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## *Forthcoming Meetings & Events*

Visit to Mapledurham House & Mill	16 <sup>th</sup> May
Rain & Shine: <i>A Winters Tale</i> (Tickets, if there are any left, from David Downs)	6 <sup>th</sup> June
Visit to Stratfield Saye	4 <sup>th</sup> July
BBQ at Highveldt	18 <sup>th</sup> July
Big Battlefields Bike Ride <i>Richard Benyon</i>	19 <sup>th</sup> September



# THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL

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### *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**

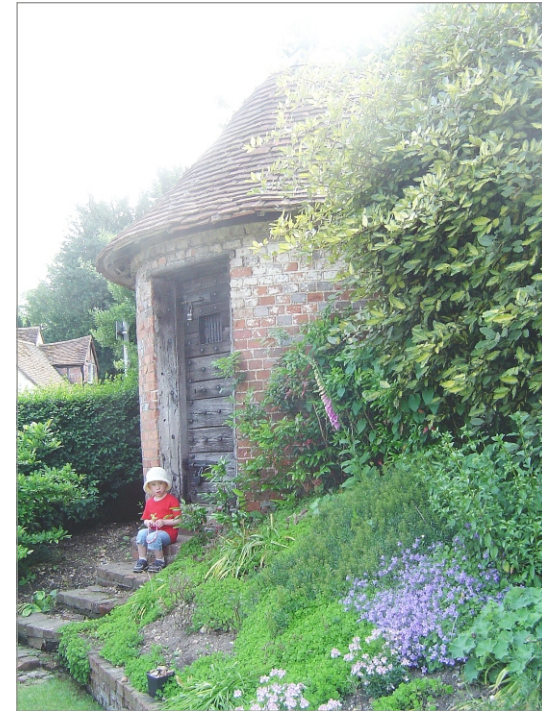
- 1 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 part 1** (items 1-23) (revised Aug 1988)
- 2 **Sources for the History of Purley on Thames Vol 1 part 2** (items 24-38) (Aug 1988)
- 3 **Monumental Inscriptions at St Mary's Church Purley Part C** (Feb 1989)
- 8 **The Early History of Purley C of 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: The Purley pond field mentioned in John Sherrot's article.  
Frontispiece: Recent photograph of the Pangbourne lock-up  
referred to in the Kenneth Graham article.*

## THE PROJECT PURLEY JOURNAL



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by  
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## *Memories of Kenneth Grahame*

RITA DENMAN

*Editor Ann Betts  
Designer Ben Viljoen*

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We are indebted to Rita Denman for the following story which we are printing to commemorate one hundred years since the publication of *The Wind in the Willows*.

Fred Rawlins family came from the village of Hemington in Somerset to Tidmarsh, later moving to Purley. He married a Purley Village girl, who he described as 'that girl with the fringe'. In the early days of their marriage they lived in one of the two cottages named 'Well Cottages' which were demolished in 1938. At a later date they moved into one side of the School House. In time they bought School House naming it Hemington.

Fred wrote a series of his reminiscences of the area including the following.

*From 1921 – 1929 I lived in Tidmarsh and spent those years of my life at Pangbourne School.*

*Passing Church Cottage several times each day, we got to know Mr and Mrs Kenneth Grahame quite well.*

*One of Mrs Grahame's eccentricities was her long coat with its row of Florins for buttons. Lunch at school was sandwiches and if the weather was fine we would go for walks to the Pang, the boat wharf, up the beeches, anywhere of interest.*

*One day collecting autumn leaves for the afternoon art lessons we were going up New Road, (now River View Road) and at the top of the Grahames' garden where they joined the next property we saw a cat in a wire. Knowing we would never handle the animal, I threw my coat over the cat to hold it down while my brother cut the string with his knife. As he did so a very agitated Mrs Grahame came upon us. As we stood up the cat bolted.*

*We were at once accused of killing the cat. She would not listen to anything we tried to tell her. Later that afternoon Sergeant*

*Jeffcock came to the school to investigate. He took us to Mrs Grahame's garden where we showed him the rabbit wire peg and freshly cut string. We next visited a large house up the New Road (a Mrs Knelder) where we found the cat, still having the wire round its neck.*

*It took the officer quite a time to convince Mrs Grahame we were releasing the cat not catching it but we spent the rest of the afternoon in the lock-up (summer house, see Frontispiece) being filled with cake and lemonade etc. We were even allowed to ring the ship's bell in front of the house.*

*From then on, we had an open invitation to the Grahames' gardens and spent many lunch times in the lock-up, listening to stories with both Mr and Mrs Kenneth Grahame.*

