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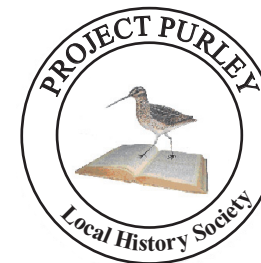
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Forthcoming Meetings

19 th May	<i>Reading Walkabout</i> , led by John Dearing and Sidney Gold. Meet at The Lion, Forbury Gardens at 6.45 pm.
17 th June	<i>Outing to Milestones Museum, Basingstoke.</i>
14 th July	<i>Barbecue</i> , hosted by Ann and John Chapman, at 5 Cecil Aldin Drive.
22 nd Sept	<i>Woodland Archaeology in West Berkshire</i> by Dick Greenaway.
20 th October	<i>Statues & Monuments of Reading</i> by Sidney Gold.

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THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL

May 2006

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£2.00

Project Purley Publications

- 4 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 Index** (revised Feb 1989)
- 5 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 part 3** (items 39-61) (Reprinted and revised Sept 2005)
- 6 **Index Locorum to The Diary of Reading Corporation** (reprinted September 2005)
- 16 **Monumental Inscriptions at St Mary's Church Part B - Memorials in old churchyard**
- 18 **Beating the Bounds (£0.50)**

Please contact Ann Betts if you would like to purchase copies of the above publications. The costs, unless marked otherwise, are £1 per copy for members and £2 per copy for non-members, plus postage where applicable.

The following are being prepared for re-publication

- 1 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 part 1** (items 1-23) (revised Aug 1988)
- 2 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 part 2** (items 24-38) (Aug 1988)
- 3 **Monumental Inscriptions at St Mary's Church Purley Part C** (Feb 1989)
- 8 **The Early History of Purley C of E School** by Rita Denman (1993)
- 10 **The Place Names of Purley on Thames** by John Chapman (Sept 1990)
- 11 **Project Purley Newsletters 1-11** (Apr 1996)
- 12 **Project Purley Newsletters 12-16** (Apr 1996)
- 13 **Purley on Thames at the Millennium** compiled by John Chapman (Dec 1999)
- 14 **Monumental Inscriptions at St Mary's Church Part C - Memorials in new churchyard**

Other Purley Related Publications

Tour Guide to Purley Church (1988)

A History of St Mary's Church Purley by John Chapman (1988)

Cover: Purley Lodge

Photo by kind permission of the owners, Stuart & Emily Kennedy

From the Chairman

May I first thank all of you for your support when I was elected Chairman in my absence. It is a great privilege to be Chairman of such an august body. We are so well regarded in Local History circles because of all that we have done in the past and a great deal of that credit must go to my predecessor, Jean Debney. We have had a covert meeting of the committee without her to elect her to honorary life membership and I am expecting to present her with the certificate on April 21st. She and Cliff, along with myself were founder members of the society which was formed back in 1982 from the merger of three informal groups - Jean leading the parish register transcribers, me the archaeologists and Marvin Clarke the natural historians and since then Jean has been chairman for three terms and done so much to develop interest in our village.

We have always set out to be somewhat more than just a local history group as the wide range of the talks in recent years have demonstrated. However your new committee have pointed out that many of our newer members have been unaware of the work done in the past relating to Purley so we are going to re-deliver (slightly updated) some of the public lectures we gave in the village to celebrate the Millennium and we are embarking on a project to capture as much of the information we have on Purley so that it can be easily distributed to members of the society. To this end we will be seeking volunteers who can type a simple text document on their computer.

I have just finished a most interesting year as Chairman of West Berkshire Council which has given me the opportunity to meet people from across the District and the County. It has reinforced my view that we live in part of the country rich in history but yet little known to most of the population other than as a place to pass through. I hope we can change that!

John Chapman

Annual General Meeting

The 24th Annual General Meeting was held on 17th March 2006 at The Barn. Jean Debney summarised the varied programme for the past year, which began in January with members remembering their school days, followed in February by an illustrated talk by Leslie Grout on St. George's Chapel, Windsor. The aims of the Campaign for Rural England were clearly outlined by Margaret Cubley in March following the AGM and Jean Debney ended the winter programme with the Manors of Purley. Both the guided tour of Englefield Gardens in May and the Nuffield Place visit in June were well attended, as was the barbecue in Ben and Dorothy Viljoens' garden in July.

The Rain or Shine Theatre production in June was a new venture for the Society, which proved to be very successful and resulted in a charity donation of £425 being presented to the Thames Valley Air Ambulance Service.

September saw some of our members and friends reminiscing about their roles as extras in the "Pride and Prejudice" production being filmed at Basildon Park; John Gurnett guided us through Nelson's Battle of Trafalgar in October and the Wilson Road School, Reading was the subject for November. The year ended with an excellent Christmas Party at The Gatehouse hosted by Rick and Val Jones.

