

Account of Purley on Thames

Aviation

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The Hardwick Airfield

At one time in the 1930s, Purley had its own airfield - down by the river opposite Hardwick Hall where Mr Rose kept his aeroplane.

Flying Circus

The famous Flying Circus visited Purley in the 1930s

A Helicopter Visit

An article written by Ken Mercer for the April 1990 Project Purley Newsletter.

Daddy, there is a helicopter on the playing field! Thus I was greeted by our youngest daughter upon my return home a little early from the office. That evening in 1970 was to be the inaugural shoot of the newly formed Purley Archery Club under instruction from three County Archers. The machine was droopily sitting in the middle of the intended range.

The very pleasant RAF pilot/instructor apologised and said his army officer trainee had been alarmed by a sudden change in the engine noise, indicating a fault. The pilot had telephoned his CO at Middle Wallop who would be flying over quite soon.

By magic onlookers had appeared on the ground, one of which was the local Press Representative, Honor Gutch, the postmaster's wife. The army officer was standing to attention, giving a barrack-style report which Honor was taking down in shorthand having filled ten pages! Sadly nothing appeared in any papers.

The CO flew in and made a circuit before landing, thus pleasing the increasing number of spectators with all the flashing blue and white emergency lights on his helicopter. Politely expressing gratitude for our being so accommodating, he said a recovery unit was already on the way. Their lightweight unit was already engaged so it would be the 3-ton one, which sounded more like a tank. I thanked him for so far avoiding the cricket square but the recovery vehicle was too heavy to be allowed on the playing field.

The CO made a hand-waving circuit flying off with pilot and trainee. Their map co-ordinates were so accurate that the recovery vehicle found the entrance at first try. It did look like a tank towing what we used to call a "Queen Mary" being a 60 foot long trailer. Rapidly they put a cable on the helicopter, winched it to the trailer and dismantled it.

There was sudden panic when the crew remembered they could not tow with petrol in the helicopter's tanks and I refused their pouring it onto our grounds. A word to some Purley sportsmen, then around, produced vehicles loaded with empty Jerry cans plus a queue of motorists happy to fill up with 100 octane fuel.

Later we received a telephone call again of thanks and an invitation to drop in any time we were around Middle Wallop.

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Concorde

For many years the spectacle of Concorde flying over Purley attracted a lot of attention. It was on its daily run from Heathrow to New York and we were greeted with a burst of sound around 11:06 each morning.

Air Ambulance

The Thames Valley Air Ambulance is based at White Waltham Airport near Maidenhead. One year Project Purley gave the donations from a Rain or Shine performance to the Air Ambulance and presented a cheque to the organisers at the airfield. Later that year the Ambulance made a low level fly-pass at the Recreation ground.

Formation Flying

The Thames Valley between Reading and Goring has long been an area for pilots of light aircraft to practice their flying skills. Usually there are only one or two planes exercising but when they practice looping the loop there will be a surge of noise as they climb, then silence as they descend followed by a great roar as they finish the loop. Also for many years there was a flight of biplanes based at RAF Benson and they used to exercise all sorts of manoeuvres over Purley. The people of the River Estate were particularly affected and one or two tried to get the Civil Aviation Authority to ban the flights but the response was always that it was an ideal area for pilots honing their skills which might well be needed in a national emergency.

