

Account of Purley on Thames

Project Purley Meetings 2016

January

Members' Evening: WW1 memories

Project Purley's first meeting of the New Year on January 22nd was focused on people stories of the First World War. Three Project Purley members talked about personal links to men who served in the First World War, though much of the information shared had to be dug up by painstaking research both here and across the Channel. So many veterans didn't talk about their wartime experiences and their stories only surfaced after they died.

In the case of Nathan Southall, it was his family who didn't talk about the war. Nathan, who was killed in France in July 1918, was the uncle of Janet Southall's husband John. Janet told us how moved both she and her husband were when they visited his grave at Sezanne in France, one of the beautifully tended cemeteries looked after by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. His headstone inscription said 'Gone but not forgotten' - ironic and terribly sad, as after he died the family never mentioned his name again.

Richard McDonald talked about his two grandfathers, who both served during WW1 and survived. His maternal grandfather George Field had joined up for a while several years prior to the war as a musician. He enlisted again in 1914, but with a bad knee (he claimed from marching, the army claimed from football!) he did not see active service. Richard's paternal grandfather James McDonald (photographs showed a distinct family resemblance) served with the Fleet in Scapa Flow and with the Army in France after a few years in the Royal Marines before the war. Richard had a full history, with lots of detailed information available.

The third talk was from Rita Denman about her late husband Ron's uncle, Cecil Bert Denman. The talk was accompanied by a beautifully produced presentation of photographs and illustrations, courtesy of two grandsons who provided the technical backup. The tragically short history of Cecil Denman, who was killed at Ypres in 1915, included a bit of a mystery. His family received lots of postcards from him from before the war when he was in service and briefly in the Royal Sussex Regiment. He still sent postcards while he was in Belgium during the war, but he never mentioned a girl called Maria Fache, whose first communion certificate, dated 1907, was found inside the family bible when it was inherited by Rita. This prompted a trip to Belgium to investigate, where after a series of fortuitous conversations and encounters, Rita and Ron were able to track down Maria's son still living just a few miles from Ypres. He had never heard any mention of an English soldier, but revealed that she married very late - and then only for the sake of the family business. A poignant story, perhaps a love story, which Cecil had never been able to share with his family.

A number of other members brought documents and memorabilia of family members who served, including photographs and medals, displayed on tables round the end of the Barn - showing that many Purley families are keeping the memories alive. In keeping with the theme of the 1st World War, refreshments included home-made Anzac biscuits.

Gillian Wallace

February

The Canning Family

Project Purley's Chairman, Catherine Sampson, was the speaker at the 19th February meeting on the subject of the Canning Family of Purley. The Cannings' distinctive but dilapidated tomb in St. Mary's churchyard, with elaborate carvings and railings around it, was the starting point of a long trail of research for Catherine.

The large chest tomb is carved with the names of three members of the Canning family - Thomas who died in 1825 aged 72, Mary Eugenia, who died in 1828 aged 83, and Thomas their son, who died in 1824 aged 39. The Canning family were Catholics, with close links to other great English Catholic families. Mary Eugenia was first married to Charles Stonor (of Stonor Park), and was born a Blount (of Mapledurham House). Her first marriage ended in widowhood a year after she and her family had been forced to flee Bath during the Gordon Riots in 1780. Two years later she married Thomas Canning, of Foxcote House in Warwickshire, an apparently impoverished Catholic lawyer with whom she went on to have two sons, Thomas and Edward. Yet the Cannings' chest tomb is in an Anglican burial ground. Outwardly the tomb looks to be in a poor state of repair, with the stonework suffering from the effects of pollution and the railings currently capped off with hardboard for safety reasons, but structurally it is still fairly sound. It was relocated from its original position on the northern edge of the old burial ground in 1985, after the current church extension was built, and so does not now mark the actual burial chamber.

The research trail goes back to Bristol, where the Canynges family were very important cloth manufacturers and merchants, at a time when Bristol was in the ascent and fast becoming the second most important port in England, second only to London. One William Canning who died in 1474 is particularly associated with the rebuilding of St Mary Redcliffe church in the then town. He carried on the family tradition by serving Bristol as its mayor, in his case five times, whilst his brother Thomas Canynges, also a merchant, served London first as an Alderman, then Sheriff, then Lord Mayor and finally as a Member of Parliament. He married the heiress to Foxcote House in Warwickshire which then became the family seat until the nineteenth century. But the family history of public service did not protect the Cannings from the persecution that all Catholics faced after the Reformation, when taxes and confiscation of land and property over 200 years wore down the family fortunes. Interestingly, this Foxcote line of Cannings from which our 'Purley' Cannings eventually derive, also some five generations earlier sent one son to Garvagh in Ireland, where at some point the family converted to Anglicanism and produced the Prime Minister George Canning (a great supporter of Catholic emancipation!).

