



Account of Purley on Thames

Chronicles 1970-1979

1970 - 18/19 Eliz II

Charles Derek Taylor was inducted as rector of Purley on 16th January. He was previously curate in charge of St Catherines, Stoke Aldermoor, Coventry (S1-10/69) (S22)

A cedar which formerly stood before the Old Rectory was badly burned in a demolition man's bonfire and had to be felled. It was ring dated as being roughly about 160 years old which could indicate that it was planted to celebrate the victory at Trafalgar in 1815 (S1-1/78)

In March the new Parish Magazine was launched edited by Derek Taylor. A competition was launched for the design of a new cover. The competition was won by Mr SC Sloper of Wintringham Way and his new design of the Lych Gate first appeared on the August edition (S1-4/70,6/70)

At the Parish Meeting on 18th March it was reported that the Parish Council were fighting proposals to close New Hill or Purley Lane (S1-4/70)

The County Council elections were held on 18th March. Rodney Stebbings (Lib) was elected for the Pangbourne Division beating Michael Moon (Cons) (S1-4/70)

A plan was mooted to move the Church from its existing location to a new site at the corner of New Hill and Oxford Road. (S1-5/70)

Ernest Spong retired as Church warden after 18 years (S1-5/70)

Long Lane School's first trip abroad was held on 15th March when 65 children, 5 teachers and 5 parents left Tilehurst Station for a day trip to Boulogne S1-5/70)

The Guides were celebrating their Diamond Jubilee and the Guides in Berkshire were earning money to provide a mobile eye clinic for Pakistan. The Unit was on display at a rally in Newbury on 13th June. The Guides in Purley were giving the project their full support (S1-4/70)

At the General Election on June 24th, The Hon J.J.Astor held the South Berks seat for the Conservatives. He polled 30,380 votes against 18647 for T.J.K.Sims (Lab) and 13,279 for D.S.C.Clouston (Lib)

The Air Photographic Unit of the National Monuments Record took photos of the area of Purley to the east of Pangbourne. Many linear features and enclosures were observed as crop marks (S125-25)

The new building for Long Lane School was due to be opened in December. At the time the school had 200 children and six staff plus the headmaster (S1-4/70)

Mr A.N.M.Cooper retired as organist at the church after 43 years (S1-12/70)

New water mains were laid to serve the estate being built on the Westfields House site. 206 yards of 4 inch pipe were laid (S309-70-29)

The Purley Kennels were closed in the early part of the year. They had been used mainly for

greyhounds who ran at Reading Stadium.

1971 - 19/20 Eliz II

The population of Purley at the Census was given as 2615

An excavation of the supposed site of Purley Parva revealed recent flint and brick floors and a well stratified pit producing finds ranging from early medieval to 19th Century.(S116-2582)

Len Overy, the lock keeper, was a joint winner of the Sir Reginald Henson cup for the best kept lock on the river (S1-8/71)

1972 - 20/21 Eliz II

Ernest Spong died on 15th January aged 86. He had been churchwarden for 18 years. He had formerly been landlord of the Bedford Arms in Reading and moved to Long Lane when he retired in 1946. He had created the Garden of Remembrance in the churchyard in 1965 as a memorial to his wife Alice (S1-2/72)

At the election for the Parish Council held on 4th May there were 10 candidates for the 9 seats. Top of the poll was Bernard Theobald with 317 votes. Others elected were RE Cooper (305), RL Skerritt (282), AJD Bucknell (240), AA White (239), DA Hutchings (215), FC Gear (197), RH Ayers (188), and Mrs LH Gutch (176). Not elected was AR Marshall (163). (S1-6/72)

An archery club was formed in Purley. 40 people attended an opening meeting and 25 opted for a series of free coaching sessions (S1-8/72)

The League of Friends of Purley Park Trust was formed on 24th July (S1-8/72)

The new extension to the Memorial Hall was opened on the August Bank Holiday and named 'The Nicholls Room' after Bert Nicholls who had supervised the building work on the original hall. He unveiled a commemorative plaque. (S1-10/72)

Initial steps were taken to establish a new Social Club at the Recreation Ground (S1-8/73)

1973 - 21/22 Eliz II

Edith Annie Tidbury died on 29th Jan. She had been headteacher of Purley C of E School from 1926 to 1953 having previously served at Pangbourne and Goring Schools. (S1-3/73)

The Purley Sports and Social Club came into being on 1st April after some 500 people had signified interest and Courages had agreed to provide a loan (S1-5/73)

