

Account of Purley on Thames

The Barn at Belleisle

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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. He produced one of his famous 'Red Books' in 1793. Repton's idea was to move the farm a short distance to the west and reconstruct the house and grounds in the grand manner. His ideas did not come to fruition as a severe flood occurred soon after and the decision was taken to relocate the house on the crest of the ridge overlooking the Thames where it would be well away from flooding. This eventually became Purley Park.

The farm was relocated at the corner of Long Lane and the Turnpike on a piece of land known as Elyham. The Storers renamed this 'Belleisle' after one of their properties in Jamaica. The plans for the lower site was reused and a new house was constructed as Belleisle Farm. At least two of the barns from the old farm were dismantled and re-constructed on the new site. Whilst the timbers were all marked for re-assembly, the people responsible did not adhere to this too much and occasionally used beams and other timbers almost at random. The result was that some of the jointing had to be replaced by nails and fixes and the building had a number of distinct irregularities and bowing. Also some of the carpenters marks do not match up. The second smaller barn survived until the late 1960s when it was demolished to make way for laboratories.

The barn was used for its original purpose whilst Belleisle was operated as a farm. However when the South Berks Hunt acquired it in the early years of the 20th century, it was used for stabling. Cecil Aldin, the then Master, used it during the first world war as a remount depot. He collected horses from all over the country, brought them to Purley where they were retrained for the use of the military.

Before Trenthams moved away from the site planning permission was sought to demolish the industrial buildings and the houses and turn most of the site over to residential development. The farmhouse was proposed to be turned into flats and a scheme was finally agreed to convert the barn into three residences. However this was not felt to be a thoroughly satisfactory way of dealing with it as in order to provide sufficient light without opening up the roof the scheme included glazing almost the whole of the south wall.