The Cannings married well through the years, and it was Mary Eugenia's nephew (by brother Joseph's marriage also into the Canning family) who purchased Purley Lodge, where it seems probable that Mary Eugenia and Thomas Canning ended up living. The discrimination against Catholics which continued until emancipation in 1829 meant that technically burial in a Catholic burial ground was illegal still in the mid-1820s, which probably accounts for the burial of Thomas, Mary Eugenia and Thomas junior in St. Mary's. However there is the complication of a further tomb to Thomas and Mary Eugenia in St James Catholic church in Reading, which Catherine suggested was probably erected after St James Chapel was built in the 1830s.

The audience obviously enjoyed the talk on a topic so close to home, and from the number of supplementary questions that were asked, really appreciated the amount of research that Catherine has done to put together the family history.

Gillian Wallace

March

The Annual General Meeting

The 34th Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on Friday, 18th March at The Barn, Goosecroft Lane, Purley on Thames. Following apologies for absence and acceptance of the 2015 Minutes, the Chairman spoke to the meeting. She talked about the varied and interesting programme of meetings and outings enjoyed by members and the continued success of the Rain or Shine Theatre Company's performances in The Barn which have raised over £10,000 for charity since they began. The annual barbecue benefited from good weather and thanks went to Dorothy and Ben Viljoen for allowing us to use their lovely garden once again.

Membership has grown to well over one hundred, but she reported that we had lost two valued members. Jean Debney, one of our founding members, has moved to Shropshire and Kath Devine sadly died during the year.

The Chairman thanked John Chapman and Ann Betts who are responsible for producing the Journal which is circulated to members three times a year, Gillian Wallace who has been doing the write-ups of the meetings for the Journal and the Parish Magazine and Rita Denman who has entertained members with her Nature Notes. She said that she and Ann Betts have recommenced researching the River Estate and put out an appeal for the names of people who could provide new information about this area of Purley between 1935 and 1980.

The Chairman thanked John Chapman for his work in continuing to sort and catalogue the archive material and again stressed the need for help from members in this connection. She also thanked the rest of the Committee for their continued support and reported that Angela Edwards will be standing down from the Committee this year. Angela was thanked for all her work organising the refreshments at meetings and for writing some of the meeting reports.

The Treasurer then gave her report. The Society's finances are in good order but, as in future we will not be receiving a parish grant as this is not available to organisations who raise money for charity, our income has been reduced. It has therefore been decided to retain a portion of the money raised at the Rain or Shine performances to cover this shortfall. However, donations had gone up as Martin Bishop and John Chapman had generously donated part of the profits from the sale of their books.

The cost of meetings is likely to rise this year due to increases in barn hire charges and the cost of external speakers and it was put to the meeting that the annual subscription to the Society should be raised to £14 for single membership and £20 for family membership from 1st January 2017. This was duly agreed.

The Election of the Officers followed and the following were proposed and elected:

Catherine Sampson - Chairman

Marjorie Butler - Treasurer

Ann Betts - Secretary

John Chapman, Martin Bishop, Jean Chudleigh, David Downs, Gillian Wallace and Pam Beddoes were proposed and elected to the Executive Committee en bloc.

Finally, Ron Chudleigh was thanked for his support as an independent examiner of the Society's accounts and the Treasurer was delighted to report that he has agreed to continue in this role.

Ann Betts

The Project Purley Archive

After the AGM business had been concluded, John Chapman gave a short talk on the archive material held by Project Purley. Members have collected many photographs, press cuttings, documents and other ephemera to chart the history of Purley on Thames, and some was displayed for members to look at before and after the talk.

The biggest problem with collections like this - as with libraries - is to catalogue and label the individual items so that they can be found. A box of unsorted photographs isn't much use, any more than boxes of unsorted books would be in the library. John demonstrated the indexing system and database that he has put in place to identify the material, so that anyone looking for (for example) information on a street can look up the street name and identify all the information that we have stored.

