

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## *Administrative Boundaries*

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### **Introduction**

Most organisations define their territory of operation to suit their own convenience and as far as the general public is concerned that is their problem. However when it comes to administrative boundaries they can have a considerable effect on the services that are on offer and the ability of individuals to influence those services. In this section we look briefly at the many different types of boundary and their particularisation to Purley.

### **Ancient Boundaries**

We have very little knowledge of administrative boundaries in Roman times. There appears to have been a Roman estate to the east of Pangbourne but we have no details. The area began as part of Britannia in the Roman Empire and it eventually became part of Maxima Caesariensis, the Roman province based on London in the south east.

There appears to have been an ancient boundary starting at the Thames to the east of Pangbourne and driving south in almost a straight line to well within present day Hampshire. This appears to have been used to define the initial eastern boundary of Wessex and the western boundary of Anglia and present day parish boundaries do not venture across it often making parishes such as Tidmarsh and Sulham very odd shapes.

Eventually of course the whole of Berkshire became part of Wessex except for brief periods when the area was taken over by Mercia.

In the 9th Century Alfred the Great set up his defensive system based upon Burghs and each settlement was allocated a burgh to which the villagers could retire for safety in the event of a Danish attack. In our case we belonged to the Honour of Wallingford and our menfolk would have to be prepared to defend the walls in the event of war. The defences were organised very much along the lines of the Roman Army and parishes grouped into units of five hides which had to provide a man at arms and four retainers. These were then organised into centuries and the lands of a century were known as a Hundred.

As in the Roman army the senior century was 160 rather than 80 men and Purley became part of Reading Hundred. In later years this was split into two with the lands held by Reading Abbey (including Pangbourne) in the Reading Hundred and the rest (including Purley) in the Theale Hundred. This was used as the basis of law enforcement for many years after, lasting until the latter half of the 19th century.

### **Parish Boundaries**

Until the 10th century the parish was a very ill-defined concept. It was thought of principally as the settlements served by a church. However as England became fully Christianised some problems emerged, relating to tithes. It was seen as an obligation to give one tenth of ones income to the

church but it was not enforceable. While it was reasonably clear whose land the arable fields were, it was nowhere near as clear when it came to pasture and woodland. So in 902 King Edmund promulgated his Tithing Act which required representatives of each church to meet with its neighbours and agree boundaries and for the proceeds to be used only to support the church, pilgrims and the poor. What this meant in practice was that two thirds (the great tithing) was given to a monastery and one third (the lesser tithing) used by the churchwardens. Contrary to popular opinion the lesser tithing did not go to the incumbent who was allocated land within the parish (his Glebe) which he had to farm to sustain himself.

## **The Berkshire/Oxfordshire Boundary**

### **Ecclesiastical Parish Boundaries**

#### **The Boundary with Pangbourne**

#### **The Boundary with Sulham**

#### **The Boundary with Tilehurst**

#### **The Boundary with Reading**

### **Public Utility Boundaries**

### **Public Service Boundaries**





