### *Memories of Purley in the 1940s*

JOHN SHERROT

I lived in Purley Park, in St Mary's Avenue during the Second World War with my grandmother from 1940 to 1946. My family was scattered all around the country. My sister and brother ended up in Scotland. While in Purley I went to school in Pangbourne, but before I went to school each day I did a paper round for Mr Tidbury who had a paper shop in Pangbourne and it was quite a scramble to get my round done in time to catch the lorry that took us to school. The lorry was operated by Mr. Lee and, on one sad occasion, a boy was killed, clinging to the tailboard, as the lorry backed into Long Lane to turn around. The headmaster at Pangbourne was Mr Townsend who was nicknamed 'Spotty' because he could spot everything that went on among the kids.

The church was just down the road from my grandmother's house and I joined the choir there. Mr Nelson Cooper was the organist and choir master and choir practice was held in the little primary school. Mr Cooper introduced me to the organ, which I still

play and I used to practise on the huge grand piano at the old rectory then owned by the Listers. Mary Lister ran the Sunday School and my teacher for a time was Marion Dupre with whom I maintained contact after the war until she died at her home in Westham a few years ago. Mr Skuse was the rector and I used to love his wonderful sermons but during the services we choirboys used to argue over who would pump the organ as we got sixpence for it.

At weekends I used to work on Bucknell's farm which was at the bottom of New Hill. Some of the jobs I did on the farm included potato planting and assisting with the milking. The field opposite the house was used as a nursery where the cows were put for calving. Opposite the farm was a big pond (see Cover) where Mapledurham Drive started. When I had time to spare I also used to spend time at the lock helping the lock-keeper opening and closing the gates. The Hatton family lived in the lock house at the time.

During the war there were lots of Canadian soldiers in the area. They used to practise building pontoon bridges over the Thames and on one occasion the bridge collapsed while a tank was crossing. We boys thought it very funny to see a tank in the middle of the river.

At the corner of St Mary's Avenue and Colyton Way there was a general store run by Mr Howarth. He would stand at the counter and add all the items up faster than a calculator which was a good effort considering the imperial currency. I never heard anyone dare to argue with him.

The roads in those days were made of anything that was handy like old bricks or ashes. Water was pumped up out of the ground, lighting was by kerosene lamps as there was no gas or electricity or water piped to 'the camp' as the locals referred to it.

*John now lives in Melbourne Australia*



## German POWs in Purley

PETER PERUGIA

*[For corrections kindly provided by Fred Miles's granddaughter, Caroline Brookes, please see the end of the article]*

The story, as far as we know it from four letters recently handed to Project Purley, is that Purley played host to two German Prisoners of War, Alfred Ubat and Karl Stephan. Both worked on Westbury Farm with Fred Miles and went back to Germany in early 1947. Various Purley inhabitants are mentioned in the letters: Mr Staniland (who also worked on the farm, Violet (who probably was Fred's daughter and about to get married), Mr Theobald (who at that time was intending to buy Westbury Farm), Mrs Smith (who had sent Alfred a very welcome food parcel) and someone referred to as 'old' Frank (another farm worker).



*Karl Stephan and two fellow prisoners,  
Joe & Helmut*

The first letter from Karl, dated 1st March 1948, expresses gratitude for the kind treatment he and Alfred had received at Fred's and his family's hands and I quote: "Well, dear Fred, I am thinking often of the time I have spent on your farm. [Name withheld] didn't think very much of us, but you always were very kind to us and treated us ever so well. I needn't mention how glad I was and still am, when I remember all the good things, such as the good soup, cake and cocoa, you gave to us." He then goes on to contrast this with the conditions he found on his return to Germany, which "... are indescribably bad, especially for us refugees from the East, as I have lost my home and nearly all our belongings to the Poles, who have taken over my former homeland." He also shows that he is still interested in what goes on at Westbury Farm: "How is Violet? Is she

*already married? I think we had a good time then and we always got on well together. I would be very pleased if I could get a letter from her. Has Alfred written to you? I wonder where Staniland is now. Is he on another farm? Has Theobald got Westbury Farm? How is old Frank getting on? I suppose he is all right and still working."*