Obviously the individual items have to be indexed first, and help with identifying and indexing the material collected would be really appreciated. A fortnightly session has been set up every other Wednesday at the Parish Office by the Barn from 10:00 to 12:00 for anyone who can spare an hour or so - next sessions 4 and 18 May. If this sounds a bit dry and dusty, think again. Going through the old photographs, press cuttings and planning applications can be a great trip down memory lane!

Gillian Wallace

April

Lesser known Images of Purley

At our April meeting Catherine Sampson took us on a delightful trip round Purley (and a bit across the borders) in a series of old photographs from the 1880s to the 1960s, with a few recent ones put in for comparison.

The journey started in Purley Village, with picturesque photographs of Home Farm and its cows, and tales of the slightly less picturesque realities of children having to wear wellington boots on the way to school, to get through the mud and slurry on the road. The ivy from Ivy Cottage seems to have spread right down to Purley Lodge Cottage early in the 1900s. Later photographs show that a mass clearance took place sometime in the first quarter of the century - a 1924 photograph of the road shows most houses completely clear of ivy. Many of us in Purley are still fighting the battle!

Images of the River Estate from the 1930s and 1940s were very interesting, showing some of the original constructions by the owners who mostly came out from London in the summer. There were photographs of the wooden huts, railway carriages and buses that were brought to the plots (and which spent some time flooded most years). There was also one of the construction of the Purley Park Property Owners Association (PPPOA) hut, which was used for dances in the war, attracting the Canadian soldiers billeted in Pangbourne at the time. Some of the families settled permanently on the River Estate, and there were a number of contributions from the audience on the families, where they lived and where they are now.

The tour continued up Long Lane, past the old Menpes Fruit Farm with its small gauge railway, on to Sulham Hill, and to Sulham Lane, with portraits of Sulham families and residents in the 1890s on the way, and so back into Purley

To finish, Catherine showed a few unattributed (but presumably relatively local) photographs in the hope that they could be identified. These included a camel in the snow, and a man riding a zebra, things that might have stuck in the collective memory. No such luck - there were no positive identifications of location, so probably not Purley, but very entertaining nevertheless, as was the whole of Catherine's talk, and very much appreciated by the audience.

Gillian Wallace

May

Sudeley Castle

Forty-four Project Purley members and guests visited Sudeley Castle on 16th May 2016. This is a 15th century former royal castle in Gloucestershire with beautiful gardens and parklands.

The weather was lovely, and after an entertaining half hour talk on the history of the land, the house and their owners, the group was free to choose when and where to explore, inside and out. The scope for outdoor exploration has been curtailed a bit over the years. The original 12,000 acres of land given by Ethelred the Unready to his daughter Goda on her marriage 1000 years ago has now reduced to a mere 1,200 acres. But the 1,200 acres still includes the stunningly beautiful grounds, looking like the best that nature can offer, but in fact entirely sculpted by man.

The castle must have been similarly spectacular. The remains of the state rooms of the castle are massive, and still show the scale of the construction, and some of the intricate stonework. It was built in 1442, funded largely from ransoming prisoners during the 100 Years War - obviously a lucrative trade. This half of the castle was destroyed - or at least de-roofed - in 1649 on the orders of Oliver Cromwell after the owner (Lord Chancellor Baron Chandos) chose the wrong side in the Civil War. Even before 1649, the maintenance funds were running low, as Elizabeth I came to visit with 300 or so attendants. Nominally this was to celebrate the anniversary of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, but possibly it was part of her strategy to ensure that the aristocracy were kept too poor to raise any rebellion.

The remaining half of the castle, originally offices and servants' quarters, was left standing but largely derelict for the next 200 years, occupied at times by a pub and farmers' rooms. When the Dent family (glovmakers then and now) bought the property in 1837, it was this part that was lavishly restored and furnished. Emma Brocklehurst, of the Macclesfield silk weaving family, married the Dent heir, and she continued the refurnishing and arranged the laying out of the gardens in 1859. This family, now the Dent-Brocklehursts, still own and actively manage the house and gardens, but much homage is paid in the public rooms to its most famous resident, Katherine Parr. Katherine was Henry VIII's last and surviving wife, who soon after Henry's death married her first love Thomas Seymour, owner of Sudeley Castle (a gift from Edward VI), and died at the castle a few days after giving birth to his daughter. She has a tomb in the church, where her remains finally lie, after her alabaster and lead coffin was uncovered (and opened!) by one of the many tourists who came to view the picturesque ruins in the 18th century.

