

Account of Purley on Thames

Crime and Justice

R200176 4/4/2017

Introduction

On the whole Purley has been a fairly peaceful village, with its citizens well behaved. However it has had its share of crime and criminals. In this account we cover both offences committed by residents of Purley and those committed in Purley by outsiders. Crime can be a very sensitive issue and for that reason we will not include personal references to crimes that have occurred within the last 50 years, ie since 1965.

It is difficult to classify them completely as our definition of crime will range from the most serious cases to social offences and acts which are on the border of good behaviour. The crimes will be grouped as follows:-

- Murder
- Crimes against the person
- Robbery and theft
- Fraud and deception
- Vandalism
- Social crimes

Murder

William Langespey 1409

William Langespey was murdered by John and Gilbert Percy in Purley in 1409. (ref 81)

Giles Blagrove 1738

Giles Blagrove was a farmer who was murdered on the road from Reading to Pangbourne on Jan 28th 1738 (ref 27)

Crimes against the person

Joseph Scrace 1776

On Saturday April 13th 1776 Farmer Scrace of Purley was attacked by a footpad dressed in a smock near Purley Hall. The thief took three guineas and a gold watch. A few days later Thomas Wise was taken into custody on suspicion of the robbery. The watch had been sold in the neighbourhood of Henley. On May 13th he was committed to gaol for the offence. (Ref 9 22/4/76 to 13/5/76)

Robert Stewart 1825

Robert was the butler at Purley Park and was accused with the mistress of the house, Mrs Ann Katherine Storer, of maltreating Philip Thompson. Philip was a former slave from the Storer estates in Jamaica.

The Denefield Knifeman 1984

Local people were terrified by a series of knife attacks which started on Monday March 5th 1984. A 15 year old boy from Denefield School was walking towards the school just below the junction with

Dark Lane at 9.30 am when he was attacked by his assailant who was described at 18 or 19 and well built. The boy was slashed in the neck and was rushed to The Royal Berks Hospital where he had seven stitches.(ref 7 - 6/3/84).

A second attack occurred two days later when a 16 year old boy from Purley was bundled to the ground and slashed several times across the face and hands while walking in Sulham Woods. It was thought that there was someone with a grudge against the school. Some after-hours activities were cancelled and pupils were warned not to walk alone. (ref 7- 8/3/84)

The next day the police discovered a hidden lair in the woods stocked with food and a primus stove. The police used tracker dogs to try to trace the assailant and made extensive enquiries but no one was ever accused of the crimes. (ref 7 - 8/3/84, ref 8 - 9/3/84)

Robbery and Theft

Charles Prater 1853

Charles Prater aged 17 was charged that on 7th November he stole a pair of shoes, the property of Charles Offar, a shepherd of Purley. Prater was caught passing the New Inn in Hampstead Norris, wearing the shoes, after he had been tracked there by Offar. (ref 8 - 8/1/1853)

Annett's stores 1984

Two raiders attacked and robbed the shop in Colyton Way on November 7th 1984 at 5.30 pm. They threatened the shop assistant with a hockey stick and got away with cash and a till valued at around £850. The assistant ran outside afterwards and flagged down a Lucky Clover ice cream van which gave chase but the raiders got clean away. (ref 7 -8/11/84)

Fraud and deception

Vandalism

George Hamblin 1851

George Hamblin aged 13 was sent to prison in 1851 for 6 weeks for putting an iron bar on the railway track.

From an article in Purley Parish News 5/88 by Jean Debney

13 year old George Hamblin was brought before the magistrates in the Quarter Sessions Courts on Saturday, 12th April 1851. The case was reported in the Berkshire Chronicle which described him as a 'ragged little urchin with the appearance of a soft place in his head'. He was born in the village in 1837, the 5th son of Matthew and Sarah Hamblin. By 1851 George was earning a living as an agricultural labourer and still lived with his parents in the 'Old House, Purley Village'.

On 10th April, he had placed an ' iron joint plate and two stones ' on the railway line at Purley ' Thereby endangering the safety of persons conveyed thereon '. George admitted the offence and the

iron plate was produced in court: it was 'completely severed in two probably the express had passed over it, for had it been an ordinary train, no doubt it would have thrown it' He was fined £5 with 8s 6d costs which he was quite unable to pay and so was 'committed for six weeks' ie he was sent to Reading Gaol where he would have mixed with hardened criminals which is not a very good start in life for a boy who seems to have been mentally retarded.

Henry Hunter and George Fuller 1851

Henry Hunter and George Fuller got one month each in prison for having abandoned a trolley on the railway. They were navvies employed by Mr R Brotherhood who was a contractor and they were working between mileposts 36 and 41. They abandoned the trolley near the Roebuck and it was smashed by a train, damaging the engine. (ref 8 31/5/1851)

G Abery 1929

Abery admitted to having sawn down a signpost at the bottom of Long Lane and burnt it.

Rubble on Railway 1982

(ref 1-11/82)

Lister Close Sub-station 1984

In October 1984 the street lights were off for several days in Lister Close and Farm Close . When the SEB came to fix the problem they found the sub-station on Lister Close had been badly vandalised. The repair man had to fix it while it was still live in order not to disrupt supplies further. (ref 1 - 12/84)

Trenthams 1986

Eight windows in the front of Trenthams were smashed on Sept 11th by vandals causing £15,000 worth of damage. (ref 8 -19/9/86)

Social crimes

This group of crimes include all motoring and similar offences; licence offences and a miscellany of offences which cannot easily be otherwise categorised.

Riot at Red Lyon 1774

From an article in Purley Parish News 11/83 by Jean Debney

On 13th December 1774

Bibliography

PPN 1 Purley Parish News

EP7 Evening Post

RC 8 Reading Chronicle

BM9 Berkshire Mercury

CMB 81 Chancery Miscellaneous Bundles (PRO)

QSR 203 Quarter Session reports