

Account of Purley on Thames

The Barn by the Church

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When Rocque made his map of the area in 1761 a building is shown in a similar position to the later location of the barn but showing the churchyard boundary enclosing it. Thus one might assume that it was originally the Tithe Barn for Purley and not simply a manorial barn. Thomas Jeffries map of 1765 shows the same three buildings, Church, barn and house in their relative positions but without indicating any boundaries.

A third reference is on an estate plan of Purley Magna which was drawn in 1786 after Robert Macreth has purchased the estate. The barn is shown as one of a cluster of buildings adjacent to the church which formed the Great Farm of the Manor.

Looking back at the history of the site we learn of an Elizabethan manor house built for the couple and St John after their wedding in 1543 and we know that this was replaced by a brick building around 1730. Dendrochronology on the beams of the barn today indicate two clearly defined timber sources, one of around 1530 and one of around 1740. The 1530 group are mostly covered with carpentry work which have no place in current usage so we may presume that they came from an earlier building and were reused in the 1740 build. The general style of carpentry is that of the mid 18th century so we may presume that the main construction was around 1740 and that timbers from the Elizabethan Manor House were reused.

Humphrey Repton's Report 1793

A few years later after the estate had come into the hands of Anthony Morris Storer, Humphrey Repton was asked to do a study of the farm with a view to transforming it into a gentleman's residence.. Humphrey Repton produced one of his famous 'Red Books' to set out his proposals for turning the Great Farm into a Gentleman's residence for Anthony Morris Storer. He came to Purley on November 2nd 1793 and had completed his work by November 22nd.

He observed "... it is impossible to preserve that air of neatness which a Gentleman's residence requires when attached to the filth and nuisances of a farm yard, it is necessary to remove the farm to a spot where it may give all the advantages of proximity without the inconvenience of contiguity. ... The barns stables and outhouses being chiefly wood may be taken down, removed and rebuilt without great expence"

There were two barns on the site, the Great Barn (referred to as the Tiled Barn) measuring 117 by 51 feet and the Green Barn measuring 83 feet by 31 feet. The Tiled Barn lay alongside the south boundary of the churchyard and the Green Barn lay at right angles to this running roughly north-south.

He proposed that the farm be reconstructed around a quadrangle at the junction of the Village Street and Marsh Lane which would need to be slightly re-aligned. The quadrangle would be formed of the Tiled Barn, the Granary and the Cart shed on the north side facing the House and other smaller buildings on the south side, the Green Barn (referred to as the Thatched Barn) on the west and the stables and cowsheds on the east.