Ron Denman retired in December as typesetter for the Newsletter and Ben Viljoen has taken over production. Tom Robinson, the Society's first treasurer, died in July after a long illness.

The Society's financial position remains very sound with a continuing steady membership. Peter Perugia and John Chapman submitted reports on the objectives and aims of both the newspaper cuttings and publications committees in cataloguing/updating all the Society's assets.

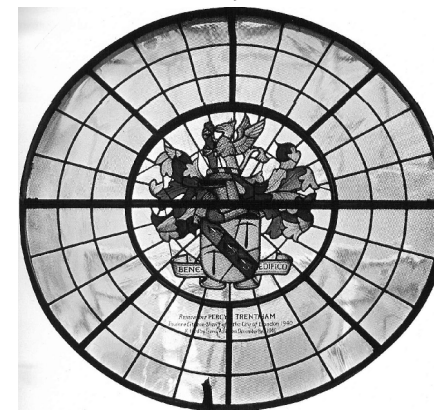
Due to the retirement of two of the present officers, John Chapman was nominated as Chairman and Ben Viljoen as Treasurer. Peter Perugia was nominated to join the executive committee.

Hazel King

G Percy Trentham Ltd Part 2

RITA DENMAN

Despite the economic depression of the thirties Trentham's were being awarded a variety of contracts. In 1932 Donald was married to Miss Doreen Radcliffe and the marriage was blessed with two sons, Peter and Barry, both of whom followed in their father footsteps and, after undergoing a period of strenuous training with the company, eventually took their places as directors. In 1937, contracts for housing estates, bridges, swimming baths, factories, reservoirs and the inevitable sewerage undertakings and road works were in progress. The success of his firm widened Percy's horizons and brought him into contact with men of influence in the City of London. He had joined various City Guilds including the Paviours and the Cordwainers and was to involve himself still more in the City, his objective being to seek election to the Court of Commons Council. On 9th May 1939 he was unanimously elected a member for the Bread Street Ward of the City as a Liveryman of The Company of Paviours with the full intention of playing a big part in the City administration. In early 1939 at the persuasion of friends he sought election to the office of Sheriff. On this occasion he was unsuccessful but at a second attempt was elected Sheriff in June 1940. A brilliant career was brought to end when Percy Trentham was killed in a German air raid on London on December 8th 1940. On 26th October 1972 a stained glass window was unveiled in memory of George Percy Trentham at St. Lawrence Jewry, the Guildhall Church in the City of London.



The Stained Glass Window

Following his father's death, Donald became the recognised head of the Company. Donald had by this time achieved a reputation for professional ability and intuitive business acumen combined with toughness, and unaffected charm and unusual generosity. Donald Trentham assumed his new responsibilities determined to carry on his father's tradition of benevolent paternalism and to continue to make the Company grow. He inspired loyalty, and respect for his considerable experience. He was also known to sack a man on the spot for idleness or slipshod work. It was said that signs of an impending outburst was the sudden bristling of the eyebrows. In 1941 the company was engaged on 50 different contracts, mainly for the war effort. These included a large new RAF airfield at Ramsbury, war factories for Armstrong Whitworth Ltd, Rotol Airscrews Ltd, Baulton and Paul Ltd, the Blythe Bridge Shadow factory and RAF work at Hullavington and Quedgeley. Two other very important contracts in 1941-2 were for a new airfield at Chalgrove and the Royal Aeronautical Establishment, transferred from its vulnerable base at Christchurch, Hants. The purpose of this new building was the very secret experimental submarine radar location station. When the work was completed, in September 1943 Donald and his staff were honoured with a visit to open the station by King George VI, Queen Elizabeth and Sir Stafford Cripps.

The war effort in terms of construction of military installations began to decline in mid-1944 with the prospect of victory in sight. As early as 1943 Winston Churchill urged his colleagues to make plans for the post-war transition of industry from war to peace, the resumption of the export trade and the provision of employment and housing for all who sought it. This would keep G Percy Trentham Ltd occupied for some time to come. In the meantime the contract was secured to build the first penicillin factory in England. Although the war had claimed the founder of the Company, in all respects the Company had faced the challenges that the war had brought and not been found wanting. The new challenge would be to face the problems of peace and reconstruction. The Company was one of several major contractors engaged in putting up what were known as aluminium houses. This was a pre-fabricated factory-made house,

a product of the Aircraft Research Industries Organisation. Between five or six completed houses a day was the average rate of erection and the record was 54 minutes for one house. The Company put up a total of nearly 5,000 houses. From houses to the complete redesigning and rebuilding of the entire complex of docks in Cardiff South Wales, the Company was kept busy for several years.

