The Buildings of England by Nikolaus Pevsner

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1966 edition

PURLEY

ST MARY. Reset inside the church is the Norman chancel arch. Single scallop capitals, strong roll moulding, abacus with saltire crosses in chip carving - ie first half of the C12. Of the early C13 a re-set lancet and doorway in the vestry. In the chancel a partly original lancet on the north side. The W tower is of brick and dated 1626. But mostly the church is of 1870 by Street, and is not a church that could contribute to his fame.

FONT. Norman, on short stubby columns, decorated in different ways - PLATE Almsdish of 1683; Chalice and Paten of 1733

MONUMENTS Anne Hyde 1632, tablet with small, stiff reclining figure on her side and a baby in the same position. Two obelisks. - Pretty tablet of coloured marbles, date of death 1772.

Good Grecian group of a family turning towards an urn on a high pedestal. On it the portrait of the deceased. A genius with an extinguished torch stands by the pedestal. This commemorates Anthony Storer, who died in 1818. No signature of a sculptor of this well done monument.

The church is reached along a regrettable bungalowscope.

Second Edition 2010

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Good examples of [early c18 interiors] can be found at ... Purley Hall, a Jacobean house remodelled internally in 1719-26 for a director of the South Sea Company: an early example of mercantile wealth penetrating the county's landed elite. The grisaille paintings covering the walls and even the underside of the staircase at Purley are of the Thornhill School.

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Stucco was also used by James Wyatt at his Purley Park, a compact villa of c1800.

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The leading early c18 Landscape gardener was Charles Bridgeman; he was employed in Berkshire at Purley Hall (1720-1) [which has] extensive grass terracing, tree planting and geometric water features.

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PURLEY

A riverside village NW of Reading, almost, but not quite, swamped by suburban development.

ST MARY. On the edge of a housing estate close to the river. The crenellated W tower is of chalk, faced externally with brick, and is dated 1626, but the flint-built church was almost entirely rebuilt
by G. E. Street for £2,000 in 1869-70. Some traces of its medieval predecessor remain, notably the early C12 chancel arch, oddly re-set on the N chancel wall and much altered, though retaining its single-scallop capitals, strong roll moulding and saltire crosses in chip carving. An early C13 lancet window has been re-set in the vestry, and there is another lancet, partly original, on the N side of the chancel. Street extended the chancel, built a new chancel arch (no capitals), and added a N aisle of three bays on low, round columns, and S porch. The Dec S and E windows and the sturdy roofs, archbraced in the nave, boarded in the chancel, are also his. In 1983-4 his N aisle was demolished to make way for a new church hall and vestry complex by Richard Perkins. Concrete, clad externally in flint-like panels, the hexagonal hall opening off the N Arcade with a complex open timber roof, and a reset Perp window at the W end. -

FONT. Norman, a circular bowl decorated with interlaced arcading surmounted by rather crude chevrons. The head of a bearded man in one opening, an ornamental pattern with a fleur-de-lys in another. - Street's FITTINGS survive largely intact, e.g. PULPIT, of wood on a stone base, REREDOS, of alabaster and marble, STALLS, and floor TILES. -

STAINED GLASS. E window by Hardman.

MONUMENTS. Anne Hyde t1632, tablet with small, stiff reclining figure on her side and a baby in the same position. Two obelisks. Cherub with hourglass underneath. - Thomas Hawes 1756, cashier of the Navy. Doric aedicule enclosing arch with inscription. - Anne Liebenrood t1772. Pretty Rococo tabl~t of coloured marbles - Anthony Gilbert Storer 1818, the builder of Purley Park (buried on his estate at Belleisle, Jamaica). Good Grecian group of a family turning towards an urn on a high pedestal with a portrait of the deceased. A nude genius, or angel, with an extinguished torch, stands by the pedestal. Who was the sculptor of this well-done monument? - Janet May Fullerton 1930. Italian Quattrocento-style marble relief of Virgin and Child over the inscription.

