

Account of Purley on Thames

The Liebenrood Family

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The Family

The Liebenrood family's association with Purley began when John George Liebenrood came from Elrich in the County of Hohenstein in Saxony to marry Ann, the daughter of John Allen of Purley. He was a merchant and had no doubt had trading connections with the Allens.

They settled in Purley, occupying Purley Lodge where they lived until 1772 when Ann died on August 25th aged 47. John lived until 5th Jan 1795 when he died aged 83. His funeral arrangements were graphically described in a letter attached to his will. He had written his will some months before he died and to make sure he had the burial he wanted he wrote a detailed letter to his adopted great nephew John Engelberts Ziegenbein.

Both John George and Ann have memorials erected to their memory in the church. They originally marked the family vault but when the church was rebuilt in 1870 the vault was built over and the memorials moved to the wall of the tower. Both of Ann's parents John Allen (d1757) and Anne (d 1775) were buried in the nave but their gravestone was also removed during rebuilding. Other members of the family who were commemorated on memorials were Ann's brother John (1726-1746) and JG's nephew Theodore Gleickman (1755-1777).

It was John Ziegenbein who inherited and one of the conditions was that he was obliged to adopt the name Liebenrood. John did not live at Purley Lodge but made his home at Prospect Hill, a mansion on the outskirts of Reading. He married Lucy and they had a son John who retained the name Ziegenbein who died aged 10 months 17th Feb 1803. Lucy who died 16th April 1829 aged 67 together with John who died 23rd Sept 1823 aged 67 were both buried in the family vault in Purley and were commemorated on a memorial.

The Sanity Dispute

John Engelbert Liebenrood died in 1812 and when he died there was a considerable dispute as to the inheritance. It revolved around the sanity of his two children George and Lucy. An enquiry was held at the Eyre Tavern in St John's Wood on May 18th 1831. The following points were made:-

Mr George E Liebenrood was the only son and one of two children of J E Liebenrood who died 1812. He was born 1801 and educated at Eton and Oriel where the first indications of the disease appeared.

On 13th August 1824 when he was residing at Little Hampton he suffered 'violent paroxysms of insanity' He had since referred to himself as Prince George of Prospect Hill.

His father had left considerable property and his mother had died in 1829. The family had therefore issued a Commission to protect the property.

The verdict of the enquiry was 'Unsoundness of mind since 13th August 1824' A similar enquiry was held into his sister Lucy Christiana Liebenrood and in her case the verdict was 'unsoundness of mind since 1st August 1822' (ref Ad ms 28673 folio 417)

John Liebenrood's Funeral

An Article in Purley Parish News Feb 1983 by Jean Debney entitled A Late 18th Century Funeral

When John George Liebenrood, a Dutch merchant, died at his house at Purley on Monday, the 5th January 1795, the weather was extremely cold. Thick snow lay everywhere and there had been such a hard frost since November that the local papers were recommending that housekeepers spread ashes or sawdust outside their front doors to try to reduce the number of accidents. The old man was almost 83 and, probably feeling that life was getting short, he had written his will some months earlier and included it in a letter addressed to his great nephew John George Ziegenbein. Fortunately for us, this letter was registered with his will as a codicil because it contained the instructions regarding his funeral arrangements: and we thus have a unique insight into some late 18th century burial customs.

The letter requests that his nephew is to '*get a careful woman to see my body washed in a decent manner; to put a clean ruffled shirt on and to attend my body night and day for 5 or 6 days or even to 8 days if necessary.* Edward Skeat White, a mercer of Reading, was to be the undertaker and was to be instructed to '*make a decent coffin* .Allen died in 1772). Warner the bricklayer was to '*look for and open the vault ... which you and he know the situation of*' - this was on the south side and towards the the west end of the chancel, but during the rebuilding of the church in 1870, the marble monument placed there in 1795 was removed to its present position in the tower

Mr Liebenrood then goes on to say that 5 days after his death he was to be placed in the coffin (if it was ready) '*using a clean shirt and clean best sheets*' and that it was to be left open for a further two days before being nailed up on the day of the funeral, which was to be at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. The clergyman who performed the service was to be provided with a '*silk scarf and proper hatband*', and mourning rings for the seven chief mourners, including his great-nephew. '*Proper and suitable mourning*' was to be given to his servants, John Smith, William Carter, Sarah Humphries and Hannah the Cook - in addition to the generous legacy each and their wages. Eight of the labouring men of Purley were to attend the coffin and each was to have a 'grey frock' (smock) 'with hatband and gloves'. The eight men are named as Palmer, Jerom, Jordan, Green, Lukeman, House, Hamlin and Frank Haines. They were all to assemble at Frank Haines's house in time for the funeral, and they were not to be served liquor on this occasion.

Unfortunately for us, although John George Liebenrood's death was announced in the local paper, there was no further obituary or report of the funeral; but since all the names given above can be recognised from the Purley Parish records, the list is interesting because it tells us who were considered to be the active and strong men in the village at that time. Note from other evidence. it seems likely that John George Liebenrood lived and died in the house now called Purley Lodge. He appears to have inherited the property through his wife, Lucy, only daughter and heiress of Mr John Allen of Purley.

