

Account of Purley on Thames

Project Purley Meetings 1994

21st January 1994

At very short notice, James Heslop presented a fascinating miscellany of oral history tapes made by members in the early days of the Society. We all enjoyed hearing about the early days of the River Estate, and the Purley Park Residents Association from Archie White. An introduction to the work of the Purley Park Trust by Elizabeth Duncan was also presented, and it was a delight to hear again the voice of Mrs Gutch. It was an evening of nostalgia for those who remember earlier times and instructive for those of us who enjoy hearing about the village as it was. The evening also included a short piece of cine-film made in Purley by Ron Denman in 1983, and was very much enjoyed.

18th February 1994

The guest speaker was Dr Stephen Rippon from Reading University. A very enthusiastic gathering heard about the excavations at the Lowbury Hill site. The site is situated on the highest part of the Berkshire Downs and consists of an enclosure and a burial barrow. The area is slightly undulating and open to the weather which, during the recent excavations, was cold, wet and windy. It is thought that the weather patterns in the area have not changed much since the site was used in ancient times, so the early Saxons and Romans would have experienced similar conditions. The site was first excavated in 1916 under the direction of Professor Atkinson. At that time indications of an ancient building were found and also a barrow burial of a wealthy warrior. There was a large find of ironwork, domestic and military, and some brooches. These items are now at the Newbury Museum. The conclusion reached was that it was the site of an upland homestead dated to the 7th Century.

As part of the University Centenary celebrations it was decided to re-excavate on the site. The aims were to investigate the barrow and the enclosure. Using modern methods, a team of twenty people took four weeks to complete the work, during which time there were new finds and new theories were formed. The conclusion reached was that it was a site of bronze age activity and also the site of a Romano-Celtic temple which was demolished. Carbon dating of artifacts confirmed the date of 6th - 7th century.

18th March 1994

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held. It was proposed that the officers and committee be re-elected en bloc, and this was carried unanimously.

Following the business of the evening, Mr H Godwin Arnold, an architect himself, gave a most interesting talk with slides, about Joseph Morris and his family, who were all architects or interested in allied subjects. We heard that Joseph Morris was descended from several generations of Quakers. Many were in trade, and well known in Reading, including Joseph's father Thomas, a woollen draper and tailor of 11 Market Place, Reading, in the 1850's. At the age of fifteen, Joseph was an articled architect, his master being John Berry Clacy. In due course Joseph became Architect and County Surveyor of Bridges & Buildings for Berkshire, and was eventually joined in his practice by his son and daughter. Included in his work was the Katesgrove Board School, Newtown School, Purley School and a gardener's cottage at Purley Park. The King's Head at Woodcote is also believed to be his work. The Morris output was prolific, and to the initiated eye, a quite distinctive style that

can be seen in and around Reading.

15th April 1994

The meeting on 15th April was in preparation for the Open Day,

20th May 1994

On 20th May, members met at The Gatehouse to hear Edna Bint and Millie Bordiss relate how they had gathered the information and produced their displays for the Open Day.

Millie Bordiss told the meeting that it had been her first effort. She had decided to base the display on the Menpes Cottage end of Long Lane where at one time there had been a fruit farm. Some of the land at the southern end had belonged to the "Warden and Fellowes of Winchester College Oxford", an old description of New College. A photograph of the old forge at the bottom of Long Lane, taken in 1912 and kindly loaned by Bill Fisher was shown. Mr Kirk, whose grandfather had owned the forge, attended the Open Day.

Edna Bint began by asking how many members had noticed that there was a bell on Purley Lodge. Some members had never noticed it. The earliest known information about Purley Lodge was an advertisement in 1776 offering the house for sale. It is not known exactly when the present eighteenth century house was built, but it was probably about 1750, although the foundations are thought to be of a much earlier date, and it has been suggested that it is the site of a monk's rest house. The first known owner was a Mr Liebenrood, a gentleman of Dutch origin, whose nephew built the Mansion House in Prospect Park. Edna has lived in Purley for 34 years and remembers the adaption of the stable block (The Coach House), and the barn. It was of particular interest that the meeting was being held in the house which was the subject of Edna's talk. It is a great pleasure for us all to be able to enjoy the house at our meetings and once again we thank Jan and Rick and family for their hospitality.

17th June 1994

We were privileged to visit Bere Court. The house is a private residence and we are indebted to Mr and Mrs Tucker who opened their home to us. The lucky first twenty applicants enjoyed a very warm welcome and an evening full of fascinating surprises.