Hopefully the current crop of tourists is a little more respectful, but the ruins and the gardens are still extremely picturesque, and the Project Purley tourists had an excellent day out. Many thanks are due to Jean Chudleigh, who organised the trip.

Gillian Wallace

June

A Surfeit of the Sweetest Things

The line from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" describes perfectly the performance of Shakespeare's comedy by Rain or Shine at The Barn on Friday, June 10th. The eight-strong actors line-up is much changed from their previous visit, and the agility and vibrancy of the newcomers shone through as they cavorted and tumbled across their extended stage to entertain an appreciative audience.

The Bard's comedies are always open to interpretation, and the introduction of pre-show entertainment by some dancers and rather amateurish jugglers heralded an evening where many liberties were

taken with the original script. But the director, Tom Jordan, had placed more emphasis on developing the characters in the first half of the performance and leaving most of the slapstick until the second half.

Bright costumes, strident voices and acrobatic movement, but not too much direct humour, were much in evidence to start with. However the actors really let rip with the comedy after the interval. We watched a wonderful bout of all-in wrestling and all-out hair pulling between the two female leads, a stuffed dog that cocked its leg against several members of the audience as it was walked through The Barn, Bottom's ears which seemed to have a separate existence of their own, swords made rather paradoxically of bursting balloons, and a potentially beautiful musical interlude cut rudely short by a trumpeting herald.

But most of all there was Bottom, played provocatively by Rob Leetham, and who utterly dominated the final 20 minutes of the play. Rob, according to the programme notes, has a part-time occupation as an armed robber (he does this while role-playing for a UK security company)! He certainly milked the audience for all they were worth as he strode about the stage, hamming it up so much that even his fellow performers were finding it difficult not to laugh, then having the effrontery to take three curtain calls of his own before joining the rest of the cast for the final bow.

Of course the audience loved it, to the extent that the leaving collection amounted to £250. Together with the bar profit and our share of ticket sales that means that Project Purley, who undertake the organisation and running of the event, can, on this occasion, donate £600 to the Intensive Care Unit at the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

I thank everyone who helped towards the success of the evening. In particular I am grateful to Catherine Sampson who arranges refreshments, and the families of Pat Taylor, Marion Venners and Ben Viljoen, who hosted the actors overnight and made them so welcome. I am also in debt to our lovely audience, who obviously enjoyed themselves and clapped so enthusiastically in all the right places.

You will be interested to know that Rain or Shine will return to The Barn on Friday, December 9th to present Conan Doyle's thriller, "The Hound of the Baskervilles." Look out for a special guest appearance during the evening!

David Downs.

The Barbecue

On Friday, 17th June members of Project Purley descended on Dorothy and Ben Viljoen's garden for the Society's annual barbecue. The weather forecast hadn't been very promising but, in the event, it remained dry for the whole evening and a good time was had by all. It was the thirteenth time that the barbecue had been held in the garden in Beech Road and, as usual, Dorothy and Ben made us very welcome.

Ben and David Green were our chefs for the evening and cooked the burgers, sausages and chicken to perfection. The meat, together with the savouries, salads, desserts and cheese provided by the members, ensured that no one went hungry and the chatter and laughter continued until the sun went down, candles were lit and people finally drifted away home.

Our thanks go to Dorothy and Ben for allowing us once again to use their garden for this annual event and to Ben and David, our excellent chefs.

Ann Betts

July

Hughenden Manor Visit

The visit, on Monday 18th July 2016 by Project Purley to Hughenden, situated as it is, just to the north of High Wycombe, made it possible to be reached individually by car rather than as a group travelling by coach. Apart from the encumbrance of High Wycombe itself with its town centre traffic flow pattern, all was achieved in sweet harmony with my two lady passengers, one being my wife who, on this occasion, curtailed her sharp criticism of my driving to a bearable limit.

Indeed the journey took hardly one hour, with easy parking awaiting us, and a short downhill walk alighted us upon the impressive lawn fronting a house that perhaps failed to achieve an appearance of great beauty, but was certainly awe-inspiring within its setting and magnitude.

