

Account of Purley on Thames

Project Purley Meetings 1990

19th January 1990

John Gurnett gave a good insight into the life and times of the Victorian Labourer with descriptions, slides from many sources and traditional folk music. During the ensuing discussion we wondered whether they were the 'good old days' or if the desperately low pay and conditions dominated everything. Looking at life today perhaps it is a case of 'swings and roundabouts'.

16th February 1990

Peter Trentham came and talked to us about the history of G Percy Trentham Ltd., alas no more. He told us of how, in the early days, the workmen away from home would sleep inside the pipes at night. Justice was certainly rough, but a strong family loyalty held the company together and brought them many leading edge projects, be it laying the early telephone cables, building runways or constructing factories for the Ford Motor Company. Peter also brought along wonderful sketches, books and many assorted artifacts including his grandfather's gold chain of office as Sheriff of the City of London - a breathtaking thing. His untimely death in an air raid robbed him of becoming Lord Mayor of London.

16th March 1990

The AGM and memories of the 1977 Silver Jubilee. Trenthams was discussed again when we looked back on the Queen's Silver Jubilee of 1977. They supplied most of the lorries for the parade of floats, which Pat Deane fortunately captured on slides. John Chapman told us of the official organisation for the celebrations. Purley was obviously very quick off the mark in booking the Pangbourne Silver band for the special day, much to Pangbourne's disgust. It was a week packed with dances, competitions, and all sorts of events. But to return to the parade. Barbara Mercer told us of how, when the floats arrived at the Recreation Ground to parade past the dais, the local dignitaries were missing and she was bundled up onto the dais to take the salute and do her very best 'Queen Mum' wave.

20th April 1990

In the late 70s plans were drawn up to extend St Mary's church in Purley. Some members of the community, later to become founder members of Project Purley, decided an archaeological dig was necessary before the builders moved in. John Chapman told us of their discoveries and showed us some wonderful slides, depicting how it was carried out and the 'finds'. But even John, with his thorough knowledge of the history of our church, was amazed to find Saxon graves close to the north side of the church. Apparently the team had not expected to find much and when the first grave was discovered John Titterton decided the police should be informed - just in case. The police, on being told the team had found a skeleton in the churchyard, replied "Well what did you expect!"

18th May 1990

We welcomed back Mike Sheppard, this time to tell us the history of JPs. Being a serving JP and a history buff, Mike has made a study of the role and I think we were all surprised just how ancient the job is. As ever Mike's talk was brought to life with quotations from documents he had found describing some of the cases dealt with by JPs in Berkshire and Wiltshire, tales of fraud, deception and injury. It seems mankind has changed little of the years!

15th July 1990

A walkabout organised by Cliff and Jean Debney who provided a site map and a precis of things to be seen en-toute. We started at Sulham Church and then followed Nunhide Lane and footpaths to the River Pang to the Tidmarsh Road past the site of the old workhouse known as "The Frenchies", and eventually to Tidmarsh Church. Some of the place names were fascinating; such gems as "The Kissing Gate" and a field called "Tickle me too". It was well received by all and we were privileged to have the President of BLHA with us for the occasion. Thanks were extended to Bill Fisher who arranged the visit to Tidmarsh Church where we were able to view the plate and the Elizabethan Prayer Book. We finished up at the Greyhound known to the locals as "the Dog".

20th July 1990

This was a surprise meeting at John Chapman's home when he was able to show some of the documents from the Great Western Railway archives that he had been able to copy only that day. Once these have been studied it is quite clear there will be more information about Purley in the early 1800s. Conjectures about the Red Lyon appeared once more - are we any nearer to finding out just where it was? Rita Denman brought along a tray of miscellaneous objects which had been found in her garde - pieces of pottery, metal objects and what may have been a coin or token and which offered evidence of the previous inhabitants of the site.

14th August 1990

A working meeting in preparation for the Open Day at the Memorial Hall on September 15th.

19th October 1990

Planned - a talk by Margaret Smith from Reading Reference Library on Local History Resources.

9th November 1990

planned - A presentation by the Oral History Group

7th December 1990

A Dickensian theme Christmas meeting. Unusual objects were brought along by members for discussion.