It was a perfect summers evening when our party arrived at Bere Court. We assembled in the coolness of the hall where Mr & Mrs Tucker welcomed us and Mr Tucker talked briefly about the history of the house. The earliest known records relating to a dwelling on the site were from the year 744. Some parts of the earlier buildings on the site have long since disappeared; these were thought to have been the country seat of the Abbots of Reading in the 13th and 14th Century.

The present manor house, rebuilt to a large extent in the late 17th century, contains many interesting features, and one has been carefully restored to the former glory by Mr & Mrs Tucker after its rather chequered history over earlier parts of this century. The most outstanding feature shown to us was a beautiful fireplace reaching from floor to ceiling. It had been boarded over at some point and discovered by Mr Tucker and restored. [MB]

15th July 1994

This took the form of a barbecue at 183 Long Lane, where Pat and Tony Deane made us feel very much at home. Following the extreme heat of the preceding days, the use of the pool was appreciated. Those of us who were not quite so energetic, relaxed at the pool side and enjoyed the aquatic antics of the 'younger set'. The £2 per head provided a plentiful and delicious meal.

16th September 1994

We were pleased to welcome Mrs Anne McCubbin whose talk was reprogrammed due to her indisposition earlier in the year. The title of the talk was The Four Manors of Tilehurst. After a brief

explanation of the functions and effects on society of the Manorial System, Mrs McCubbin enlarged on the four manors of the title, which were Pincents Manor and Beansheaf Manor, both of these having connections with Reading Abbey. The third was Kentwood Manor which it is believed was settled in the 14th century in the great forest which extended from the River Kennett the Thames. The fourth Manor was Tilehurst which was most likely included in the hamlets in the 'Domesday' survey of 1086.

21st October 1994

We were delighted to welcome fellow member John Titterton and to hear his talk "Keeping it in the Medieval Family". The family in question was five generations of the de Malyns who were Lords of the Manor of Purley Parva (Little Purley) from 1290 to 1430 AD.

This was a tale of a family fortune amassed through hard trading on the continent, speculation and opportunity. The Jews had, of long tradition, become moneylenders to the nation but when times turned against them and they were prohibited from continuing this trade and hounded out of the country, Henry Buscott de Malyns made moneylending part of his business. As in modern day business, national and international events had their effect. During the "Hundred Years War" trade was depressed and after the Black Death which claimed so many lives, there was a labour shortage. Careful management and consolidation saw to it that the de Malyns fortune was secure. As this tale unfolded we were struck by the similarities to headline news today. Tax evasion and dubious business practice was rife long ago.

11th November 1994

Members met for the talk by Derek Sweet, which he called "A Journey into Nepal". This was quite out of the run of our normal subject, but as we heard in the previous months talk, individuals connected with Purley were travelling abroad in the 13th Century. In the 20th Century they travel further but still bring back tales of different cultures. Derek illustrated his talk with beautiful slides, taken with an artist's eye. We heard about the long journey through the foothills, and of the lush subtropical regions. The terraced hillsides and the happy and contented people who inhabit the small settlements and of their spartan way of life. We also heard that although there are no cars, no telephones and no telegraph poles - in fact very few modern conveniences to despoil the beauty of the area - still it is far from quiet. The frequent cracking of the glaciers is a background to the water from river and glacier which rushes eternally through the gorges and deep valleys created by flash floods.

2nd December 1994

The Gatehouse was again the venue for the Christmas Social Evening. The buffet table looked very attractive and the contributions to the buffet were varied and delicious. Jean's mulled wine was voted a vintage brew and we were soon replete and ready to enjoy the evening programme.

Pictures of Purley never fail to please, and the 30 minute video brought forth many oohs and aahs. It was a very poignant moment when the item by the late Bernard Theobald was viewed. The pictures of the vineyard and his ambition to go on and on doing better and better gave us all pause for thought. A number of members brought along photographs which they had taken. In all a good record of Purley in 1994. The evening was rounded off by playing one of Jean's 1930's parlour games. Identification of familiar items photographed from unusual angles was the object of the game. At least the items would have been familiar in the 1930's. There was a great deal of frustration expressed by the feeling that one ought to know what the object was, but not quite being able to recall it. The winner of the game was Edna Bint who received top marks for observation.

Our thanks to Jan and Rick Jones for their kindness in hosting all of our Autumn meetings.