Alfred's 1st letter, dated 5th September 1947, is along similar lines. "I found my parents old and sick, not much to eat and four people together in one room...", he writes. He also talks of his very low pay, and of how little there was in the shops that they could afford to buy. Alfred illustrates this by saying that his earnings are 30 RM (Reichsmark) a week, while the price of one egg is 10 RM on the black market. "Last week I received a parcel from Mrs Smith and we were very glad about its contents, especially the chocolate for the children." He adds: "The weather here has been very bad, no rain, very bad for potatoes and Swiss chard. This winter there will be much hunger in Germany. I often think of the good times in Westbury Lane. How is Mr Staniland, and Mr Theobald? When is Violet's wedding day? At Christmas?" He concludes: "All the best to you and all (my) friends in Westbury Lane...I hope you will write very soon...". The address he gives is in Hesse, 'American Zone'. His second letter, dated 12.12. 1948, begins with: "Thank you for your letter and parcel. We were very pleased with its contents and we can use everything. One can buy things here but prices are too high, particularly as we have lost everything and have to start afresh. Now that Christmas is here, I still remember the good time we had with you. You always treated us well and that was not the case with everyone... I would like to come and see you, but it is too far - if only the Channel was not in the way....The children are looking forward to Christmas. They all have large wishes but everything is very expensive. Kindest regards..."

Karl's 2nd letter of 26th April 1948, shows how much he appreciated receiving a reply from Fred: "...I was so happy to receive [it]. Now just about a year has passed since I was with you. I think back a lot to those times, it was often nice, even if we argued now and again... Yes, Fred, times are bad now, everybody has worries and has to see how best to get through life. You can imagine how my family was happy when I came home, but it is hard for us now, we haven't got anything. You know that we live as refugees here. In our home town are the Poles. I hope that one day we will be

able to go back there. Then everything would be better again.

I suppose you have a lot of work now and Ginger will be after the work, How is your wife and Violet, we have always understood each other so well and they were always so good to us. How is Violet, is she still on the farm or is she already married? It would be nice to receive a few lines from her. You write that the prisoners walk around free now. Yes, when we were there everything was stricter. I suppose a lot of them will stay there.

Dear Fred, you write if you can help me with something. What we would need most at the moment are fats, but I can't expect you to send anything, you don't have much yourself. Of course I would be thankful for anything as we are in need of practically everything at the moment..."

There are no further letters in Project Purley's possession and no other information. It would be quite rewarding to try and complete the picture - and even expand this episode of 'Purley at War'. Perhaps some readers have memories or other information that would add to the story.

#### **Corrections**

1. Mr Staniland was the tenant of Westbury Farm.
2. Violet did not get married until 1954, to Edward Luker, who lived at Scraces Farm.

#### **Addendum**

Since publication of this article in the Parish Magazine, I have been in touch with Caroline Brookes, thanks to Bernard Venners, who also provided some photographs of the POWs. It appears that they lived at Basildon Park at that time.

### ***Tributes to Sylvia Conquest*** **28th May 1935 - 2nd February 2008**



*My Special Mum*

Thank you to everyone at Project Purley that knew and loved my Mum. She enjoyed Project Purley so much.

I keep saying how unfair it is! My Mum had so much to offer and gave so much to everyone. No doubt an AA battery has run out at Project Purley, like the light bulbs have run out at my house. My Mum was a fighter until the end, but I am sure you all have some little memory of Sylvia, (no questions asked!!!!!!). Mum enjoyed all her social activities so much, and whenever I rang, she was always out with one thing or another! My Mummy was so special to me and to others I know. She brought warmth and happiness wherever she ventured. Mum wanted a bag of donuts in her coffin with her. Anytime you are confronted with a jam donut think of Sylvia.

My thanks to any of you that came to the Crematorium and I am sure that my Special Mummy would have been pleased with her day.

Lisa Labrosse XXX

#### ***Jean Debney recalls that:-***

Sylvia was a one-off, lively, energetic and entertaining person, with an interesting collection of brightly coloured jumpers. She always managed to cheer everyone up even if she was feeling a bit low.

I first met her when, early in 1980, after I had advertised for help

indexing the Purley Parish Registers, she arrived to join our small group at the weekly get-togethers round our dining room table. A couple of years later, when Project Purley was founded, she also led the Natural History Group for some time. But her circumstances changed and she moved to Tilehurst. At the same time the group disbanded and she passed over the little red box of records they had created for safe keeping in the Project Purley archives.

Sylvia was very artistic and, over the years, sent us several beautiful hand-made Christmas cards which I have kept as it seemed a shame to throw them away. She had a fantastic sense of humour and also adored Mr Darcy - alias the actor Colin Firth (she requested a photo of him, plus a lipstick and other things I can't remember, to be put in the coffin with her).

Sylvia remained a member of Project Purley and was usually to be seen with a crowd round her.

We all miss her very much.

### Nature Notes



#### December

The weather during the second week of the month turned much colder with some frosts. Christmas Day saw torrential rain in this area.

