

Account of Purley on Thames

The Red Lyon

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One of the intriguing mysteries of Purley concerns the Red Lyon. This was an Inn whose precise location cannot be ascertained for certain and which disappeared around the turn of the 18th/19th centuries leaving no trace. The Inn appears several times in the documentary record and there are many clues to its location. However it appears on none of the maps of the area, several of which have survived. However we are fairly sure that it was on the site occupied by the Purley Park Mansion House and was demolished to make way for Wyatt's creation. This site was immediately adjacent to the old turnpike which was diverted about 200 yards south in Wyatt's plan.

A Riot at the Red Lyon 1774

An extract from Jean Debney's article in Purley Parish News of 11/1983

On 13th November 1774, John Sherman, a labourer of Purley, was caught poaching and arrested by William Southby, a servant to Philip Worlidge esq of Purley. Twenty five year old John was accused of the illegal possession of a gun and of planting a wire snare to kill and destroy game. As no magistrate was available to deal with the offence, the prisoner was taken for the night to John Emmon's, the victuallers house called the Red Lyon in Purley where he arrived at 6 o'clock in the evening. There he was placed under the care of Thomas Heath, the Tithing man .. and Benjamin Jerum, a labourer, both of Purley.

During the course of the evening a group of friends came into the Red Lyon. It is not known if any ale was consumed but between the hours of 11 and 12 midnight they began to make a riot by dancing etc. In addition to the prisoner at least five other people were involved. They were the landlord's daughter Elizabeth Emmons aged 45; their daughter Lucy aged 18 and the wife of Richard Wellman; Thomas Newberry aged 23 a footman to the Rev Benjamin Skinner, Rector of Purley, George Newberry aged about 44 and Thomas father a cordwainer; and Jemmy Martin aged 18 also a cordwainer. All lived in the village.

In the ensuing rough and tumble someone put out the candle and would not allow it to be relit. Thomas Heath immediately placed himself in front of the closed door in order to prevent the prisoner escaping, but Elizabeth Emmons insisted upon opening it and pushed Heath aside: whereupon John Sherman promptly escaped into the night.

The Court Baron of 1786

In 1786 the Court Baron of Purley Magna was held at the Red Lyon and when they began a perambulation of the parish the first point after leaving the Inn was 'a place in the road to Reading called Warren Shaw '. This wood is shown on the 1786 Estate map as being between the Roebuck and the field known as Little Warren which started about 10 chains to the west of the Roebuck and the starting point therefore would have been where the old lane to the village started to descend the escarpment.

The Deed on 1773

A deed dated 1773 in which the property was effectively transferred from John Sherwood, yeoman of Purley, to John Emmons and his wife Elizabeth stated that the property lay on the north side of the

turnpike leading from Reading to Pangbourne and consisted of a messuage or tenement, stable, garden, orchard and one acre of land. There was a further parcel of land with a messuage, garden and one acre of land in the Parish of Tilehurst which had been occupied by John Emmon's great grandfather (Richard), his grandfather (John) and father (William)

The Donkey Wheel

Perhaps the most conclusive evidence of location is the survival of the donkey wheel between the new mansion and the stables. It is now just a circle of cobblestones but from earlier days we have a photo of the donkey in action. Likely it was a cider press used by the Inn Keepers to make their own drinks.



The donkey wheel at Purley Park

