that at a far distance. The meadow flowers are appearing in profusion. Buttercups and daisies, clover, vetch and vetchling and a dozen or more unassuming natives. The yellow flags are in fat bud, and the fat Spanish slugs are about too!

6th June It is a joy to wake to the song of the blackbird and thrush and the dawn chorus in full flow. Less musical are the jays and magpies but they add their handsome plumage to the summer scene. Robins are friendly and appear as soon as a spade hits the ground. Green woodpeckers are less obvious now that the meadow grass is growing. Pheasants also out of sight are evident by their cackling call. Rooks are noisy and always at war with the red kites. There are frequent air battles overhead as the rooks defend their chicks. There is a considerable amount of wing flapping and verbal abuse by the rooks who harass and buffet the kites trying to steer them away from the nesting area. The kites with their huge wingspan fly serenely in circles around the rooks in an almost taunting way.

In the village I was pleased to see a good variety of wild flowers growing by the fence at pond field including a large clump of milkmaids. I hope the children noticed them as they passed by.

13th June It has been a very busy week at Home Farm. What is usually a pasture field behind my meadow has been grown to hay this year. The first time for probably 30 years. With a few days settled warm weather it has been cut, turned, baled and now waiting collection. The red kites have made the most of the opportunity of an easy meal and the tractor has been followed by a dozen or so. Tim tells me that lower down in Purley he counted 20 kites following the tractor. Although kites are primarily carrion eaters, the re-introduction programme has been so successful that there isn't enough carrion, road kill etc to feed them all so they prey on small birds and mammals.

The fine weather has produced beautiful sunrises and sunsets with a full moon visible for most of the day. There was a lack of cuckoo song in early spring but this week it sang a long goodbye before returning to Africa.

20th June On Friday 13th June Purley experienced a very violent electrical storm which was directly overhead and lasted for a couple of hours. The thunder was alarming and the sheet lightning continuous and blinding. Following the storm the weather has been calm and sunny. There are a number of interesting moths. The burnet varieties and poplar hawk moth.

27th June It promises to be a good year for moths butterflies and dragon flies and although the ornamental pond in the garden is very small it is full of frogs, water boatmen and pond skaters.

Before the skies are criss- crossed with con-trails and before the noise of the world intrudes, morning seems to hold its breath and nature reigns. The lush woodland in the valley and on the hillside is a dark green backdrop for the fields of ripening barley. All is still save for the birds beginning their urgent coming and going. The lark rises to her lofty domain, birds fly silently along the river course, red kites hidden by the low misty cloud call their plaintive mewling. A pigeon adds its coo-cooing and the harsh call of a pheasant in the meadow is a sign of unseen foraging in the long grass. Slowly the sun breaks through the cloud, lighting up the barley field and the clusters of winged seeds adorning the field maple trees. Soon the early morning departures from Heath Row and the first cars out of the village to start a new working day will break the silence and the clamour of the modern world will begin.

11th July After a few days of glorious summer weather, we woke to a dull morning with leaden skies which merged with a mist on the hill and tree branches bowed down with the weight of overnight rain. Despite the dreary outlook, the ripe barley in Oak Tree Field glowed like molten gold. The only signs of life were the black silhouettes of a small flock of rooks flying low and outlined against the field of golden grain.

13th July Tim Metcalfe has begun to harvest the barley in Oak Tree Field.

19th July A sultry heat has reached 30°C. Purley has escaped the heavy thunderstorms which have hit many areas. Harvesting the grain at Home Farm has continued with the sounds of the farm machinery a reassuring sign of a good harvest. The present colours of the Thames Valley are summer blue skies, dark green wooded hills and amber of the stubble fields.

26th July Early morning in the garden and the perfume of the evening honeysuckle is still on the air. The dewy grass attracts a number of tiny white moths and the sky is filled with rays of white cloud. The early sun slants across the garden casting light and shade.

30th July I noticed recently that some ragwort had appeared in the meadow, a plant that is pernicious to cattle. This would have to be eradicated before it took a hold or spread to the farm pastures. I was up early and while it was still cool I trundled down to the meadow with my barrow and fork looking for the offending weeds the flowers of which are a cheerful yellow and advertise themselves well. A steady search and the meadow was soon 'clean'. It was a good opportunity to look closely at how the meadow is doing. It is somewhat untidy and waiting for the long grass to be cut, but there are wild plums ready and a good crop of blackberries to come. The meadow is maturing and fulfilling all the expectations that Ron and I had when we planned it.

Bernard Neil Venners

18 May 1945 - 29 July 2014

It is with great sadness that we have to report the recent death of Bernard Venners. Bernard and his wife, Marion, had been valued members of Project Purley but, in recent months, were no longer involved with the Society owing to Bernard's failing health. Bernard was well known for his interest in military vehicles, one of which was regularly used to move equipment for Project Purley barbecues.

Bernard's parents (his mother Monica was a founder member of Purley W.I.) and grand parents were well known Purley residents. The family has owned property on Purley Rise for many years running the Caravenners business which Bernard took over on his father's death.

Our sincere condolences go to Marion and all the family at this very sad time.