Red Kites regularly perch in the Scots Pines calling to each other. Saw a Peacock butterfly in the sunshine. There is a new addition to the ladybird population called a Harlequin. Originally from Japan they were introduced to parts of Europe as an aphid control. Arrived here

in 2004. They are larger in size with a voracious appetite, eating other ladybirds when aphids are scarce. Apparently they are now so wide spread that it is impossible to prevent them spreading and breeding. They like to winter in bathrooms. For those who are interested visit [www.harlequin-survey.org](http://www.harlequin-survey.org).

#### January

This month had torrential rains since the 10<sup>th</sup> with rivers high and flooding again in many areas. 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> were the warmest nights on record for January. Scotland had its best fall of snow for many years.

Winter Jasmine blooming and Spring bulbs well up. Lovely show of the white berries on Symphoricarpos (Snowberry bush) in the hedgerows.

Good sightings of all our normal birds in the garden, plus a Blackcap feeding on the Jasmine berries, Jay and Green Woodpecker on the lawn. Robins singing well. A White-tailed Eagle was sighted in Wiltshire. Larger than our native Golden Eagle, it was thought to be a juvenile flown in all the way from Finland.

Berkshire Natural History website reported that an otter was seen casually walking down Cholsey High Street – probably making its way back to the Thames via the local small brook.

#### February

The 2<sup>nd</sup> of February is Candlemas Day. There is a saying that “If Candlemas Day be fair and bright, winter will have another flight, if Candlemas be shower and rain, winter gone and will not come again”. The 2<sup>nd</sup> started frosty, cold winds, bright with some clouds. Snow fell in the North. Very warm days, but cold frosty nights during the second week.

An adult Canada Goose with goslings were seen on a local golf course lake. Bumble bees out in the sunshine, Rooks very active and more birdsong. Apparently one of the collective names for Rooks is a “parliament” – they certainly make enough noise! Blackthorn

blooming in the hedgerows, crocus and first daffodils out.

### *March*

The beginning of the month was very windy – “March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb.” Lived up to this saying as the start was very windy with rain and the last two days were sunny and warm.

The high winds damaged a lot of the taller Spring flowers. Bluebells opening in the woods. Rats have caused tremendous damage in the allotments by eating root crops still in the ground and even attacking the stems of the brassicas.

Observed a small flock of Bramblings in the garden – similar in plumage and size to the Chaffinch. Unusual sight of four Jays in the garden eating the hawthorn berries. One or two small birds collecting nesting materials. 14 Rooks nests reported in Allison Gardens – two blown down in the high winds but, as at 31<sup>st</sup> March, were back up to 13.

It was reported in the National Press that a wild beaver was discovered living in the Thames, more than 400 years after they were believed to be extinct. It is apparently a European species, which escaped from a breeding programme, defying the experts who said that it would not survive.

## *Reviews of Meetings & Events*

### *Members' Hobbies & Interests*

The most popular Project Purley meetings are those categorised as “Members’ Own.” In previous years these have included members reminiscing about their schooldays, heirlooms and, in some cases, wartime experiences. On Friday, January 11<sup>th</sup> twenty-two devotees gathered together in The Barn to talk about their hobbies and interests.

Chairman, John Chapman, had asked those people willing to speak to allocate themselves to one of five groups: collecting, research, arts and crafts, indoor games and outdoor pursuits, with a

time limit of five minutes per speaker. Members could also, of course, bring items to display and discuss.

David Downs began the proceedings by showing a small selection of the many original cartoons he has collected, including one in which he himself featured and which appeared in “The Times” some years ago. David explained that he enjoys cartoons because they combine the two beautiful elements of art and humour, and that while some of the leading cartoonists guard their work quite jealously, others are quite willing to sell originals for modest prices or even donations to charity.

Ben Viljoen collects antique books, but fears the age of the printed and bound book is fading due to the advance of the internet, whilst Catherine Sampson was keen to explain her fascination with hats. It began when she was aged just two and started wearing her grandfather’s trilby hat, which she still possesses. She also showed a couple of her favourite hats which are from Borneo, and made all of us chuckle when she said that the only way she could bring a collection of six hats back through Customs was to wear them all at the same time.

Jean Debney made a brief mention of the cigarette cards and postcards she has accumulated, then it was Bernard Venners’ turn to introduce the section on research. He collects militaria and pre-1945 vehicles and caught everyone’s attention by asking us to identify a headlamp masker used during the World War Two blackouts to avoid traffic accidents. Bernard has acquired a number of veteran military vehicles over the years and drove one ancient ambulance on the London to Brighton run. His expertise and collection have led to him being involved in several film and television productions, such as Secret Army, Longitude and Pearl Harbor.

