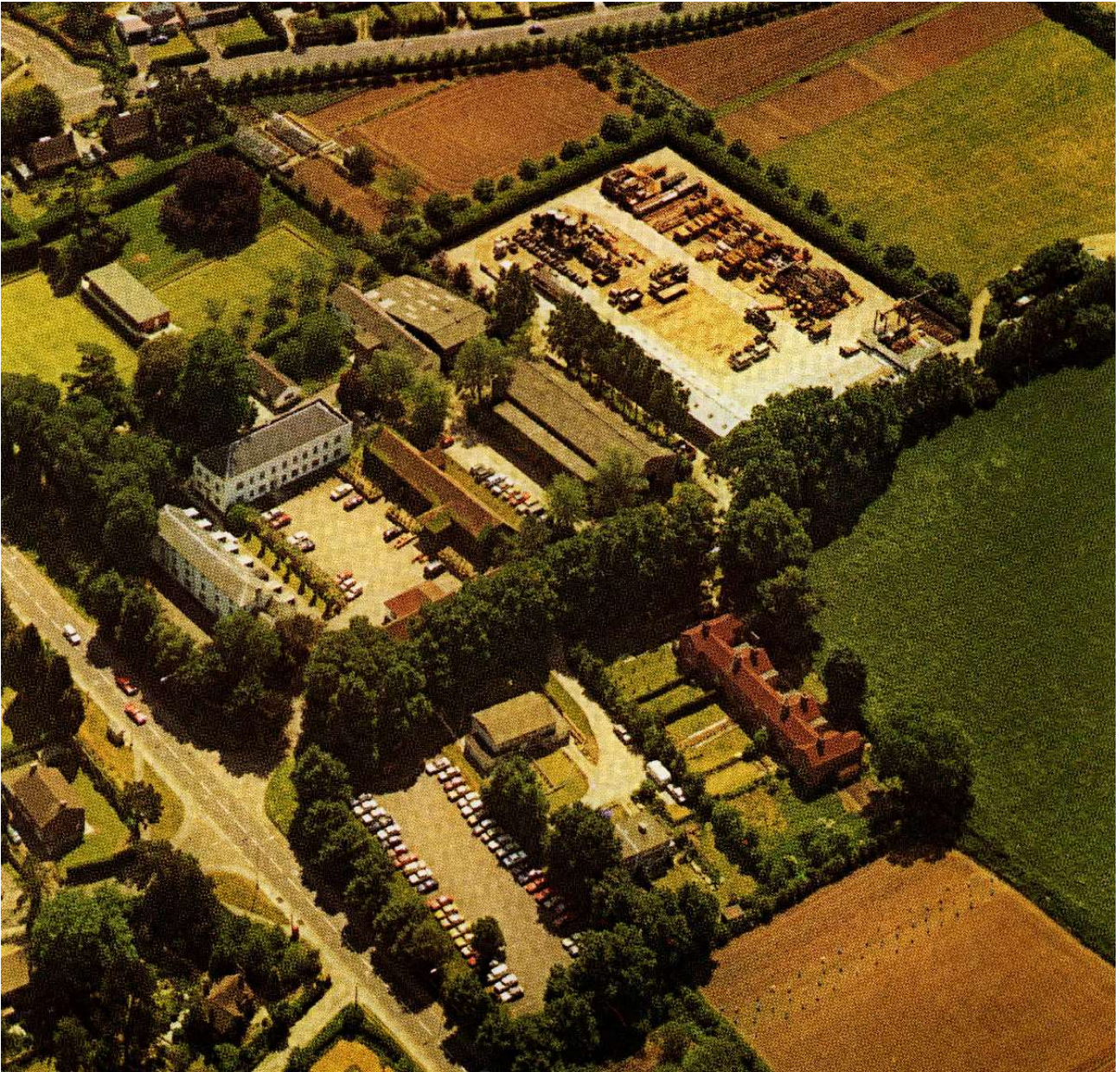


Account of Purley on Thames

The Trentham Story

The story was told to John Chapman by Peter Trentham and published in the Project Purley Journal of May 2011

From 1951 to 1991 G. Percy Trentham Ltd was the only major employer in Purley. They were based on 15 acres of land to the southwest of the junction of Long Lane and what is now Purley Rise.



Aerial view of the site

It all began back in 1840 when Jeremiah Trentham quit working on the land in Middleton Cheyney in Northamptonshire which had been the family home for over 150 years. He went to work for a contractor who was engaged in building railways. One morning in 1879 his son George was approached by a gentleman who was a complete stranger, but who had seen the young George at work. The stranger gave George £500 in banknotes and told him to go off and found his own company, which he did.

George's son George Percy was born in 1881 and joined his father's contracting business in 1896. When he was 26 however he fell out with his father and went off to start his own company based at

his home in Booth Street in Birmingham. Despite a very harsh economic climate the firm survived and grew so that by 1912 it had a permanent staff of 20. In this year the firm was hit by an accident when five men were buried in a 26 foot deep trench which collapsed when they struck an underground spring. The foreman, Bob Ward led a team which rescued three of the men and was later presented with the Edward Medal at Buckingham Palace.



The Head Office block, now Bowling Green Farmhouse

In December 1913 G Percy Trentham Ltd. was formed with a nominal capital of 50,000 £1 shares of which Percy held 6001. Percy was denied the opportunity to go overseas, even though he was an officer in The Territorial Army, as the work his company was doing was regarded as vital to the war effort. His first wartime contract was to build an extension to the Daimler factory at Radford so that it could build aeroplanes. His next big job was the building of Fort Dunlop on the outskirts of Birmingham.

Between the wars the company flourished and although still a relatively small company, they took on contracts all over the country and opened offices in Edinburgh and London as well as the head office in new premises in Birmingham. Their main achievement was the construction of the Ford Motor Plant in Dagenham in 1929. Over the next 30 years the company grew from strength to strength with Percy's son Donald taking over as chairman and in 1952 Donald's son, Peter, joined the company aged 18.

The move to Purley came in 1951 when Donald bought Kennelgates from the South Berks Hunt and set about acquiring additional land. Many of the villagers were given employment at the new head offices and several of the employees came to become villagers. The company made a major contribution to the local community, loaning lorries and equipment for village events and supporting all the local groups. Donald was a keen bowler and set up the Trentham Bowling Club which was provided with one of the finest greens in the county and often staged county competitions.



Donald Trentham

Among their later projects were a stand for Liverpool Football Club, the Didcot Power station and the Post Office Sorting complex on Caversham Road in Reading. Sadly however in 1991 the company was sold to the Egerton Trust and the few remaining employees moved to Theale, leaving the site to be redeveloped for housing. After a few houses were built the site was passed on to Bryant Homes who completed the estate and donated the ancient barn, which had been used as a garage and workshop, to the Parish Council.

John Chapman in association with Peter Trentham