

Account of Purley on Thames

Shops

Introduction

A community without a shop is almost unthinkable. In a village the shop serves a much wider purpose than merely selling goods. It provides a meeting place and a place to exchange news and gossip.

Purley has never been a village with a strong commercial or shopping centre. It never had a market and only in the last 150 years or so has it had a shop, as far as we are able to tell. The earliest shop seems to be that of Charles Gibbens which was recorded in 1854 and which we believe was situated at what is now Lichfield Cottage on Purley Rise.

Purley Shops

A number of sites in Purley have been used as shops:-

Purley Rise Stores

Bungalow Stores (Annetts)

Kiosk in Colyton Way

The Garden House

Lichfield Cottage

Lichfield Cottage was the Sub-Post Office for many years. It was also used to sell various goods such as sweets and stationery.

Local Shopping Patterns

Historically Reading, Tilehurst and Pangbourne have acted as shopping centres for the people of Purley. Reading held the market and is now a major regional shopping centre, drawing its custom from an area perhaps thirty or forty miles in radius.

The Triangle area of Tilehurst and Pangbourne are very much local centres each drawing customers from about a five mile radius. They both have a good array of shops although Tilehurst has the greater population within its catchment and consequently a much greater number and variety of shops.

In the 1960s and 1970s other local centres such as Meadway, Norcot and Theale have attracted custom from Purley with the increased mobility and shopping parades on Kentwood Hill, Overdown Road and Hildens Drive also draw a small number from Purley.

The most significant development however was the establishment of the Savacentre at Calcot which opened around 1982 as a hypermarket on the French style. Drawing its custom from as far afield as Swindon and Southampton it is situated at the M4 junction with the A4 and has seen a major expansion in 1991 nearly doubling its size. Originally owned as a joint venture between British Home Stores and Sainsbury's, it became wholly owned by Sainsbury's but provided facilities for several other businesses ranging from the Post Office and Abbey National Building Society, through newsagents and chemists to Mothercare.

It was immensely successful and had over 50 tills taking over a million pounds on an average day. For many people it provided a day out and excursions were run to it during the summer months. It was particularly popular with people from Purley who often set up regular shopping visits and enjoy the facilities of the restaurant and the opportunity to purchase cheap petrol.

It is also well served by buses although you have to change to get to there from Purley. For a few years after it opened there was a direct service, the 100, but this was poorly patronised and was soon

withdrawn. It also provides the Reading stop for Long Distance Motor Coaches who slip off the M4, drop and pick up passengers and then return to the M4 without visiting the centre of Reading. This saves them a lot of time but many passengers feel somewhat stranded.

Alternatives

Savacentre attracted a number of other major retailers who set up warehouse type shops on adjacent sites and there were plans for expansion to include a major leisure centre. In 2016 IKEA opened a branch nearby replacing what had been the Homebase store. But fierce competition downgraded the area and Savacentre expanded and renamed itself just Sainsbury's.

The chief competition came from Tesco who set up on the old Battle Hospital site and Waitrose who set up on the Oxford Road between Kentwood Circle and Norcot Junction. Between them they have attracted most of the supermarket shopping from Purley people. They also acquired the site of the convenience stores on Knowsley Road and have turned it into a thriving mini-market.

Shopping Survey

In 1983 Sarah Thomas of Glebe Road did a survey of shopping habits in Purley as a school project. She posed the question 'Is the Post Office the greatest single factor influencing the size and shape of a grocery store's sphere of influence in Purley?' She conducted a survey and questioned shoppers as they visited local stores.

Her principal finding was that local stores were patronised only by people wanting a few odd items and that on the whole they chose the store which was closest to their home. However if they also needed to use the Post Office they would ignore their local store and use a shop adjacent to the Post Office.

Comparing Purley Rise Stores (which included the Post Office and had a newsagents next door) with the kiosk on Colyton Way (which incorporates a newsagents) an interesting difference appeared. Of those visiting the kiosk 66% also visited the other store, but of those visiting Purley Rise Stores only 37.5% also visited the kiosk. Interestingly the patronage of the kiosk was slightly higher (at 31/hr) than that of Purley Rise Stores (at 28/hr)

A further difference was that the average distance travelled by people visiting the kiosk was 204 m whereas the average distance for Purley Rise Stores was 468m, over twice as far.

It was also very evident that only a very few people, mostly the very elderly claimed to do most of their shopping at either grocery store.

Proposals for further shops

The corner of Colyton Way and St Mary's Avenue, next door to the kiosk was reserved in the Guidance Plan for many years as the site of a shop. Despite many enquiries no one could be found to take it on as by the 1970s the supermarkets had taken a virtual monopoly of the main weekly shopping market and local shops were left to find their own niche markets and to cater for local convenience only. There was really not room for more than one shop in the area and the kiosk had this already. Eventually the Planning Authority gave way and permission was granted for two residential dwellings.

A later proposal for the kiosk to move to the other side of Colyton Way came up when Bob Skerrit was trying to redevelop 1 Oaktree Walk in conjunction with 2 Colyton Way. However the level of investment required was too much for the owner of the kiosk and the country was going into

recession so nothing has come of this. However it remains a possibility.

Farm Shops

There have been Farm Shops at both Westbury Farm and Home Farm, Sulham. At Westbury the shop was used mainly to sell wines from the vineyard to visitors, but since the demise of the vineyard this too has disappeared.

The Home Farm shop catered mostly for animal feeds but is now long gone.

The Horticultural Society shop

Home Shopping

Other Shops

Over the years there have been several other shops in Purley at various locations. These have been relatively short lived and were generally more sidelines than serious businesses.

In the 1930s Mr Seawell the then owner of Purley Rise Stores erected a wooden building on the land between Mapledurham Drive and the village pond. This was a retaliatory measure against the opening of the kiosk on Colyton Way and sold a variety of groceries and general supplies.

Apart from the kiosk there were at least two other shops on Colyton Way. There was a general store opposite Brading Way and a fish and chip shop on 21 Colyton. An attempt to revive the general store was made in 1991 but the Planning Application was turned down. The fish and chip shop caused such traffic congestion and general nuisance that the PPPOA and the Parish Council stepped in and bought the site, reselling it with a condition that it not be used for the former purpose.

Several of the houses in both Purley Village and Purley Rise used to sell produce to passing traffic. They had a hinged bench which could be held up by chains to hold the goods. This was mainly a seasonal effort and mostly it was garden produce and eggs which were sold. In one or two cases there was also a canopy above the bench which could be lowered to shield it from the sun and rain.

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