1952 was another landmark when Donald Trentham's eldest son Peter aged 18 joined the Company, followed by his younger son Barry aged 20 in 1958. These latest two family members were expected to learn the rough and tumble of the business just as their father had, by starting at the bottom of a trench.

So in 1951 this nationally known prestigious company brought its offices to Purley although its address was known as Pangbourne.



The Entrance Head Office Pangbourne

Behind the quiet façade of the old farmhouse the business of civil engineering and contracting continued. The commercial buildings

that Trentham's put up to carry on their business were integrated into the old farm complex.



Rear of the Old Farmhouse and the Lime Walk

The ancient barn, which has a history of its own, found a new use as a carpenter's shop. Kennel Cottages were used for employees and various other barn style buildings were used as laboratories, as storage and a canteen.



Kennel Cottages



Beyond the Canteen Area looking North

Because of his love of nature and gardening Mr Donald, as he was affectionately known, personally took over the landscaping of the entire property. He was one of the first people in Britain to plant successfully mature 30ft trees. Many of the long-term employees came to Purley with the Company and were joined by new employees from the area. Before long Trentham's was a respected name in the local community, known to regard its employees as individuals. If a carnival or procession were to take place, an immaculate Trentham vehicle would be in service. At Christmas a children's party was part of the festivities with Santa carrying a sack of toys arriving on a suitably disguised mower. A group of disadvantaged children was always invited to the parties. Every employee received a turkey and sausage meat as a seasonal gift from the management. The Trentham Bowling Club was a very important area of recreation and a first class green and clubhouse was kept in tip top condition by the groundsman. The grounds as a whole were

beautiful and a delight to the eye, the groups of trees, spring bulbs and colourful shrubs being a relaxing background to what was sometimes frenetic work.



View of the Bowling Green and Chiltern Hills Beyond

I became an employee in 1978/9 and was with the Company as Head Cook for just about 5 years. It was a fascinating job as I came into contact with everyone from the Chairman to the newest employee. It was my responsibility to run the canteen for those employed in the offices, a separate area for what was known as The Black Hand Gang, that is all those who were engaged with the plant and machinery, a small restaurant for the Heads of Department and also the Director's Suite. The Director's dining room, furnished and decorated in traditional style, was in frequent use and it was always a pleasure to support the company by putting on the best possible meal and service. The Chairman hosted shooting parties in the winter and enjoyed fishing in the summer and it was a regular duty of the canteen staff to prepare a packed lunch on these occasions. When Mr Donald arrived on site in the morning he parked the car in

his parking space next to his office and opposite the kitchen. He always sat for a few minutes observing what was going on. The canteen staff were then on the lookout, waiting for his signal that he was ready to go into his office and for his tray of morning coffee.

Mr Donald supported the St John's Ambulance Brigade recognising the value of having someone who could render immediate first aid on busy sites. Apart from the excitement of the special Christmas meals and party, the canteen staff prepared two to three hundred mince pies to be sent to the Church of St Lawrence Jewry, the Guildhall Church of the City of London, for their carol service.

The days were full and varied. The Chairman's compliments and appreciation were valued by all the canteen staff. It gave me greater pleasure than he realised to be presented with a copy of the privately published book *The Trentham Story* from which the greater part of this article is taken.

The Company continued to win contracts but times were changing and the commercial world was becoming more hard-hitting. The family, paternalistic atmosphere and moral stance which had been engendered by the Trentham Family for 150 years was passing. In 1982 the health of the chairman was giving cause for concern. He overcame a serious illness and was ordered to take several months of convalescence. After a while he was back at the helm at Head Office but in late 1983 he was again taken seriously ill which caused great anxiety to all those at Pangbourne and beyond. As I waited to cross the road at the top of Nursery Gardens on a dismal November day I watched the Trentham Standard being lowered to half-mast and knew that we had lost our Chairman. A beautiful service of thanksgiving for his life and work was held at St Lawrence Jewry, which I was privileged to attend.

It was another watershed in the history of the Company. After a couple of years Trentham's moved out of the Pangbourne offices and

the Crown Green Estate was built. The Bowling Green remains as a reminder that the Company which built hundreds of landmarks that we all know, was once a neighbour in Purley.

Notes. It has not been possible to refer to all the family members who have played their part in the development of the Trentham Company, nor to the many legendry names of the employees of the Trentham Company through the years. The area offices were integral to the Company and have their own histories. The contracts too numerous and varied to mention have been described as Trentham Town. Everyone who has worked for the Trentham Company has their particular memories and anecdotes and there are still a good many around Purley to relate them.