Jean Debney also contributed to this section, talking about her research into family history, a subject she has investigated since the age of seventeen. John Chapman is well known for his research into the Royal Berkshire Regiment and its predecessors, and Ben Viljoen also spoke in this section about local gardens. His intention is to set up an historic gardens trust in Berkshire.



The arts and crafts section was led by Edna Bint. She became hooked on stained glass ten years ago when she studied pictures of a leaded lantern. The lead became too heavy for her hands to work so she now uses copper foil. Edna, who also does stone carving, had brought a colourful selection of her stained glass creations. She also repairs stained glass, is happy to teach others, and is only too willing to accept commissions! The two other contributors to arts and crafts were John Chapman, who is working on a needlepoint map of Berkshire and Ann Betts, whose skills lie in embroidery and tapestry stitching.

The West Berkshire Scrabble Club is led by Ian and Elizabeth Burn, so Ian told us about his favourite indoor game. It has its origin in the game Lexiko, which was invented by Alfred Mosher Butts in the New York depression of the 1930s. In 1947 he went into partnership with James Brunot to market the game. It was renamed Scrabble, and there are 300 Scrabble clubs in the United Kingdom alone. There is a standard dictionary used for the game, and major leagues and tournaments take place, including the annual West Berkshire event in The Barn, which last year raised £752 for charity. The club is always looking for new members, so anyone interested is welcome to contact Ian or Elizabeth. Incidentally, Elizabeth is also interested in garden design and is happy to offer advice to any member looking for guidance.

The Purley Pathfinders walking group is run and organised by Nicki Woodward. Nicki is not a Project Purley member, but received high praise from Ann Betts, a regular walker and who, as such, fitted into the outdoor pursuits part of the evening. The Pathfinders meet every week during school term time and walks are graded to suit all ages; the theme for walks in 2008 is "Village Life." There are usually four outings a year, and the timetable for each generally includes a walk, a picnic lunch, a guided tour and a cream tea. The group, which also organises social evenings, always seems to be lucky with the weather. The number walking varies between thirty and fifty and, like Ann, they all pay tribute to Nicki's enthusiasm and sheer hard work. However, it was while she was out walking near

Westbury Lane with her dog, Dougall, that Ann found the Neolithic projectile point which attracted so much attention last year.

On the same theme of travel, Rick Jones told us about "Wurdler," the canal boat which he once owned, and how he and friends found boating an enjoyable and safe form of transport which was popular until it was overtaken by rail travel.

By now the clock showed 9.30 p.m., time for coffee, general chit-chat and the opportunity to look more closely at the items on display. It had been an intriguing evening, and should Project Purley ever find itself short of a speaker, I feel sure that any one of the meeting's contributors would have more than enough information and artefacts to entertain an audience for an evening.

David Downs

### *Mapledurham Mill*

At the opening of the meeting on February 15th there was a minutes silence in memory of Sylvia Conquest whose funeral was today. A collection was taken to support 'Water Aid' in her memory and raised £40 even though many members had been at her funeral. Sylvia was a founding member of Project Purley and her bubbling personality will be sorely missed.

The main item was a talk by Corrie Starling from Mapledurham who gave us a fascinating review of milling in general and Mapledurham Mill in particular. He explained how mills were introduced by the Romans and were an essential component of mediaeval life as without a mill, grain could not be turned into bread and other foodstuffs for both humans and animals. Although the miller was a tenant of the lord of the manor he was often better off and more secure. Minor and sometimes major crimes were often overlooked as the village could not be without its miller and a fine was about the most severe penalty that could be imposed.

The mill at Mapledurham was recorded in Domesday and, with a short break has been in continuous use since then. The present buildings date mainly from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries although parts have to be replaced from time to time as it is almost exclusively made

of wood. Metal can generate a spark and a spark plus air infiltrated by flour dust is potentially highly explosive. The lord of Purley funded a bridge across the river in the 14<sup>th</sup> century so grain could be brought from farms on the south bank of the river. The point being that with a relatively flat river like the Thames, mills had to be well spaced out and therefore served large areas of territory.

The plague and fire of London in the 17<sup>th</sup> century drove out many of the wealthy citizens of the city to country retreats and they created a profitable market for the produce of the mill. When they began to drift back and the population of London exploded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century a wharf and barn were constructed on the island in 1777 and vast quantities of agricultural products of all sorts were shipped downriver by barge. It was when the London market began to be served by produce from America that the decline in milling began and Mapledurham is now left as the last operational mill on the Thames.