At the end of the Spring term Mrs M.McLean left Purley C of E School. She had been headmistress for several years and was replaced by Mrs V Sargeant in September (S1-5/73,6/73)

The first elections for Newbury District Council were held in May. Newbury District had been formed as a result of the 1972 Local Government Act when Bradfield, Newbury and Hungerford RDCs had been merged with the Boroughs of Newbury and Hungerford and the small parts of Wantage RDC that remained in Berkshire after the north wets part of the county had been transferred to Oxfordshire. Bradfield Councillors had argued for Bradfield being included in a 'Reading Rural' District including Henley, Wallingford, Woodley and Twyford rather than the West Berks District which eventually adopted the name of Newbury. Bernard Theobald who had been one of Purley's two Rural District Councillors was elected unopposed to be its first Newbury District Councillor.

Bernard Theobald established a commercial vineyard at Westbury Farm. (S17)

At the County Council elections Frank Lewis (Conservative) won the Pangbourne seat from the sitting member Rodney Stebbings (Independent) He polled 1044 votes against xxx for Stebbings and 244 for Coulson (Labour) (S7-6/5/77)

1974 - 22/23 Eliz II

Nelson Cooper died on 13th Feb. He had been organist at St Mary's Church for over 43 years. He lived at Tilehurst and a memorial plaque was erected to his memory in the church (ref 1-3/74)

Newbury District Council formally took over the Local Government for the area on 1st April. They had had almost a year of planning for the takeover from the Bradfield RDC which was abolished on the same date

In September Mike Woodbridge founded the Purley Saturday Club for boys aged 9-11 to play football. He had formerly run the Tilehurst Saturday Club at Westwood (S1-8/74)

In the General elections held in this year Michael McNair Wilson held the Newbury seat twice for the Conservatives. On 30th April he polled 24,620 votes against 23,419 for D.Clouston (Lib) and 10,035 for Mrs C.A.Fletcher (Lab) On 10th October the figures were McNair Wilson (Cons) 23,499, DCS Clouston (Lib) 22,499, Mrs C.A.Fletcher (Lab) 9,390 (S23-2/3/74,12/10/74)

Lieutenant Colonel Reginald Edwin (Rex) Cooper died on 1st August. He had been a member of the Parish Council from 1966 to 1974 and had been a vigorous Chairman of the Purley Park Property Owners Association in which role he had secured the adoption of the Purley Park Guidance Plan (S1-9/74)

Derek Taylor resigned as rector to become Vicar of Milton in Somerset. He was succeeded by David Evans, a Welshman, who was previously assistant curate at St Austell Parish Church in Cornwall (S1-1/75)

Bill Palmer resigned as Headmaster of Long Lane Schol to take up a post as headmaster of a new school in Bracknell. He had been Headmaster since the school opened (ref 1-4/74)

Elizabeth Burstow was appointed Head Teacher of Long Lane School. She had previously been Deputy Head of Hayling Primary School in Hampshire (ref 1-6/74)

1975 - 23/24 Eliz II

The precept for 1975-76 was set at £4500 at the Parish Council meeting of 16th January. Of this £1000 was to be invested in a capital fund for the recreation ground. (S4-1/75)

Allotments were established on land leased from the Bucknell Trustees to the north of Purvey's Bridge (S1-2/75)

The Westwood Farm Preschool Playgroup split up. The main group moved to the Westwood farm Community centre and the remainder stayed at the Memorial Hall as the Purley Preschool Playgroup. The Parish Council paid £100 for the equipment left behind for the Purley group. (S1-2/75)

The Reverend David Evans was inducted as rector of Purley on February 27th. He had been assistant curate at St Austell Church and before that Curate of St Peter's Cockett, Swansea from 1967-70. A former soldier from South Wales he had studied at St Michael's College Llandoverly and had taken a BA at the Open University in 1973. (Crockfords)

Fred Saunders of 'The Laurels' Long Lane was awarded the British Empire Medal in the Queen's Birthday honours list in June for his services to the British Red Cross Society and First aid (S1-12/75)

In October the Church Commissioners proposed a new Benefice of St Mary Magdalene, Tilehurst which would take in part of the ecclesiastical parish of Purley (S1-12/75)

Herbert West of Ivy Cottage, Purley Village, died on 29th October aged 71. He had moved to Purley in 1940 as an employee of the Bucknells (S1-12/75)

Alfred Collins of Park Walk died on 16th November in Peppard Hospital. He was one of the earliest residents of the Purley River Estate (S1-1/76)