*I acknowledge with grateful thanks the information contained in **The Trentham Story** written by George Bruce, and Mr Peter Trentham's permission to include this article in the Project Purley Newsletter & Journal.*

Rita Denman

Recent Discoveries

JEAN DEBNEY

1. Purley Voters for Election of Knights of the Shire of Berkshire in Parliamentary Election taken at Abingdon, Wednesday, 30 Aug 1727

Thomas BLAGRAVE of Reading Voted for	F - P
*James HARRISON, clerk of	
Medmenham, Bucks	- S P
William GUTTERIDGE of Purley	F - -
John ALLEN of Purley	F - -

The candidates were F - Charles Lord Viscount FANE of Ireland
 S - Sir John STONEHOUSE, Baronet
 P - Robert PACKER, Esq

NOTES: * This was in the original list for an unknown reason.

The voting qualification was possession of freehold land worth 40s per annum or more in a place.

- **Thomas BLAGRAVE** (1677-1740) Gentleman, was baptised and buried in Purley. He was the eldest son of George and Mary (née CHILD) and grandson of Rev Thomas BLAGRAVE, rector of Purley. An attorney in Reading and Justice of the Peace for Berkshire, he was the Steward of Purley Parva in which he held an unidentified freehold property. In 1711 he interceded in the tithe dispute over an aftermath of clover in Goodboys-Wheatham (field) in the parish between his mother and the rector, Rev William GOSTWICK.

- **Rev. James HARRISON, Clerk**, was Rector of Purley (and therefore held the glebe land) from 1723 until his burial in the parish on 29 Aug 1741. His widow, Hester, then of Henley on Thames, was also buried here on 24 Jan 1768.

- **William GUTTERIDGE** (1678-1759), third son of John & Joan GUTTERIDGE (the spelling varies) of Purley, married Elizabeth BRUNT in Purley in 1709 but does not appear to have had any

children. He was a churchwarden in 1716. It is not known what land he held.

-John ALLEN, Churchwarden of Purley for most years between 1714 and 1754. His only son and heir, John, died young and his freehold property in Purley (including Purley Lodge and Jasmine Cottage) and elsewhere went to his only daughter and heiress, Ann (1724-1772), wife of John George LIEBENROOD (died 1795) a wealthy Dutch merchant of London to whom the property passed.

2. *Magna Britannia - Berkshire*, by John & Daniel LYSONS (1806), 325-6: Copy entry for Purley.

3. 1807, Purley Man in Berkshire Militia: William FORTY was balloted and enrolled on 14 Nov 1807 to serve for Purley; no bounty was agreed or paid. Nothing more is known of this man. [Index transcribed and published by Eureka Partnership of Bucks from original document in Berkshire Record Office, ref. D/ERA/022/1-10]

4. Purley Park - flint boundary wall along Oxford Road: Sarah CORDERY of Tilehurst (a member of the Berks Family History Society) has told me that her grandfather, Caleb G SMITH (bc.1869) a bricklayer from Woodcote, Oxford, was, according to family tradition, employed as foreman-in-charge of building this wall about 1899.

5. *Kelly's Directory of Berkshire, 1903 - Purley*: Photocopy entry which includes a potted history, principal landowners, etc. when William POCOCK was sub-postmaster and Mrs Rebecca MOULE was the schoolmistress for about an average of 35 children a day. Among the residents listed were three farmers, William Baker BOULTON, John GULLIVER and SAUNDERS Bros, the blacksmith John COX and wheelwright Thomas POCOCK.

6. D H LAWRENCE in Pangbourne: Newspaper cutting, 'The Independent', Sat 5 Mar 2005 - re a letter written by him in August? 1919 from Myrtle Cottage, Pangbourne. Also a copy transcript of the letter made by the reporter.

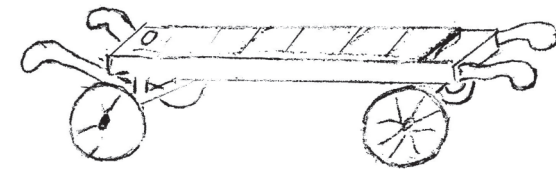
Letters to the Editor

The Parish Bier

During a conversation with Sybil (Pryor) some time ago, she happened to mention that when her Grandmother bought the old rectory, the village bier was left behind in an outbuilding. I was interested in what she recalled and asked her if she would let me have more information and if possible a sketch of the bier. She thought her sister Rachel would have a better recollection of what it looked like and promised to ask Rachel to make a sketch. Sybil has now given me the sketch and some notes to go with it.

Rita Denman

"This is sister Rachel's drawing of what we thought was the old parish bier which lived in the cart-shed/cow house at the old rectory, probably left behind when our grandmother, Mrs. Lister, bought the Rectory House from the church in 1928 (I think).