*Recent photo of the Mill*

Corrie described how the milling process worked and pointed out that at times the mill had four sets of stones all driven from water wheels controlled by sluice gates. The wheel is an undershot wheel which means that while it is not quite as efficient as an overshot one, it is not so

liable to be unusable in times of drought or scarcity of water. Their biggest problem is usually too much water.

He showed us the different grades of flour produced and invited members to get a feel for the different types with their fingers and also to taste some of the products made by his wife's company which are usually on sale at the Purley Farmers' Markets – delicious!!!

Afterwards he did a roaring trade selling products to the members.  
John Chapman

### ***Purley Cricket Club***

Martin Bishop, Chairman of Purley Cricket Club, played one of the longest innings of his career when he spoke to members of Project Purley about "Bats, Balls and Biscuits" at The Barn on Friday, March 14<sup>th</sup>. He forecast his talk would last only about thirty minutes. Instead it began at 8 p.m. and did not end until 9.30 p.m. Not that anyone in the audience of twenty-four members and many more guests minded, because Martin's talk was a classic. It was delivered clearly and precisely in easy to follow chronological detail and beautifully illustrated with some ancient yet clear prints, maps and photographs. Moreover, and in true classical style, our speaker kept us waiting until the very end of his presentation before disclosing the relevance of it all to Purley on Thames.

Martin began by summarising the history of Huntley & Palmers Biscuit factory. In 1822 Joseph Huntley opened a small baker's shop in London Street. By 1826 the shop had extended to employing sixteen staff and his son, Joseph junior, had founded Huntley, Boorne & Stevens, which produced amongst other items, tins for biscuits. Biscuits could be kept much fresher in tins and were sold not only to local residents, but to those travelling through Reading by coach.

In 1841 George Palmer joined the company, and as Reading became linked to London and the West Country, demand for biscuit production increased. So much so that the company moved to a new 24 acre site in Kings Road. In keeping with the Quaker ethic of its owners, the company provided educational and recreational opportunities for its employees, the main intention being to keep them out of public houses. There was an Excursion Fund, which paid for river trips and visits to exhibitions, a Reading Room Library was built inside the factory, and the employees received several Royal visits, as the firm held the Royal Warrant for supplying biscuits.

Employment conditions were, however, generally poor despite the company employing by 1898, over 5,000 people, which represented ten per cent of Reading's adult population. Pay was £1

a week, plus one pound weight of biscuits and working hours from 6 a.m. until 6.30 p.m. There was no canteen and only seven and a half days holiday a year. It was only after World War One that the statutory 48 hour working-week was introduced for employees. None of this mitigated against the success of Huntley & Palmers though, for by the early 1900s their biscuits were being sold to 137 countries and, during the First World War, H.& P.'s biscuits became the staple diet of the British Army.

From 1870 through to the 1970s, when biscuit production finally ceased, Reading was known as "The Biscuit Town," and the local football team, Reading F.C., which played in the Football League, was nicknamed "The Biscuit Boys" or "Biscuitmen." The factory's recreation department was increasing in size too, offering football, cricket, tennis, bowls and quoits to its employees as well as a drama section, and it was the mention of this expansion of activities which provided Martin with the link to concentrate on the history of cricket at the biscuit factory.



*Cigarette card  
from David  
Down's collection*

The first record of cricket being played was in 1855 when the Single Men beat the Married Men at Henley following a steamer trip along the Thames. The Reading Biscuit Factory team next played matches against local schools, mostly on Saturday afternoons, and although there was no evidence of formal league cricket, evenings would often be given over to inter-departmental games. By 1883 the factory was running A and B teams, and in 1886, Reading Biscuit Factory C.C. defeated Reading Wanderers C.C. in the final of the Reading Town Cup.

Factory home games were played at King's Meadow, a venue shared with Reading Football Club, and teams included

management as well as shop floor workers. A fixture list from 1888 shows cricket on a more formalised basis and in 1891, when George Palmer donated Palmer Park to the town, the factory cricket club played a major part in the celebration event. In 1898 when the Recreation Club was formed the cricket club became a sub-section, and now ran four men's and one junior team. In addition there were twenty departmental teams.

