

# 14 Church Lands and Property

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## The Early Vicarages

The earliest reference to a vicarage in Purley was in 1394 when the then vicar, Stephen Walle, was accused of keeping his concubine there. It is likely that it was the same house which was leased in 1560 to William Stoning, presumably because Richard Gatskyll was unsure of his future after the death of Queen Mary and may already have left the parish at that time.

William Stoning's son Thomas became rector in 1577 and the lease was renewed to William around 1581. It appears that when William died shortly afterwards the lease was again confirmed in the names of Thomas, then the rector, and his two sisters Elizabeth and Anne. When Thomas died in 1585 his goods were left to his wife Elizabeth but his sisters Elizabeth who had married Humphrey Higgins continued to live at the rectory.

In 1595 Randall Wright, Thomas's successor as rector, apparently tried to gain possession and it was reported that it was occupied by a number of poor men who paid their rent to the parson. Presumably Randall eventually gained possession.

The Terrier of 1634 gives an interesting description of the parsonage, which sat in 3 acres of ground. The main house had six bays containing 13 rooms and there were two barns of 5 and 3 bays and a newly built stable of 5 bays. There was also a close on the west and an orchard on the east. In 1608 there had been only one barn and by 1704 the stable was only 2 bays and there was also a cart house and cow shed. Medieval houses tended to very flexible and were made up of a framework of oak beams. The framework was very modular and consisted of bays which were typically rectangular with sides of 25x15 feet. These bays might be one two or three storeys high and could be fitted together in almost any combination. The joists were then boarded over to make floors and the framework was filled in with laths and plaster to form walls with doors and window inserted where required. Buildings could easily be taken apart and rebuilt either on the original site or elsewhere and frequently were.

In 1724 the ancient parsonage house was reported as being out of repair, but was to be rebuilt. It was being rebuilt in 1728 and 'in good order' by 1730. This new parsonage house was built



*The 1728 rectory  
shortly before  
demolition  
[M10397]*

by James Harrison who was rector from 1723 to 1741. Whether it occupied the same site as the old vicarage is not known, but this building lasted until 1968.

It was rented out several times as many of the subsequent rectors held more than one living and preferred to live elsewhere. In 1795 it was rented to a Mr Doe who recorded that he planted a larch and a cedar on the rectory lawn.

The house was enlarged in 1805 and a new barn and stable constructed on the west side of the orchard. The rectory was mortgaged for £560 in 1830 by Charles Manesty to pay for essential repairs and to effect further enlargements.

The rectory was sold in 1926 for £3000 to Mrs Lister, a niece of Lord Lister of antiseptic fame and remained in the possession of the family until 1964 when it was sold to the County Council for use as an old people's home by Mrs Pryor.

The Council however did not look after the house properly while they were waiting to get their plans complete and finance for the conversions approved. The house had a large well in the roof which was drained by a gutter which needed regular clearing. A family of muscovy ducks set up home there and their debris worsened the blockage to the delight of the ducks who now had their own private duck pond. Eventually the roof gave way and the house was flooded and had to be demolished to be replaced by flats and council houses on what is now Lister Close. The remains of the mangers of the stables can still be seen as circles in the boundary walls of Lister Close and many of the windows and timbers were used in the construction of the Old Rectory Garden House which preserved many of the design features of the old house.

## **The Modern Rectories**

A new rectory was built on a site to the south of the railway which formed part of the original glebe lands. It was not completed until some time after Arthur Harris-Rivett took over as rector in November 1927. It was built by John Purvey and sons of Pangbourne and the final cost was £3003/5/9 although the original estimate had been for £2900. Arthur Harris-Rivett had had changes made during construction which had cost an additional £95-16-3. It was expected he should pay these charges himself but eventually in July 1928 the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty agreed to pay the money from Purley's standing account.



*Harold Hawkins  
welcomes visitors to  
the 'Middle' Rectory  
[M20168]*

*The 'new' rectory  
on Westridge  
Avenue shortly  
after completion  
[M20169]*



This 'middle' rectory was deemed to be much too large in 1941 and the Parochial Church Council had the house and its 3.5 acres of ground valued by Messrs Nicholas. Their valuation was £2750 and the PCC resolved to sell it at the earliest opportunity. John Purvey of Pangbourne offered the church a plot of land of one acre on the Oxford Road for £165 but the PCC decided that they should stay within the guidelines of Queen Anne's Bounty which advised only three quarters of an acre.