" 'I think this is more or less how the village bier looked. The front wheels were on a bogey but I am not sure of the mechanics. The top was slatted with about 4" boards. The wheels were spoked with iron tyres and possibly rather bigger than I've drawn' - Rachel.

"On it we kept guinea pigs in hutches and two impeccable Blue Beveren hares which were given to my oldest brother Richard by his school friend, Tommy Sopwith. I won lots of prizes with them at the Horticultural Society Show, but they bit! Eventually I went away to school too - not sure what happened to the hares" - Sybil Pryor.

If anyone has any information on the parish bier and when it may have last been used at a funeral please let us know - Editor.

Nature Notes

MICHAEL KING

I am very pleased to report that Michael King has agreed to write notes on the natural history of Purley and surrounding areas for our Journal and the following are his first contributions - Editor.

January 2006

The weather patterns for this month have alternated from fairly mild temperatures and dry conditions to heavy frosts and cold winds. The flow of water in the Pang is very low for this time of the year.

Our first walk of 2006 on a very bright but cold day was a round trip through the Sulham Valley ending at Beech Road. The woodlands are still in their winter dormancy. It is pleasing to see bulbs pushing their leaves above the soil, with the occasional flash of white from the snowdrops in local gardens, hopefully forecasting spring is just round the corner. Winter flowering shrubs are in full bloom.

Regular sightings of deer grazing in the field between Purley Hall and the A329 and flocks of sheep feeding on the meadows bordering the Thames. Whilst working on the allotment I saw three birds of prey - Buzzard, Red Kite and Sparrow Hawk. These birds are now regular visitors to the valley.

February

The month started on a mild note with the first substantial rain of the winter. Watched a Blackbird gathering nesting material and a pair of Robins eagerly hopping in and out of the ivy prospecting for a nesting site. The local squirrel was also collecting extra leaves for its dray - was this because it had the foresight that the temperatures would drop dramatically?

Our walk along the Thames was in very foggy conditions limiting what we saw. Heard and saw Rooks gathering in the

rookery at the top of Purley Lane and also below Home Farm. Saw several pairs of Great Crested Grebes and flotillas of Tufted Ducks on the river.

In the early hours of the 3rd we had three foxes on the lawn and around the pond. This month has been disappointing for wintering migrants such as Fieldfares, Redwings and Siskins. With all the snow and colder conditions further north one would have hoped to have seen these wintering birds. It has also been reported there have been less sightings generally of the Tit family around garden feeders. The cold temperatures have slowed down the growth of the emerging bulbs and early spring flowers.

March

Most of this month has been very cold. We have heard frogs back in the pond to spawn on warmer nights only to disappear again as the temperatures have plummeted. A great deal of shrub clearance has been carried out on the railway embankments locally during the winter months. Unfortunately this will have taken away a great deal of natural habitat for birds and wildlife of the area, but the vegetation will re-establish over the next few years. This work has particularly opened up the view of the valley from the Roebuck pub looking towards the town. Counted 70 swans grazing these fields.

The Rooks were very vocal in the rookery at the top of Purley Lane by the traffic lights. Some pairs still building, but one or two of the nests had sitting birds. The temperatures rose at the end of the month, which has brought more colour to the gardens with the opening of the spring flowers. Green shoots can now be seen on some trees and shrubs. Nature responding to warmer days and daylight length.

Noted in the winter edition of Upstream, newsletter of the Pang, Kennet and Lambourne Valleys Countryside Projects, signs of otters have been found in the Thames catchment of both the Kennet and Loddon rivers. It is hoped in time otters may be seen in our part of the valley.

Review of Meetings

Your House, My Home

The January meeting of Project Purley took place quite appropriately in The Barn, one of the oldest buildings in the village, though it has of course been moved from its original location. The topic to be discussed was "Your House, My Home" and John Chapman introduced the subject by explaining the many different ways in which the history of houses and homes can be researched.

John explained that every house is interesting, if only for the history of the land on which it stands. Much source material is available, including electoral registers (in Purley these date from 1949), parish registers, newspaper cuttings, sale catalogues and an "up my street" website. Aerial photographs are excellent for comparing changes in land use, and John illustrated this by showing the contrast between Purley in 1964 when Purley Beeches had not been developed and Menpes Fruit Farm still existed, and the village in 2003 when the Marina had been established, and the Knowsley Road area was full of roads and housing. Despite the consequent reduction in open space, Purley is still essentially a rural village. There were also some fascinating photographs of the 2003 floods which caused such havoc in the river estate, part of Purley "under Thames" as it was described by the speaker.