Four guided tours or talks were offered by a host of guides located throughout the three floors of the house as well as the gardens, and the National Trust have preserved and maintained the house in a condition reminiscent of the times of the 19th century when its most famous owner, Benjamin Disraeli both Chancellor and then Prime Minister resided, and where Queen Victoria visited on two occasions.

The 1st Earl of Beaconsfield and his wife purchased the house in 1845, he concentrating on extending and redesigning the house by demolishing the stucco finish to reveal the attractive brickwork, and she designing the beautiful parterre and pleasure gardens. They lived in the house in great happiness until Mary-Anne's death in 1872; Benjamin Disraeli continued living there until he died in 1881. Paying as they did £36,000 for the property caused them to live in great debt for much of their life there, but this was a situation not new to Disraeli, who exuded flamboyance in much of his lifestyle.

Following the introductory talk, a further talk and tour called Operation Hillside described the remarkable role played by Hughenden during the War of 1939-45, and during early afternoon there was a chance to find out about the formal gardens designed by Mary-Anne Disraeli.

The heat of the afternoon was unrelenting, and thankfully shade and succour was available at the Stableyard Cafe, and an attractive shop selling souvenirs and bric-a-brac, with an adjoining second-hand bookshop.

Finally, departing from the grounds of Hughenden, there was an opportunity to pay a short visit to the church, St. Michael and All Angels, where the Earl and his wife lay at rest, together with another lady, a benefactress, who clearly commanded some respect from her fellow sojourners but whom Mary-Anne demanded be placed on the left side of her husband to perhaps suggest to visitors like ourselves, her proper place in that society.

Tony Trendle

September

Purley Park Trust

Before the start of the September meeting, a cheque for £450 was presented to Larry Grady, Chief Executive of Purley Park Trust. This was monies raised by the Society earlier in the year at a performance by the Rain or Shine Theatre Company.

Members' Evening - Birthdays

Project Purley's September Meeting held on the 18th was a Members' Evening themed around birthdays. The talks began with three speakers all focused on national or local celebrations of the Queen's 90th Birthday in June of this year. John Chapman was first up, to talk about attending the Royal tea party in the Mall, dressed in what he described as his ceremonial gown for the occasion -

waterproof clothing! His humorous talk, accompanied by a good number of photographs, described the pageantry of the day, and the considerable care and commitment shown by the members of the Royal family present to try and talk to as many of those present as possible, interspersed throughout with reports of what the weather was doing. Afterwards John showed the contents of 'the hamper', some items still untouched, and the varying souvenirs he had acquired. Catherine Sampson followed with a brief photographic introduction to some of the street parties held around Purley before introducing Lee Hall who talked about Singing for Fun's indoor street party and how the group started. Jean Chudleigh finished the Purley celebrations with photos and an overview of the festivities at the church on the Saturday evening, which culminated in the lighting of a beacon, and the special church service held the following morning.

Next it was the turn of David Downs to talk about a very special 100th birthday celebration. Bill Lloyd, the uncle of Project Purley member Marion Downs, was born during World War One and celebrated his 100th birthday on August 13th, 2016. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1936 and served throughout World War Two, including taking part in the 1944 D-Day landings. As a Flight Sergeant he and his ground crew were responsible for recovering crashed Allied aircraft and airmen, often behind enemy lines. He was awarded the French Legion d'Honneur in 2015 as one of the surviving participants of the D-Day invasion. Several celebrations were held to mark his centenary. Of course he received the traditional 100th birthday card from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (the next one she will send him will be for his 105th, then every year thereafter), and was guest of honour at a huge family party in Sherfield on Loddon, his home village, on the Saturday of his actual centenary. He received over 80 birthday cards from family, friends and neighbours. He was also treated to a celebration lunch at the R.A.F. Club in Piccadilly and entertained as guest of honour at the Annual Dinner of the R.A.F. Association (Basingstoke Branch) at The Red Lion in the town. Bill still drives - he has just renewed his licence which will take him up to 103, still runs his own house and garden, and leads an active social life. In short, an example to us all!

Catherine Sampson and David Downs

October

Douai Abbey and Western Monasticism

On October 21st Abbot Geoffrey Scott of Douai Abbey came to talk to us about western monasticism and the history of the Order of St Benedict. He managed to fit nearly 2000 years of history into an hour of fascinating chat.

