



A Walk in Purley on Thames

A walk from the Barn to the Church for members of BLHA visiting for their AGM



Start at The Barn

walk northward along Goosecroft Lane, cross Beech road and follow the path to Purley Rise



Cross the main road carefully and turn right at the far pavement

Walk eastwards to the traffic lights



Turn left and walk down Purley Lane to the bottom of the hill (northwards)



turn right at the bottom to follow Purley Village (eastwards)

cross Mapledurham Drive and follow St Mary's Avenue (eastwards)



end up at St Mary's Church

The walk starts from The Barn and it will end up at St Mary's Church

START - The Barn

The Barn is in its third location. It was originally constructed around 1740 alongside the church using timbers from the Elizabethan Manor House dating from the mid 16th Century. Around 1800 it was moved to the new farm at Belleisle and was used as stables in WW1 and as a workshop in the 1950s for Messrs G Percy Trenthams. It was moved to its present location in 1993 to be used as a community facility. To the west of the Barn is the Purley Burial Ground, opened in 1999 after the churchyard became full. Goosecroft Recreation Ground has one of the best cricket pitches in the County and several test players who have played here described the wicket as good as at any test ground. The site also is home to the Purley Sports and Social Club, the Purley tennis Club and the offices of Purley on Thames Parish Council.

Now walk down Goosecroft Lane, crossing Beech Road and following the footpath to Purley Rise (The A329)

The farm to your right was once a dairy farm but is now just the base for an agricultural contractor.

Please take care crossing over the road to:-

POINT 1 - Purley Rise

Now look back towards Goosecroft Lane. Yew Tree Cottage on the left is our only remaining thatched cottage. On the right is Lichfield Cottage which was once Purley's Parish House and later Purley's first Post Office.. The road is the A329 (formerly the A42) and links Reading to Wallingford and Oxford.

Now walk eastwards (towards Reading) until you reach the roundabout.

You will pass the present Purley Post Office on your left. Why not pop in and meet Gurmit and Rushi and buy a few sweets. On your left again is a lane leading down to Purley Allotments. It was once the track of a 600mm gauge railway which brought gravel up to the main road and down to the river. On the right is where Purley's second Post Office was located in the Garden House of Westfield.

POINT 2 - The Roundabout

Pause at the roundabout and look diagonally across to the white building which was once the main farmhouse of Belleisle, behind which the Barn was located. It was extended in the 1950s to be the headquarters of Messrs G Percy Trentham. The entrance to Nursery Gardens was once the site of Well Cottages, built on parish wasteland.

Continue eastwards until you reach the traffic lights

One of the houses to your left was once home to Ian Gillan, a rock star with Deep Purple. Opposite on the verge is a milestone from the Reading and Wallingford Turnpike.

POINT 3 - Traffic lights

Pause as you come to the junction with Purley Lane. Behind you is the former coachhouse of Westfield House. Diagonally opposite you is the site of Purley Forge on the east side of Long Lane. This was demolished in the 1930s to allow for road widening.

Now turn left and walk down the hill until you reach the railway bridge. Please take care as there is no footpath on Purley Lane

The lands to your left were donated to Reading Abbey in the late 1100s and after the dissolution were sold off to the Earls of Shannon. After the coming of the railway the southern section became the site of Westfield House, built by the same family, the Sykes, who owned Basildon Park. On your right were glebelands, but all that is left of them is the site of the present rectory on Westridge Avenue.

POINT 4 - Railway Bridge

Stop and watch the trains awhile, you will never have to wait long as this is part of Brunel's Great Western Railway from London to Bristol and Oxford. If you look either side the next bridges are special in that they show both broad gauge and standard gauge arches built to Brunel's design. Guess which side was the broad gauge. The tracks were widened in 1890.

Continue on down Purley Lane until you reach Purley Village

POINT 5 - Purley Lodge

To your left is Purley Lodge. This was built in the 1700s by John George Liebenrood whose heir built Prospect Park in Reading and gave his name to Liebenrood Road. Previously the site was occupied by one of Reading Abbey's retreat houses. The village street used to run straight past the house to join Westbury Lane about a mile to the west, but the Liebenroods diverted the road around their walled garden and when the railway came in 1840 the western end became just a bridle path. Turn and face east to look along Purley Village. On your left is Purley Lodge Cottage, the gardener's cottage for Purley Lodge and on your right is the site of Corner Cottages, now demolished and replaced by modern dwellings.

Turn east again along Purley Village until you reach Lister Close

As you walk along, on your left you will see the sites of several old cottages, some of which have been replaced by modern dwellings.

Jasmine Cottages are Grade II listed and have connections with the Civil War. The Cottage was once the home to workers on Westbury farm and Yew Tree Cottage to workers on Home Farm. On your right you will pass Purley Church of England School, dating to 1870 with modern additions and Hemington, formerly the home of the head teacher and school caretaker, but now merged into one.

POINT 6 - Lister Close

Lister Close was named after the Lister family who lived here in the old rectory from the 1920s. (Lord Lister, an ancestor, you may recall, invented antiseptics) The rectory was sold to the County Council in 1968 for an old folks home but they neglected it and the house collapsed after ducks created a pond within the mansard roof. The site now provides flats for the elderly and social housing.

Keep straight ahead, cross Mapledurham Drive and pause at the entrance to Colyton Way

On your left is Pond Field which was used to dump sludge dredged up from the Thames. Opposite is Farm Close, once the site of Home Farm which was rebuilt to the north of you. Just before Mapledurham Drive is the site of the Village Pond which was drained by the County Council for *'elf and safety'* reasons. Mapledurham Drive leads down to Mapledurham Lock, but only pedestrian access. On your right is New Hill created around 1800 when the owners of Purley Park closed off the old road and demolished all the old cottages to the east. Iron gates were erected to allow parishioners access to the church, but only on Sundays and holy days.

POINT 7 - Colyton Way

Colyton Way is the entrance to the Purley Park River Estate, formed in the 1930s when land was sold off to caravaners and campers. During WW2 many Londoners moved down here and eventually more permanent dwellings were built. Opposite you is Primrose Close, an estate built upon the rubble of former buildings when the Butts Centre in Reading was built.

Carry on along St Mary's Avenue until you reach Waterside Drive on your left

On your left are houses that formed part of the River Estate and, on your right, social housing now administered by Sovereign Housing.

POINT 8 - Waterside Drive

Waterside Drive was built on the site of the walled kitchen garden of Purley Park after the mansion on the brow of the hill was built to replace the manor house which stood within the grounds of what is now Purley Marina, opposite you.

Now cross the car park and enter the churchyard via the Lych Gate

POINT 9 - Lych Gate

To the right of the Lych Gate, running alongside the wall of the churchyard was the original site of the Barn. The Lych Gate was provided in 1870 as a memorial to Ann and John Sherwood and as you pass through look for the plaque above you. The old churchyard where you are standing has several tombs which are listed. You might like to take a walk around the churchyard and look at some of the inscriptions. The oldest grave dates from 1760 and is against the south wall of the church.

Finally enter the church by the west door to the left of the tower

Finale - St Mary's Church

The church buildings that you see date mainly from 1870 but the tower bears a date of 1626. A church has been on this site since around 850. The Saxon church was destroyed in the wars between Stephen and Matilda and a Norman Church built about 1150. This was modified or rebuilt several times, principally in the 1350s and 1620s each leaving their mark as you will see when you tour the interior. Watch out for inscriptions on the quoins of the tower. The churchyard was extended in the 1930s and a large extension added to the church in the 1980s.

Thank you for visiting Purley on Thames and we hope you have found something of interest.