Having captured the audience's attention, John went into more detail about how research can be conducted. For example, if one is finding out the history of a particular house, the topics to be investigated are the date when it was built, sale prices, what the land was used for previously, alterations that have been made, covenants affecting the property and whether there has been a change of name. The latter question may also apply to roads in the area, as evidenced by the Oxford/Reading Road, which has been the cause of much confusion over the years. Having gained as much information as possible, the researcher may decide to draw plans, take photographs, show the location on a map and also illustrate the building's orientation. A folder, CD with images, or magazine

article may be produced if the intention is to share the evidence but researchers must be circumspect about who has access to the details, or it may become a burglar's guide. The occupants of the house are also, of course, entitled to privacy.

John completed his neatly illustrated introduction to the evening with the intriguing information that a house in Westbury Lane was until fairly recently used by MI5 as a safe house and, on one occasion, housed a defector from the KGB, who was later imprisoned by the British Government for offences committed in this country.

Then it was the turn of Project Purley members to talk about the history of their own houses, though time allowed each speaker to mention only brief details. Cliff Debney could plot the land on which his house stands on the 1900 map of Purley. The house was completed as recently as 1979 and stands next to the site of the Ice Box, a huge pit dug and filled with ice for the storage of food before the invention of refrigerators. Hazel King received the deeds of her home six years ago and from them, found that the land was formerly part of the Purley Park Estate until it was sold. The property in Highfield Road was completed as recently as 1958.

Elizabeth Burns had, like Cliff and Hazel, brought along the deeds to her property. Deed No.6 of July 1938 showed 858 feet of land on the original site being sold for £200 and the plans include provision for a proposed road through the area, though fortunately this has not happened yet and now seems unlikely. Catherine Sampson chose to talk about a different type of property and showed a "Camping and Caravanning Site Guide in Purley" dating from 1933. The guide spoke of the riverside attractions in the village, especially bathing and angling, and said that a caravan plot could be bought for any price from £5 to £50.

A change of name from "Dogberry" to "Midfield" for his property had been made by David Downs. He lives in an old converted farmhouse which still has the original air-holed larder window. While redecorating the kitchen he found a George V silver 3d piece and two Edward VII brass farthings hidden under the mantelpiece, along with one red and yellow enamelled cufflink.

Whether they dropped there by accident or were deliberately left as keepsakes will always be a mystery. The present occupiers were pleased to send Mrs. Lobjoit, who lived in the house over fifty years ago, some photographs of the property as it now looks on her one hundredth birthday in 2002.

A carefully annotated photograph album was used by Bernard Venners to illustrate the progress made in the building of his residence in Purley Rise. He began work on the previously bare site in 1998 and did much of the work, including the cutting and fitting of the roof timbers, as well as the electrical installation, himself. Marion designed the garden, and the house is almost complete except for the garage doors. He added that, by coincidence, his mother had moved into the M15 safe house referred to by John Chapman earlier, though Bernard was keen to stress that she had absolutely no connections with the KGB!

However, perhaps the most unusual self-build design was that achieved by Pat Dean's family. Her husband worked for Trenthams and was based in Purley from 1962. The couple decided to build their own house in the area, bought a site in Long Lane and, despite the Arctic-like winter of 1963, completed the job in under two years. They did everything, from foundations to roofing tiles and, as a bonus for their children, added a 23 feet tall rocket in the back garden, as well as a swimming pool with changing rooms. Little wonder that they have been happy enough to remain there for the past forty-three years.

David Downs

The History of Purley Lodge

Purley Lodge is already well known to members of Project Purley as the adjoining Gatehouse has been the venue for so many enjoyable Christmas parties hosted by Rick and Val Jones, so there was added interest in the talk given by Rick on February 17th about the history of the Lodge.

Rick began by explaining that he would divide his talk into two parts. He would concentrate firstly on known facts, supported by

documentation about the building and then spend some time speculating about the "what might have beens" and the "what could have happened" to do with the house. One of the most interesting rumours about Purley Lodge, however, was to come from a member of the audience right at the end of the meeting.

The factual history of Purley Lodge is as follows. It is a Grade 2 listed building at the foot of Purley Lane and, although its origins are obscure, it is of Georgian design. However the cellars contain ancient timbers and flintwork which look much earlier, and an ancient holy water stoop was discovered during renovation work. Maps and documents dated around 1760 show a house on the present site with the village street running past the front instead of being diverted round the garden as it is now. It is safe to assume therefore that Purley Lodge was built in the period 1750-1760. A Reading Mercury advertisement of the time describes it as "a brick house in good repair," situated two hundred yards from the turnpike. We can see nowadays that the house is not symmetrical, so there were clearly some later additions, though it retains its typical Georgian façade.

