



Account of Purley on Thames

The Gravel Railway

R200191 21/3/2017

John Purvey and Sons was a contractor based in Pangbourne which did a lot of work for the County Council maintaining the roads. They had a yard in Purley which was roughly the area from Winston Way to Glebe Road and from the main road to the railway.

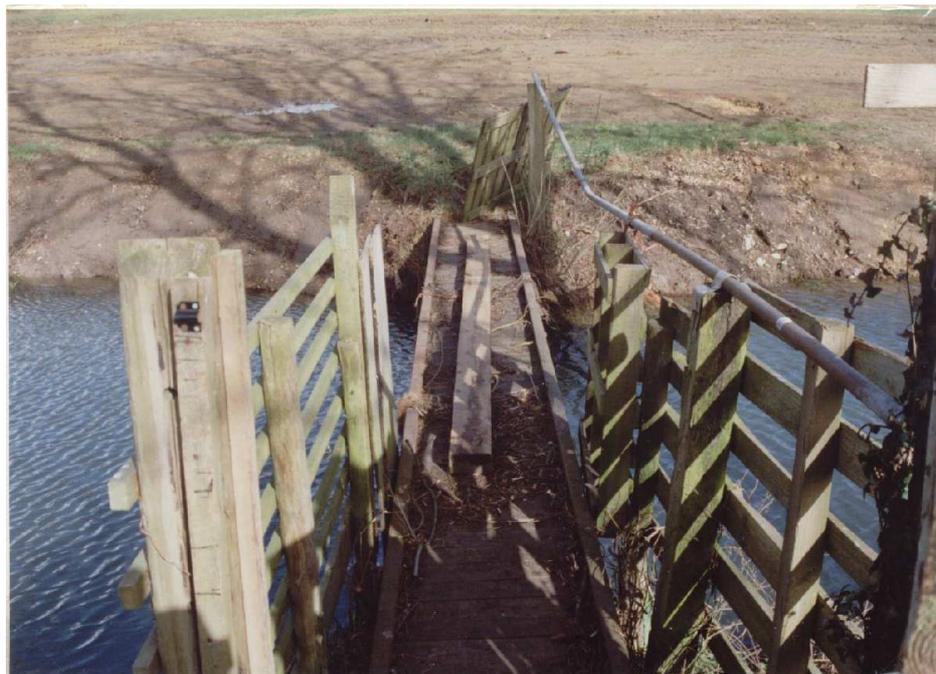
The main purpose of the yard was to transfer gravel, extracted from a pit by the river, to Purvey's lorries. The pit which is now a pond was also used for the construction of the new Caversham Bridge in Reading.

To move the gravel from pit to river and yard Purvey's bought some of the Decauville Railway track which had been ordered for the military on the Western Front but which was now redundant. It was the slate mines in north Wales who were the main purchaser of this kit but many other contractors around the country bought some too.

The Decauville system was a bit like modern train sets with sections of rail and points made in the factory to 600mm (2ft) gauge which could be manhandled by four or six men and laid very quickly. The sections were then bolted together.

The line ran from the main road, over the bridge which now leads to the allotments and followed a hedge down to the quarry. There was a second line running from the quarry to a stage by the river. This was marked for years by a piece of rail stuck vertically in the river bank.

We have no record of any locomotive working the railway but it is certainly possible that they had also bought one of the small petrol driven simplex locos which were used extensively on the Western



Front. On the other hand they could just have used horses to tow the wagons.

The railway seems to have been in use for only a few years in the 1920s and 1930s. When it went out of use one complete rail section was used as a bridge from Westbury Farmhouse to cross the West Brook and several sections went to the Menpes Fruit Farm.

The bridge over the West Brook