Mrs May Newton of Belle View, Reading Road died on 23rd November in Battle Hospital. She had been a resident of Purley for 46 years

1976 - 24/25 Eliz II

The Parish Council made a presentation on 15th January to Mr Len Overy who had just given up his job as keeper of Mapledurham Lock. He was succeeded by Mr. George Fielder (S1-2/76)

The new chairs to replace the pews in the church arrived in May. The old pews were being sold to parishioners. (S1-4/76)(S1-11/75)

A new Parish Council was elected on 6th May. Elected were Bernard Theobald, John Bucknell, Betty Hunter, Bob Skerritt, Reg Ayers, Archie White, Denys Hutchings, Reg Marshall, Ken Mercer, John Chapman and Peter Jordan. Bernard Theobald was returned unopposed as Newbury District Councillor on the same day He was re-elected Chairman of the Parish Council at its first meeting. (S1-6/76)

St Mary's Avenue was relaid in anticipation of building works leading off the Avenue. The junction at New Hill was changed from a simple T to a cambered curve leading from New Hill into St Mary's Ave. In response to Parish Council protests about the design the County Council agreed to paint double white lines and so ban parking around the curve. (S1-12/76)

The County Surveyor confirmed that Street lighting would be installed in St Mary's Avenue (ref 4-10/76)

Footpath 11 was diverted so that it came into Beech Road instead of direct to Reading Road (ref 4-11/76)

Following discussions between Tilehurst and Purley Parish Councils an official line was fixed for the Purley bypass which would roughly follow the parish boundary (S1-12/76)

A second hand piano was purchased by the Church from the bequest of Mrs La Hive (S66-1977)

Berkshire County Council passed a plan to prohibit heavy lorries from passing through Streatley. This had been lobbied for some time by the Villages Action Group which had representation from Purley Parish Council (S1-9/76)

The new Long Lane Secondary School opened for the first time on 1st September. There were only 110 boys and 67 girls in the first year who had come from 31 primary schools from both Reading Borough and Newbury District. The staff were the Headmaster, Mr. D Hopkins, nine teachers plus one for the partial hearing unit and 20 ancillary staff. (S165)

All objections to the making up of the four main roads in the River Estate were overcome and Newbury District Council went out to tender for the work. The contract was eventually awarded to Flaherty Bros.

1977 - 25/26 Eliz II

The Pangbourne and District Volunteer Centre was established on 28th March. Part of its area covered Purley and it was supported by both Parish and Parochial Church Councils. John Chapman was the Parish's representative and was elected Vice Chairman. (S1-5/77)

In the County Council election on 5th May Frank Lewis retained the Pangbourne seat for the Conservatives polling 2408 votes against 311 for C Cushine (Lab) (S7)

Purley Parish Council organised a week of celebration for the Queen's Silver Jubilee in the week 5th to 11th June. Jubilee Crowns were distributed to all children and among the events were - a house decorating competition - a home made wine competition, - An exhibition of photographs and other memorabilia of Purley Past organised by Sybil Prior and Denys Hutchings at which a collection was made to provide trees for the village - a procession of floats from St Mary's Ave to the Recreation Ground, - a fete in the riverside meadow, - a fancy dress competition, - a gala day at the recreation ground and a Jubilee Queen competition, - The Kennett Morris Men came and performed at Purley Park, In Bourne Road and at the recreation Ground. There was a special service in the grounds of Purley Park to start the week off. Unfortunately the weather was atrocious and most events were washed out. In the end a small profit was made and donated to the Prince of Wales Appeal via Newbury District. (S1-5/77,10/77)

The inaugural match of Purley Jubilee Football Club was played on 7th June against Upper Basildon. The result was 7-1 to Purley. The Club was formed to cater to the teenagers and played on a small field at the back of Hedgerows in Long Lane by courtesy of Bill Roberts. (S1-7/77)

Mr Gutch retired as Postmaster on 1st August. The Office was transferred to Purley Rise Stores, a little further along Reading Road which had recently been taken over by Mr and Mrs Jones. The Gutches had run the Post Office for 22 years, prior to which it had been at Lichfield Cottage over the other side of the road Mrs Gutch continued to run the little shop which had been part of the Post Office for a few more years (S1-8/77)

In September the new Long Lane Secondary School had been renamed Denefield School and was merged with Cintra School in Reading. There were now 182 in the first year, 176 in the second year, 97 in the 3rd, 92 in the 4th and 119 in the 5th giving a total of 666. Apart from the headmaster there were 43 teachers plus 2 in the partial hearing unit and 21 ancillary staff (S165)