The Tithe Map of 1840, apart from showing that the Great Western Railway had come to Reading, also depicted the house in greater detail and with more accuracy. In addition the land adjoining the property totalled approximately 40 acres. Several portions of the original property have been sold off, the original walled garden is now occupied by three houses, there are two more houses between the Lodge and the railway line, and the Coach House has been converted into a residence as has The Barn. Accommodation in the Lodge was divided almost equally between the family and their servants, as a family of four would usually require the same number of servants to look after them.

The Lodge was rented until about 1891, when the mineral rights of the property, needed by the GWR as it sought to extend its land holdings, had to be obtained from the Countess of Shannon, the mother of the then owner. Previous occupiers who had paid rent included John George Liebenrood, a Dutch merchant who lived

there from 1786 to 1794 and who is buried in Saint Mary's churchyard; Michael Blount (1835-1846) who was related to the Blounts at Mapledurham House; Major-General Sir James Hope, KCB (1845-1853) who served with great distinction in the Peninsular War and The Honourable Robert Boyle (1861-1887), a Royal Naval Vice-Admiral who commanded HMS Spey one of the Navy's first steamships. One of his ship's bells was mounted on the north face of the house and can still be seen there.

More recently the Lodge has been owned by Charles Ernest Hodgkin (1902-1949), who moved in with his family when he became Managing Director of Pulsometer Pumps in Oxford Road. He was also Chairman of the Parish Council and a churchwarden for 45 years. His son, Eliot (1955-1956) was an artist and converted the Coach House into an artist's studio.

In 1957 Purley Lodge was divided into two residences; the kitchen and servants' quarters forming the Gatehouse, and the family rooms making up the main house still known as Purley Lodge. There are still different ground levels, the north ground level equivalent to that of the Village Street, the south equal to that of the lawns, one storey higher.

The first occupant of the new Gatehouse, who lived there from 1957-1973, was Peter Mosley, nephew of the notorious Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Facists, who knew the area from the time when he lived in Caversham Court. There have been three more owner occupiers of the gatehouse since, the most recent being our speaker, who has been in residence since 1985.

Rick concluded his well-illustrated talk by discussing some of the speculation that surrounds the house. One theory is that Purley Lodge once incorporated the remains of a medieval church. In the 1960s Peter Mosley, while carrying out repairs to the Gatehouse kitchen, found an underground tunnel leading in the direction of the river. Local and national newspapers suggested that the tunnel might have formed an escape route to Mapledurham House, at a time when Henry VIII and then later Oliver Cromwell were intent on persecuting and imprisoning Catholics. The Blounts at

Mapledurham were a well-known Catholic family, and could have harboured fugitives from The Lodge, but it seems unlikely that a tunnel of such a distance could have been structurally possible.

Jean Debney and John Chapman spoke from the floor of the meeting, Jean showing an ancient piece of stone found recently in the Lodge garden which would appear to be part of a very old window sill. John explained that the monks of Reading Abbey were obliged to look after the needs of tenants in the area, though they usually off loaded any problems to be dealt with by the Lord of the Manor. He also stated that Purley Lodge is not the oldest home in the village that distinction probably belongs to Ivy Cottage.

But the most fascinating piece of conjecture about Purley Lodge was supplied by the current owners, Stewart and Emily Kennedy. When they moved in in 1996, they were told by a cleaning lady that the house has a ghost! Folklore claims that an elderly lady walks through the house and, although she cannot be seen, doors open and close to allow her uninterrupted passage. Evidence of this strange happening has been supplied by workmen in the house. If anyone knows the origin of this story, or who the old lady might be, please contact a member of Project Purley with the explanation, so that further lustre may be added to this intriguing mystery.

David Downs

Dovecotes

The guest speaker at Project Purley's March Meeting was Andrew Hutt, a member of the Berkshire Archeological Research Group, whose subject was Dovecotes. His talk was informative, clearly illustrated and concise, the latter quality being especially appreciated by members who had already sat through the Society's Annual General Meeting in The Barn where the heaters was not operating effectively.

Andrew divided his talk into six parts. Firstly he drew attention to the two Berkshire dovecote projects, one conducted by Esme Few in the 1960s which created an archive of the 50 or so dovecotes

existing in the county, and the more recent example undertaken by the BARG. This organisation has inherited and updated Esme's work, and a group of volunteers intends to publish a book entitled "The Dovecotes and Pigeon Lofts of Old Berkshire."

The rest of the talk concentrated on the history of dovecotes, though Andrew did explain that the terms dove and pigeon can be used interchangeably as both are descended from the Blue Rock Dove, which likes to live in man-made buildings. Pigeons mate for life and a pair can produce two squabs (chicks) eight to ten times a year for seven years.

