



# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## Project Purley Meetings 2004

*January*

*February*

*March*

*April*

### *Ascension and the Falklands*

*Talk to Project Purley April 2004 ex R000073 by John Chapman*

On 16 April John Chapman gave a beautifully illustrated talk about his visit to the Falkland Islands. John had been fascinated by the Falklands from a very early age, but it wasn't until 2003 when he was given the opportunity to travel to the islands that he was able to satisfy his curiosity.

Even by air, the journey is a long one, and was broken by stopping off at Ascension Island for a few days. Lying just south of the equator Ascension Island is the tip of an extinct volcano the size of Snowdon with the whole mountain rising from the bed of the ocean the size of the Jungfrau and the soil is mostly volcanic ash. Throughout the ages more fertile soil has formed on the main peak, Green Mountain, which gets a fair amount of rainfall and in earlier days marble dew ponds were built to collect rain water and moisture from condensing clouds but now drinking water is supplied by a tanker moored offshore. In the 1800's Kew Gardens were invited to stock the mountain with suitable plants to advance the process of cultivation. The island is a habitat for donkeys who contribute to forming a growing medium on the lower reaches. The island is home to the Royal Air Force, several telecommunications companies including Cable and Wireless and BBC World Service, The European Space Agency and the American Air Force who run the airfield. Due to its remote location it is almost pest and disease free. Originally occupied by the British to prevent the French rescuing Napoleon from nearby St Helena, visits are permitted only for the British, Americans and the French by special permission.

Journeying on to The Falkland Islands, the plane was escorted in to land by Tornado fighters. The Islands are of great strategic importance affording good water anchorage and relatively calm weather although cold winds from Antarctica are experienced. There is an indented coastline, and mostly boggy terrain. Port Louis was founded in 1610-11 but the capital has now moved to Stanley. The islands are littered with the hulks of ships abandoned after either being damaged rounding the Horn or condemned beforehand. Many of the mountains have rivers of stone and boulders, which flow down the hill like glaciers There are also many remains of the recent conflict. Many kinds of Penguin gather in colonies and march to and fro to feed, providing endless fascination. The smell from th colonies is never to be forgotten. The penguins share the islands with a huge range of birds including cormorants, seagulls, skuas, albatross, ducks and geese, all of which seem oblivious to humans and a very rare predator, the Caracara who follow you around sizing you up for their supper. The beaches are home for many colonies of elephant seal who like nothing more than lying among the seaweed and sunning themselves.

With the aid of slides, John took us on a tour through the town centre with glimpses of the golf course and a racecourse. The main industry is sheep farming providing wool which is shipped to Bradford; the sheep are sheared by travelling Australian gangs. A notable suspension bridge for a sheep crossing was constructed in Birmingham and transported and assembled on site, in a similar way to a Meccano kit.

John's enthusiasm for the subject was transmitted to those present and we all left having learned a great deal about the background and daily life of a remote part of the world which had played such a prominent part in our recent history.

*May*

*June*

*July*

*August*

*September*

*October*

*November*