He explained how many early Christians felt the need to develop communities in cities where they could live together, pray together and do good works together, while others wanted to seek the isolation of desert places to pray and worship alone, like St. Antony of Egypt. The movement soon led to the establishment of monasteries where people lived in a community and we were shown a 5th century Coptic monastery in Egypt.

From Egypt the movement spread to Gaul and to north Africa which had a flourishing Christian Church. By the 6th century monks found it necessary to write down and preserve the teachings of the early monks in written Rules. We were shown Hatton 48 Manuscript which is the oldest surviving copy of the Rule of St Benedict (8th century) which has been miraculously preserved at the Bodleian in Oxford.

We learned about the foundations of Benedict and his sister Scholastica in Subiaco. Then came the move to Monte Cassino where Benedict and Scolastica's tombs were about the only survivors of the Allied bombardment in WW2.

We moved on to the influence of Irish monks and to the foundation of monasteries on Iona and Lindisfarne and we compared the different styles of illuminated manuscripts of which the most

famous, the Lindisfarne Gospels, ended up in the British Library after it had been at Durham Cathedral during the Middle Ages and at the Dissolution of the monasteries entered the collection of Henry VIII.

After the crowning of Charlemagne in 800 as Holy Roman Emperor and the Synod of Aachen in 817 all monasteries in the Holy Roman Empire were obliged to follow the Rule of St Benedict. During this period many of the monasteries were the property of large and influential landowners. However an Abbey was founded at Cluny in 909 which attached itself directly to the Pope and enjoyed great influence. After the destruction of monasteries during the Viking invasions, monasticism revived and this revival in England was led by three Benedictine monks, Dunstan, Aethelwold of Abingdon, and Oswald. Reading Abbey was founded in 1121 and used the customary of Cluny but it was very much the child of the Norman Henry I, continuing the trend for English monastic houses being closely aligned to the monarchy as in the later Anglo-Saxon period.

The 11th century saw the rise of orders of hermits, eg Carthusians and Cistercians who were more enclosed than the Benedictines and sought a return to the literal sense of the Rule of St. Benedict.

The 13th century saw the appearance of the Friars such as the Franciscans and Dominicans who had no fixed place of abode and travelled the country begging and preaching.

All this came to an end with the Dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII and English men and women wishing to lead the monastic life travelled to the continent to form English communities in France, Spain, the Low Countries, and Italy. The various English Benedictine monasteries established on the continent in the 17th century were united in Paris in 1619 as the revived English Benedictine Congregation. One of these was the monastery of St. Edmund, King and Martyr, founded on the Left Bank in Paris in 1615, from which the present Douai Abbey descends. The Community's church was where the tomb of King James II was located and the monastery became a centre of the Jacobite Movement. After the French Revolution and imprisonment, the monks decided to move to Douai in northern France, a town which had had strong English links for centuries. The monastery there had been built in the 1770s by a Berkshire Benedictine, Augustine Moore from Fawley Court, on the Berkshire Downs. Moore had installed a weather vane reading N E S and W instead of the French N E S O. Once the Paris English Benedictines had been established in Douai, they commissioned the architect, Augustus Welby Pugin to design a new chapel in the early 1840s.

Having not gained approval by the French government in 1903, the Community was offered a school site in Woolhampton and moved to England to some very cramped accommodation. By 1933 they began building a new Abbey Church but quickly ran out of funds and it was not until the 1990s that the Abbey Church was completed, albeit in a very different style. Meanwhile, the Benedictine Order spread to many other sites in England. A similar problem for the Benedictines had occurred in 1878 in Germany and German monks moved to Buckfast in Devon but it was not until 1962 that these joined the English Benedictine Congregation of which Douai is a member.

In answer to a question from the audience on the word 'Douai', the speaker explained that when John F. Kennedy took the oath of office as President, he swore it on a Douai (or Doway) Bible which had been translated from Latin to English at Douai and which served as the principal Catholic Bible in English.

John Chapman

November

My Zambia

Project Purley met on Friday 18th November for a talk by Ben Viljoen, illustrated with his photos and entitled 'My Zambia'. Fifty years ago, Ben met his wife Dorothy in Lusaka, the capital of the then newly independent Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia). This autumn they made a return

journey to enjoy Zambia again and to rediscover their lost youth. Ben first shared with us a little about his family history in southern Africa and his father's career as a civil engineer in central Africa. After completing his education, Ben was employed as a statistician by the Zambian government.

