

Account of Purley on Thames

Archaeology

General

Purley is quite rich in archaeological remains. There are three principal components: Stone Age deposits on the flinty slopes of the hills, Deposits from all ages which have been dredged from the Thames and Mediaeval and later artifacts found associated with dwelling sites.

There are suspicions of Stone Age to Roman occupation but no conclusive evidence. Saxon occupation is certain however there is very little direct archaeological evidence. The churchyard has been shown to contain very early mediaeval remains and there have been many finds of later mediaeval and modern occupation.

Sites and Monuments Record

Crop Marks

Crop marks occur because of differences in the fertility of the soil caused by underlying features. In general they can only be recognised from aerial photographs taken at an auspicious time of the year, usually just before harvest and time of day when the sun's rays are oblique (morning and evening)

There have been many photo-surveys of the area looking specifically for crop marks, the two chief ones were those conducted by Professor St Joseph for Cambridge University from 1948, and that for the National Monuments Record between 1965 and 1972. Further surveys were done by various other groups and results published by Timothy Gates in 1975.

The following is an extract from Gate's report page 25 (ref 125)

Map 4 6476 SU 67 MW Area centred SU 646764 PURLEY

Curvilinear features (abandoned river meanders?) Linear features, some of which may be pipelines or field drains. To east at 648765 trapezoidal enclosure with rounded ends (c 45m long) and short curvilinear feature. To N at 647767 oval enclosure (c 30 m long), linear features and trackway. To NE at 650767 isolated linear features (field drains?) NMR 70 SU 6476/1,2,5/7/150,153

6576 SU 67 NE Area centred SU 659767 PURLEY

2 conjoined circles, rectangular enclosure and curvilinear feature ST JOSEPH 66 AOJ 71.

Dredging the River

Purley Parva 1971

The following extract is taken from the Berkshire Archaeological Journal vol 66 page 133

Purley - Dr B Levy contributes the following note. 'While soil surveying a small field at SU 653770 to the west of Westbury Farm a "hard bottom" was detected at 9 in over most of the field. A trial trench (14x1 m) dug across the area in Feb 1971 exposed at one end a good flint floor butting on to a brick floor, both being covered by a layer of chalk rubble; the scant finds suggest a comparatively recent date. The other end of the trench cut through a well stratified pit 2.8 m across and more than 75 cm deep, producing finds ranging from 19th century to early medieval. The excavation was abandoned unfinished in December 1971 to allow ploughing. There are records of a deserted village - Purley Parva - in the immediate vicinity (Beresford and Hurst 1962, 97)

Church dig 1982/3

Purley Village 1987

When two new houses were being constructed in Purley village on the site of a house formerly occupied by the Newbury family and destroyed by fire just before the war, the opportunity was taken to examine the trenches dug for the foundations of the new houses.

The following report was provided by Sally Brown, Assistant County Archaeologist (ref 493)

PRN 4008 Purley Village watching brief.

Site visited 13 April 1987 and 15 April 1987

Foundation trenches approx 1 m deep; majority of trenches had already been dug at time of visits.

Western side of building plot appeared most disturbed. Scant traces of packed chalk foundations; only one clear foundation visible in section - located at centre of trenching and could be traced in other sections across western half of site.

Trenching nearest the road on western side which might have been expected to reveal traces of construction features showed scant evidence of this.

Stratigraphy consisted of gravelly-loam overburden below the turf and topsoil - both contained much post medieval pottery, predominately very hard dark red-orange fabric with a hard shiny glaze. Also some later, modern fabrics. Much fragmented brickwork in topsoil etc. - only one small patch of footing, or more likely demolition material. (Ivy cottage and nearby boundary walls etc are also of brick and flint construction)

Very small quantities of animal bone also present.

Eastern side of plot (nearest Ivy Cottage) was less disturbed with thick deposits of topsoil-garden soil ie dark loamy with less coarse (gravel) component.

At the 'junction' of the west and eastern parts were the remains of a well (probably located just outside the former building(s)). The well was neatly lined with large flint blocks, with a collar at the top consisting of a single course of red bricks. Much disturbed by the mechanical excavator - a third of its interior lining was intact on the SE to a depth of c 2 m.

13 April 1987 - brick rubble fill not completely excavated and included a modern iron bucket itself filled with bricks.

15 April 1987 - well had been excavated by machine to a depth of 2.5 m into natural chalk, waterlogged at base Excavated fill was examined and found to contain post-medieval and modern pottery finds

Conclusion

The observed evidence appears to fit in well with the documentary evidence, ie previous building activity appears to have commenced in the post-medieval period and to be confined mainly to the western part of the site. There is no evidence for earlier occupation The well, although undated is probably post-medieval as brickwork is included in its construction.

The previous structures on the site left little trace, it is possible that flint and brick were used as building materials, and these may have been robbed out and re-used in the vicinity. The paucity of construction material on site may indicate that former buildings were of flimsy, insubstantial nature or that post-demolition robbing was most thorough and effective.

Bibliography

Berkshire Archaeological Journal

125 Middle Thames Valley - Timothy Gates 1975

493 Watching brief at Purley Village 1987.