The Kensington Road ground had been leased in 1885 by Mr. Jesse, a local builder and benefactor, to Berkshire County Cricket Club, but was sold in 1902 to W.H. Palmer, and the venue renamed Reading & District Amateur Sports Club catering for a variety of activities. In 1919 Palmer transferred the lease to the Biscuit Factory Recreation Club, and the ground became the new home, together with its splendid pavilion, for the cricket and football teams. On July 21<sup>st</sup> 1923, Reading Biscuit Factory C.C. entertained the M.C.C. at Kensington Road and, by 1939, the club was fielding five teams as well as an occasional Ladies XI. The facilities were far superior to those at King's Meadow, which was vulnerable to flooding, though the lower sides still played there occasionally. But following World War Two, Huntley & Palmers Cricket Club, as it was now known, could field only one eleven, and by the 1960s, all activity was centred on Kensington Road. Sunday cricket as well as Saturday was being played, helped by the amalgamation of H.&P.s with Huntley Boorne & Stevens to form Associated Biscuits Cricket Club.

By 1976 biscuit production at H.& P.s had closed down and this heralded the demise of the ground and facilities at Kensington Road. The ground was sold in 1983 by Nabisco to Reading Town Council, who allowed Reading Cricket Club to play there in the interim whilst they sold their Church Road site before moving to Sonning. H.& P.s still maintained a presence at the ground by virtue of their bowls club tucked away in one corner, but a further blow came with the destruction of the pavilion and much of the memorabilia contained therein when the building was gutted by fire.

Throughout Martin's long and fascinating talk, his listeners had been waiting, on alert for a mention of Purley on Thames. In the



style of the romantic writer, Gustave Flaubert, who in his novel, "The Charterhouse of Parma," does not disclose the reason for the title until the last sentence of the book, Martin finally explained the connection. In 1984 some members of Associated Biscuits C.C. were playing at Purley, and a year later in 1985, Associated Biscuits C.C. was fully amalgamated with Purley on Thames Cricket Club, playing home games at the beautiful ground in Goosecroft Lane.

Martin has written "Bats, Balls and Biscuits," the history of cricket at the Reading Biscuit Factory, which will be published in April. I have seen the proofs and can highly recommend it. Copies will be available directly from Martin, whose telephone number is 0118-9453117, at a cost of £9 to include postage and packing. In addition Purley on Thames C.C. celebrates its fortieth birthday this year with a special game against a Berkshire XI on Sunday, July 27<sup>th</sup> at Goosecroft Lane beginning at 2 p.m.

David Downs

### *Daughter of the Regiment*

There was a keen air of anticipation among members of Project Purley as Catherine Butcher waited to begin her talk entitled "Daughter of the Regiment" at the Barn on Friday evening, April 18<sup>th</sup>. We could see that she had prepared a table full of photographs, books, maps, postcards and artefacts with which to illustrate one of the most moving talks ever delivered to the Society. As soon as Catherine began to speak, we knew that we were not going to be disappointed.

She has a clear, pleasant voice and talked to us for an hour without hesitation or interruption. She explained how her father's family came originally from Bannockburn, and after his two brothers had been killed in a mining disaster, he decided to join the army. He enlisted in the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, served during World War One, and met Catherine's mother while they were both on duty helping to deal with a fire at Stirling Castle. Catherine

Munnoch was born in 1932, and as her father was now a sergeant-major in the A.& S., became known as a "daughter of the regiment." When Catherine was just four years of age, her father's regiment was posted abroad to India, and she at first had to live in a mud hut, where the family had to shake out their shoes each morning to ensure they were not inhabited by scorpions. After re-housing, much of the cooking and cleaning was done by bearers for the soldiers' families. Catherine's family spent three and a half years in India, which she recalled as a very happy period in her life.

However there was a dramatic turn of events in 1939. Catherine passed round a letter dated July 7<sup>th</sup> 1939 from her father, explaining he and his regiment had been posted to Singapore for jungle warfare training. War had been declared with Germany and the Japanese army was advancing towards Malaya. Australian troops were conscripted to defend Singapore, but on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, The Japanese also bombed and decimated Singapore. Catherine, now aged nine, likened the sound of the aircraft engines to that of a swarm of insects. She was woken by her mother and they both took refuge under the billiard table in their house. Her father, by now the Regimental Sergeant Major, was suffering from malaria and had been sent to the Alexandra Hospital to recuperate. He told his family that the British and Australian troops defending Singapore were in desperate trouble as they had no water, no supplies and were low on ammunition. R.S.M. Munnoch discharged himself from the hospital shortly before Japanese soldiers entered the building and



*R.S.M. Munnoch*



shot or bayoneted all the soldiers receiving treatment there.

With the enemy now just a few hundred yards from their front door, Catherine's mother packed what possessions she could, left home and went with Catherine to the docks to board a ship for Australia. Father went with them, and bought everyone ice-creams (or "Eskimo pies" as he called them) while the bombing of the docks continued. Catherine waved goodbye to her father, who was now due to rejoin his regiment. As the ship left harbour, she saw him become just a speck in the distance. She did not know that she would not see him again for three and a half long years.