Ernest Skuse refused to live at the rectory for much of his tenure as he could not afford the upkeep. It was used however by his two successors. The rectory was eventually sold and demolished around 1967 when Allison Gardens and the west end of Westridge Avenue was constructed. A new modern house had to be provided as part of the deal and this was completed in July 1969 and first occupied by Derek Taylor.

## **Glebe Lands**

The Glebe lands of the Church were a main source of income until comparatively recent times. They were the lands owned by the benefice which the rector farmed or rented to provide his livelihood.

Purley's glebe lands have been defined from time to time in documents known as terriers. These were updated regularly and an up to date terrier was usually required to be produced at the bishop's triennial visitation and often to the Archdeacon whenever he required it. Additionally notes were made in the parish register by William Gostwicke in 1714 about a plan made by William Humphreys which listed church lands. Further information can be found in the tithe awards of 1841 and the survey made by Moss in 1786.

The terrier for 1634 recorded about 40 acres with common rights to graze in other areas. Over the years the glebe lands were gradually sold off and parcels of land exchanged to effect consolidation of land holdings. Small amounts of land were sold to the Great Western Railway in 1836 for the building of the line from Bristol to London.

When Charles Manesty came to sell the land to the GWR the situation was complicated because much of the land between New Hill and Purley Lane which the GWR wished to purchase was owned by Philip Powys Lybbe of Hardwick and occupied by the Rector. It seemed that the field Nutmore had been strip farmed. The Powys-Lybbes had acquired several strips and several were Glebe lands. Under a very complex land deal the GWR purchased lands from both parties and then sold back what they did not require to the Rector, but personally, not as Glebe lands. Part of this was sold back to the GWR in 1889 to facilitate widening between Reading and Didcot. This latter sale was of two roods and ten perches and realised £350 which was invested in India 3% Stock.

A major sale was made in 1879 when Charles Travers sold over 24 acres, consisting of three fields, to Major Storer for £2000 which was invested on Purley's behalf by the Church Commissioners. The Lord Chancellor, as Patron, had great misgivings as he believed land in Purley would soon become very valuable and he was anxious that the proposed sale would not '*depreciate the comfort of the Rectory House*' he finally agreed however but while he was amenable to £20 of the proceeds being used to redeem Land Tax, he would not consent to it being used to repay a loan from Queen Anne's bounty. The rector then got into a dispute with Major Storer as to whether or not the land would be subject to a tithe after the sale had been completed. It was suggested that rather than pay cash the pasture opposite the Rectory (The Pond Field) should be sold to the Rector but Major Storer objected to this as he claimed all his land was entailed and he was not empowered to sell any of it. This was a false claim as he himself had taken steps to remove the entail when he first came into possession of the estate. Prior to this sale the glebe lands had totalled 43 acres, one rood and 35 perches with a gross rental value of £62. so by 1891 17 acres remained.

In 1923 an acre of land was sold to Messrs Purvey and Boxall to be used as a gravel yard. This realised £750 which was to be put towards the proposed new Parsonage House to be built at the North East corner of Purley Lane and Oxford Road. This latter site consisting of 3.149 acres was sold around 1967 for the construction of a new housing estate. Today only the half acre or so of land upon which the 'new' rectory stands remains.

### **The Churchyard**

The present churchyard is .630 acres in extent and was enlarged from .426 acres in 1926. All parishioners of Purley have the right to be buried there but nowadays this right is only rarely exercised.



*The old churchyard in the early 1980s (M00110)*

The churchyard is bounded by a brick wall and there is a lych gate at the southwest corner. The wall was breached in 1982 to permit access to the site for heavy equipment engaged in building the extension and so far this has not been restored. The intention had been to move the lych gate but this proposal was abandoned in favour of new metal gates..

A small paved area at the end of St. Mary's Ave was made available for car parking in the late 1960s and this was extended in 1984 after the extension was built. At the same time a new path was laid to the west door which traversed many of the graves of the Storer and Fullertons, the last Lords of the manor of Purley Magna.