PURLEY PARK (now called Purley Magna), Hazel Road, between the railway and the Reading-Wallingford road. Built c 1800 by the executors of Anthony Morris Storer (1799), son of a Jamaica sugar planter, and an antiquary, bibliophile and former diplomat. He purchased the estate in 1793 and in the same year Humphry Repton produced a Red Book which proposed rebuilding the old manor house close to the church and river. That project was abandoned following serious flooding, and in his will Storer left £15,000 for building a house on a higher site to the designs of James Wyatt, faced 'with stone similar to that of Francis Sykes at Basildon (Basildon Park), commanding views of the river; the builder was Wyatt's carpenter T Fulkes. Most of the grounds have recently been swallowed up by housing, and the house was turned into flats in 2005-6, when the interiors were remodelled and the external stonework replaced by Sutton Griffin Architects.

The house is three storeys high, originally of Portland stone, rectangular and severely plain, with a low-pitched hipped roof. Entrance front of five bays, with pilaster strips framing the centre and a porte cochere of paired Doric columns. At the middle of the N front, overlooking the Thames, a semicircular balcony on Doric columns. The interior is planned villa-fashion, with a central hall and drawing room flanked by the staircase and other reception rooms. (ENTRANCE HALL with two fluted Ionic columns at the far end and doorcases with urns and festoons. Stone, cantilevered STAIRCASE with a simple iron balustrade of unusual design with interlocking ovals. Delicate stucco ceilings and chimneypieces elsewhere.) On the site of the stables, w, a discreet group of brick Neo-Georgian houses (2005) around an open courtyard.

In the village street, some distance w of the church, Ivy COTTAGE, early C17 with two gabled cross-wings, and Nos.1-2, a nicely textured C17 lobby-entrance house of timber and brick infill. Opposite, the SCHOOL, plain flint with stone dressings and some Gothic detailing. By J Morris, 1874.

PURLEY HALL, 1 ½ m. w. A Jacobean brick house built by Francis Hyde in 1609 and altered
1719-26 (rainwater heads) by a new owner, Francis Hawes, a director of the South Sea Company. He also commissioned Charles Bridgeman to design a formal garden in 1720-1. In 1775 the house was sold to Henry Wilder, Vicar of Sulham, who leased it briefly to Warren Hastings, and in 1818-20 Wilder's son John employed Thomas Hopper to carry out a thorough external remodelling. In its original form it was a compact two-storeyed double-depth house with plain triangular gables to the attics. The much-remodelled N (entrance) facade has a narrow inset centre and gabled wings, with early c18 stone quoins and ceil-de-bceuf windows to the rusticated basement. The steps, with their scroll iron railings, are also early c18, but the porch and its Neo-Jacobean stone cresting are of 1869. Hopper replaced the cr8 sash windows with Mullions and transoms and lowered the gables, meting out a similar treatment to the w front, where he added two canted bay windows surmounted by Jacobean strap-work. He also remodelled the S front, adding French windows and a wide, low gable but retaining the c18 sashes on the first floor. The lower service wing and stables to the E are probably his also, the latter replacing an cr8 stable block w of the entrance forecourt.

The ENTRANCE HALL is lined with fielded grisaille wall paintings of 1719-26 in the Thornhill manner, probably by a team of painters who also worked at The Grange, Farnham (Surrey), and Northaw Place (Herts). Standing figures of Hercules and Constancy (w) and Apollo and Hebe (E), separated by trophies representing the Roman, Holy Roman and Ottoman empires. From it the STAIRCASE, with slender twisted balusters and exquisitely carved tread-ends, rises to a first-floor gallery with a round wooden arcade. More grisaille paintings, e.g. of the Arts and of putti, Underneath and beside the stairs. The DINING ROOM has early C17 panelling and a Rococo papier-mache ceiling of c. 1740-50 with the Hawes coat of arms. In one of the DRAWING ROOMS on the w front an elaborate Jacobean wooden chimneypiece and a painted window dial of 1734, by John Rowell of High Wycombe and later of Reading, showing the time in England and in Constantinople. Rowell also made the armorial glass in two windows in the adjoining room.

Bridgeman's formal GARDEN layout survives largely intact, with avenues E and w of the house (the latter somewhat fragmentary) and a sunken lawn to the N, leading to a rectangular sheet of water with semicircular branches at the far end. On the far side of the lake a pedimented PAVILION of brick and rough flint, built in 1746, according to a later inscription, to commemorate the Battle of Culloden, with an opening in the form of a serliana under an open pediment. - Battlemented LODGES, of 1732, also of uncut flints and brick bands, lit by circular windows and linked by a battlemented arch (and also apparently by an underground passage).