The ship arrived in Fremantle, Western Australia, and the passengers disembarked after they had all been declared sane and healthy by the Captain. Catherine and Mrs. Munnoch were welcomed by the Red Cross, then lodged with an Australian family in Perth. Meanwhile, Catherine's mother had received a handwritten card from R.S.M. Munnoch to say that he had been captured and was now a prisoner of war of the Japanese. Mrs. Munnoch became understandably restless, moving from house to house and job to job, and then fell ill. But she was determined to get young Catherine safely back to her grandparents in Kent. They were due to sail on one ship, but were delayed because Catherine caught German measles. That ship was torpedoed and sank, so the two caught a train to Sydney, then went by ship to New Zealand, Bermuda and Liverpool arriving in England on V.E. Day. They then travelled to Kent so that Catherine could meet her grandparents for the first time. Not for nothing did she say that she had a guardian angel watching over her throughout the war.

The atomic bomb was dropped on Japan, and that forced the surrender of the Japanese army in the Far East. Catherine's father returned home after release from his P.O.W. camp, and when she met him, she realised that he appeared to be half the size of the father she had last seen in 1941. The family, now reunited, had to survive the harsh British winter of 1947, when rationing meant food was short. Although R.S.M. Munnoch never spoke about his experiences as a prisoner, Catherine was able, by speaking to other members of the

regiment and reading war diaries, to learn details of his great bravery and leadership during that terrible time.

Her father was captured after the surrender of Singapore and sent to the notorious Changi jail, along with many other of the 130,000 Allied P.O.W.s. Prisoners were routinely beaten, starved and made to stand in the stifling heat. He was transported by rail, with 35 men crammed into each steel wagon, to Thailand to build the Burma railway. He was put in camps, firstly at Chunkai then later at Tha Khanun, where each prisoner was allowed just eighteen inches width of living space. There was no sanitation, so disease, especially cholera, was rife with prisoners being fed only on meagre bowls of rice.

As R.S.M., Catherine's father was responsible for maintaining discipline and morale among the Allied prisoners. This he did to such good effect that he was awarded the M.B.E. for his outstanding leadership while in captivity. Among his other activities, he organised concert parties, arranged for the burial of the dead, and had the ashes of those cremated placed in a cairn under a thirty-foot tall cross he had built in the centre of the camp. He was also forced to supervise the digging of the mass graves which were to be used for the bodies of the prisoners should the Japanese decide, under threat of attack, to carry out a wholesale execution.

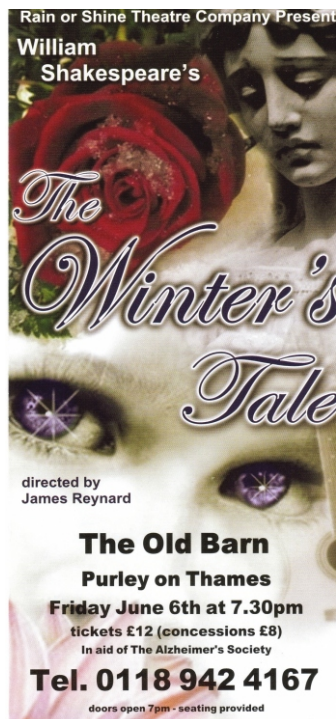
R.S.M. Munnoch and many of his fellow prisoners survived the war and he returned to his regiment. He was introduced to King George VI and Queen Elizabeth when their Majesties visited the regiment, and was a guest at the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip in 1947. His other distinction was to appear as an extra in the film "Bonnie Prince Charlie" before being posted south as an instructor to Bradfield College Combined Cadet Force. Sadly, Catherine's father died aged 58 in 1956, just six months before she was married.

Catherine and her son have visited the site of the camp where her father was incarcerated, and she showed the meeting a rivet and piece of sleeper from the railway on which the prisoners worked. She is a member of COFEPOW (Children of Far East Prisoners of War)

which raises money for charity and says she has lost all sense of bitterness towards the Japanese. She has sent much of her father's memorabilia to the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders' museum, including photographs she took of the prison camp graves.

Her story was one of great courage in the face of adversity, not just from her father's experience in the prison camp, but also from her own point of view. She says she has had to move on, and her dislike and fear of the Japanese has been washed away over the years. This was brought home to her when she met a young Japanese girl sitting on her own near Tilehurst Station, waiting for her father. Catherine asked if she could sit next to, and protect her, until her father arrived. This had been indeed one of most poignant talks ever given to Project Purley.

David Downs



*Don't miss the next production  
of Rain & Shine*

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