The Parish Council submitted their proposals for the new Parish Boundaries to Newbury District Council in October. This was part of a review called by the Boundary Commission. In essence they proposed that the parts of Purley adjacent to Pangbourne should be transferred to Pangbourne, there should be a minor adjustment agreed with Sulham Parish Council to their boundary and that in compensation Purley should gain The Upper Long Lane area and the rest of the Wimpey site from Tilehurst (S1-11/77)

1978 - 26/27 Eliz II

Harold Gutch of the Garden House, Reading Road died on 22nd March. He had been Postmaster of Purley for 22 years and had run a market garden on the site of what is now Nursery Gardens for many years. (S1-5/78)

A new notice board for the church was erected alongside the lych gate in May. (S1-5/78)

Mrs Luker died at Prospect Hospital aged 78. She had lived in Purley for over 50 years. Her father had been shepherd to Mr Saunders at Stonham Farm and she used to work at the 'Elephant' at Pangbourne (now the Copper Inn) (S1-11/78)

Residents of Purley Beeches who were concerned about the state of the site reserved for a school agreed to seek a licence from the County Council to clear the site and use the land as a play area (ref 4-1/78)

Archie White resigned from the Parish Council in March. Sybil Pryor was co-opted at the meeting in May to replace him (ref 4-3/78 and 5/78)

Throughout the year discussions were held with neighbouring Parish Councils to discuss proposed boundary changes.

1979 - 27/28 Eliz II

At the January meeting of the Parish Council the resignation of Bernard Theobald as Chairman was received. Bernard had served on the Parish Council for 25 years. (S1-2/79)

At the same meeting it was reported that the telephone kiosk at the bottom of New Hill had had to be removed as it had been severely vandalised. It had been a source of problem for several years and had been used as a meeting point for local youths. The final straw had come when it had been rocked on its concrete base and the live power cables cut beneath. (S1-2/79)

The Reverend Harold Hawkins died in January aged 74. He had been rector of Purley from 1961 until he retired in 1969 (S1-2/79)

A General Election and a District Council election were held on the same day on May 3rd. Michael McNair Wilson held the Newbury seat for the Conservatives with a majority of over 10,000. He polled 33,677 against 23,388 for Tony Richards (Lib) and 6,676 for Joan Ruddock (Lab). John Chapman was elected unopposed to Newbury District Council. There were to have been held Parish Council elections as well but these were postponed. (S1-5/79)

The 7th May was the first Official May Day Holiday. The Parish Council decided to mark it by organising a Parish Clean Up. Squads of children supervised by adults spent the day cleaning out the verges and waste ground in the parish. An incredible amount of litter was picked up, the non burnable material was put out for the Council to collect and the rest taken to the allotments where a bonfire was lit. Afterwards everyone gathered around for barbecued sausages and gingerbread and a good time was had by all. Arrangements were made by Sybil Pryor. (S1-5/79)

At the last meeting of the old Parish Council on 10th May an address was presented to Bernard Theobald to mark his 25 years as Chairman of the Parish Council and 30 years in Local Government. (S1-6/79)

The postponed Parish Council elections were due to be held on 24th May but only 12 nominations had been received so there was still one vacancy. At the Annual Meeting in June John Bucknell was elected Chairman (S1-7/79)

Phyllis Fothergill reported in the Magazine in August the Mother's Union branch was closing down. (S1-8/79)

The new hard tennis courts at the Recreation Ground were completed in November. The three hard courts replaced two inadequate grass courts and floodlighting was due to be fitted in the near future .(S1-11/79)

The last concert of the Thames Vale Junior Singers was given in the Memorial Hall on 3rd November. Mrs Mary Richards had founded the choir many years previously and had had to give up because of age and infirmity. (S1-12/79)

A petition for the provision of traffic lights at the junction of Long Lane and the Oxford Road was presented to Berks CC. It had been organised principally by the Long Lane School PTA but had received the full backing of the Parish Council and just about everyone else in Purley except for a few in Purley Lane and Purley Village (S1-12/79)

A painting by Ray Herring was presented to the Church. It depicted the many generations of parishioners in Purley gathered around the Norman font dressed in the costume of their period. Ray had been advertising manager for a large insurance company before he retired to live in Farm Close. (S1-80)

The caravan site on St Mary's Ave, owned by the Environmental Health Committee of Newbury District Council was transferred to the Housing Services Committee. The annual interest charges on the land were £2,900 and plans were drawn up for building Council Houses on the site.(S11)

K1970 15/2/03