Their recent trip began with some time in the Taj Pamodzi, a beautiful hotel in Lusaka, to recover from the long flight from the UK and to look for some of the places they knew fifty years ago which included the Longacres Lodge where they had first met, and Lusaka Cathedral which was built in the early 1960s and is reminiscent of Coventry Cathedral. Ben also renewed his taste for the traditional food of the region including nshima, a stiff porridge made from ground maize.

They next moved on to Mfuwe and the South Luangwa National Park where they saw plenty of wildlife around the Luangwa River including hippos, elephants, leopards, lions, crocodiles and buffalo.

Ben and Dorothy were keen to revisit the Victoria Falls UNESCO World Heritage Site, and found them sadly depleted due to low water levels at the end of the long dry season. These Falls mark the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe. After a short stay in a hotel situated on the banks of the Zambezi in a small game reserve close to the Falls, they returned to Lusaka, this time renting a house via Airbnb.

They found that although Lusaka has changed a lot in fifty years, the house they were renting and the staff that came with it reminded them very much of the life they once knew. The audience learned that, in a tropical climate, if you see a tree that has mud spread on the trunk, you can be sure you have termites! The termites use the mud covering to protect themselves against the searing heat of the climate.

Ben summed up by telling us that Zambia is still a very poor country, nevertheless the warmth of the Zambian people was evident despite the economic and health problems that the country continues to face.

Jan Brown

December

The Hound of the Baskervilles

The game was afoot in The Barn on Friday evening, December 9th, as Rain or Shine arrived to present their spoof-like version of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic thriller, "The Hound of the Baskervilles." There was a surprise for the capacity audience even before the play began, as welcomed onto the stage was Maidenhead resident and former Reading Evening Post reporter Clive Baskerville, who is a distant relation of Henry Baskerville. Henry was Conan Doyle's coachman when the doctor was travelling across Dartmoor, and his surname was the inspiration for Baskerville Hall, where much of the action takes place.

But the play begins in Sherlock Holmes's study at 221B Baker Street, where Doctor Watson, played with obvious relish by Anthony Young, and who is on stage virtually throughout, meets the cross-dressed Dr. James Mortimer, who describes the strange goings-on at Baskerville Hall.

Much of Act One is down to exposition and explanation, but the pace and the comedy, both spoken and visual, really increases as the setting moves to the Hall and the misty, spooky, atmosphere of the Great Grimpen Mire. Act Two sees the enthusiastic Watson and the more cerebral Holmes cavorting across the somewhat rickety though atmospheric stage set - what a pity that modern day fire regulations would not allow us to use dry ice to create the Dartmoor mist - as they attempt to track down the escaped convict and the legendary hound.

Of course everyone was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the hound itself and, as he bounded, or should

I say emerged on stage, he did not disappoint. Appearing as a diminutive hand-held glove puppet, he snarled and growled at the actors and the audience in a style reminiscent of a Basil Brush or a Roland Rat, and was not averse to take an extra bow or two even after his demise!

The three players alongside Doctor Watson perform a variety of roles and clearly enjoy themselves as they change costume, character, voice and posture. The actual story seems secondary to the slapstick, but the tale is neatly concluded as the final scene returns us to Baker Street, where the legendary detective is playing his violin and explaining the twists and turns in the drama to his faithful supporter and companion.

My sincere thanks to all those who came to watch, and especially those behind the scenes, as well as the families who provided overnight accommodation for the cast. A most enjoyable occasion for all concerned, and most important of all, we have been able to raise the sum of £600 to be donated to Blind Children UK, a charity based at the Guide Dogs for the Blind Centre at Burghfield.

David Downs

The Christmas Party

For the last time in 2016 the members of Project Purley gathered together in the Barn, on this occasion for the Society's Christmas Party. This was a jolly event with more members than ever before attending and, after John Chapman welcomed everyone, all tucked into the food which fast disappeared.

With Christmas music in the background, sounds of chatting and laughter filled the Barn until the Christmas quiz was produced. Then silence reigned as members tried to identify the twenty photographs of images connected with Purley. Finally, when all the answers had been checked, there was a draw between three tables and tie breakers were produced until, at last, a winning table emerged and chocolates were distributed to the successful participants.

Eventually it was time to pack up the Barn for another year and cries of "Happy Christmas" and "see you next year" echoed round the hall; so ended a very enjoyable evening.

Ann Betts