The first evidence of pigeon keeping comes from Ancient Egypt, as squabs were included on a menu for King Unas dating from 2600 B.C. From Roman times, doves are portrayed on pottery and two Roman authors, Varro and Pliny, describe doves being kept for food. Varro tells us that they were kept in a columbaria, a circular store building, that they were fed on millet, wheat and peas, and that their keepers anointed the doves' bodies with myrrh to attract other birds for breeding.

Dovecotes and pigeon breeding were introduced to England by the Normans following the invasion of 1066. Only Lords of the Manor were allowed by right to build dovecotes and the earliest extant dovecote, which can be seen at Hurley, near Bisham Abbey, was built in 1308 by Benedictine Monks as the right to ownership increased. The young squabs, rich in tender meat, were sold to provide food and bring in considerable revenue for the Monks, as the Hurley dovecote could produce over 6,000 squabs per year, equivalent to 200 meals per week. Squabs took 20 minutes to roast, whilst the fully grown pigeons, often stuffed with herbs and garlic, needed a much longer time as they were turned on a spit. However, the pigeons could be a menace to farmers, and a law passed in 1476 stated that any pigeons which had escaped from their dovecote could be killed to protect the farmer's corn and seed.

In medieval times, there were dovecotes in and around Berkshire at Harwell, Brimpton and Hurley, the largest standing seven metres

tall and containing 660 nesting boxes. But the most local one was at Coley Park on land bought by Thomas Vachell after the monastery lands had been annexed by the Crown. That dovecote dates from 1553 and is still visible in 2006 in the centre of a housing estate, though the lofts have now been blocked.

In 1619 a law was introduced to allow freeholders to build dovecotes, so there was a post-dissolution boom in their numbers. Designs began to vary from the stereotypical circular building and the first square dovecote was built at Carswell Manor.

The period from 1619 to 1793 saw a rise, then a fall in the keeping of pigeons and the building of dovecotes. In 1640 a law stated that pigeons were a protected species as pigeon keeping became a hobby as well as a business activity, with many more dovecotes appearing on the map, including one at Culham Manor which is the largest octagonal example in England. However the selling of pigeons both for business and for pleasure had become so widespread that, in 1694, any profit from the enterprise became taxable.

Then in the eighteenth century, following a massive boom in the population - from 5.25 million in 1714 to 10.5 million in 1812, the industrial and agricultural output of the country also increased. The price of wheat increased too following the French revolutionary wars, so that the value of the wheat eaten by the pigeons exceeded the value of the pigeons themselves. So the 1790s saw an end to large scale pigeon keeping and the majority of people who kept their dovecotes open were those pigeon fanciers who bred and flew them as a hobby.

Pigeons have been subject to more legislation in recent times. In 1948 it became illegal for farmers to wantonly kill pigeons feeding on their crops, but in 1961 the Public Health Act allowed local authorities to take preventative measures against any pigeons causing a nuisance or hazard to the public.

Andrew completed his talk by detailing the current status of some of the ninety dovecotes studied by BARG. Thirty still retain their

original form, ten have been converted into living accommodation or for business use, four have had their holes removed and replaced with painted replicas and just one is preserved as a ruin. The group's publication will record all pre-1793 dovecotes in East Berkshire, West Berkshire and South Oxfordshire.

It was a tribute to our speaker's obvious enthusiasm for his subject and his clear diction that he was able to keep his audience entertained on such a chilly evening.

David Downs.



The Sulham Pigeon Tower

In 1769 the Rev. Henry Wilder of Sulham House and Joan Thoyt of Sulhamstead House married. The Pigeon Tower was said to have been built during their courtship as it could be seen from both their homes.

Ben Viljoen

Executive Committee

Chairman	John Chapman (0118) 9426999 john@purley.demon.co.uk	5 Cecil Aldin Drive Purley on Thames
Treasurer	Ben Viljoen (0118) 9843170 highveldt@ntlworld.com	12 Beech Road Purley on Thames
Secretary	Lee Hall (0118) 9429238 leeandrichard@vodafone.net	33 Waterside Drive Purley on Thames
Minute Secretary	Hazel King (0118) 9424442	2 Highfield Road Tilehurst
Editor	Ann Betts (0118) 9422485 ann.betts7@ntlworld.com	4 Allison Gardens Purley on Thames
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	Jean Debney (0118) 9413223 jeandebney@onename.demon.co.uk	8 Huckleberry Close Purley on Thames
	David Downs (0118) 942 4167	99 Long Lane Tilehurst
	Peter Perugia (0118) 9843932 perugia@perugia515.fsnet.co.uk	7 Nursery Gardens Purley on Thames
	Catherine Sampson (0118) 9422255 clspurley@aol.com	32 Waterside Drive Purley on Thames