There was a small garden shed to the east of the church used to store gravedigging and grass cutting equipment. This shed had been used by the builders while the Church of England School was being built in 1870 and was moved to the churchyard soon afterwards on the instructions of Major Storer, then the churchwarden.

Close by was an old water pump which used to be the only source of water until piped water was brought to the churchyard in 1969. In 1987 the old shed was demolished and a new one erected against the north wall of the old vestry. The pump was acquired by Fred Rawlins, a former sexton, after he moved from the village to Ashmore Green and so far as we know it is still at his new house, Fred having long died.

In 1970 new rules for the churchyard were made. They were adopted by the PCC at their meeting on 9th October and published in the Parish News of November 1970. Memorials had to be of stone quarried in Great Britain or of English oak and designs approved by the Rector. Artificial flowers were banned and provision was made for levelling graves which had not been attended.

By 1999 the church extension was full and no more new graves could be dug, although several existing graves were re-opened to accommodate a second body. After earlier attempts to extend the churchyard southwards had failed, the Parish Council acquired land adjacent to the Barn and established a new civil burial ground. This was dedicated by Dominic Walker, the Bishop of Reading in June 1999.

### **The Churchyard Walls and Boundary Fence**

In 1711 the rector William Gostwicke recorded in the parish register an account of the walls and rails which surrounded the churchyard. The responsibility for upkeep went with the tenure of land in the parish and his account is therefore more noteworthy for the insight it gives into who owned and rented the land than as an account of the boundary.

The account starts at the gate and proceeds anticlockwise around the boundary.

| Section | Orientation | Length     | type      | Responsible person |
|---------|-------------|------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 1       | NS          | 9 feet     | rails     | Thomas South       |
| 2       | EW          | South side |           | Mr Gower           |
| 3       | NS          | East side  |           | Mary Blagrove      |
| 4       | EW          | 19-20 feet | hurdles   | Mary Blagrove      |
| 5       | EW          | 44 feet    | wall      | John Arnold        |
| 6       | EW          | 8 ft 6 in  | rail      | Robert Newbery     |
| 7       | EW          | 4 feet     | rail      | John Nicholls      |
| 8       | EW          | 8 feet     | rail      | John Tailor        |
| 9       | EW          | 8 feet     | rail      | unknown            |
| 10      | EW          | 40 feet    | Wall/rail | Francis Hide       |
| 11      | EW          | 8 feet     | rail      | Ann Viner          |

|    |    |           |      |                  |
|----|----|-----------|------|------------------|
| 12 | EW | 8 ft 6 in | rail | William Higgs    |
| 13 | EW | 7 feet    | rail | Mary Blagrove    |
| 14 | EW | 7 feet    | rail | Samuel Elms      |
| 15 | NS | 9 feet    | rail | William Simmonds |
| 16 | NS | 33 feet   | wall | Mr Allen         |
| 17 | NS | 15 feet   | rail | Edward Aldridge  |
| 18 | NS | 16 feet   | rail | Richard Sinden   |
| 19 | NS | 10 feet   | rail | Mr Robinson      |
| 20 | NS | 6 feet    | rail | John Breedon     |
| 21 | NS | 7 feet    | rail | John Martin      |
| 22 | NS | 13 feet   | wall | John Knap        |
| 23 | NS | 17 feet   | wall | Rector           |
| 24 | NS |           | gate | Rector           |

The churchwarden's presentments contain many references to the rails, mostly reporting failures on the part of landowners to effect repairs, as in 1742 when Mr St John was the culprit and 1754 when it was Mr Francis Hawes.

### **Churchyard Plan**

A plan of the churchyard was commissioned from Mr Keen of Pangbourne when the question of levelling unknown graves was under discussion in 1934. Mr Keen's estimate of 18 guineas was thought excessive by the PCC and they demanded a second estimate. In the end the rector, Reverend Skuse, preferred to pay it out of his own pocket. The plan measures 24" by 24" and all known graves were numbered, the plot numbers being entered in the burials register in future. The plan is still in use although in later days a number of anomalies were introduced as rectors mixed up burials with cremations and didn't draw in the new graves at the correct scale.

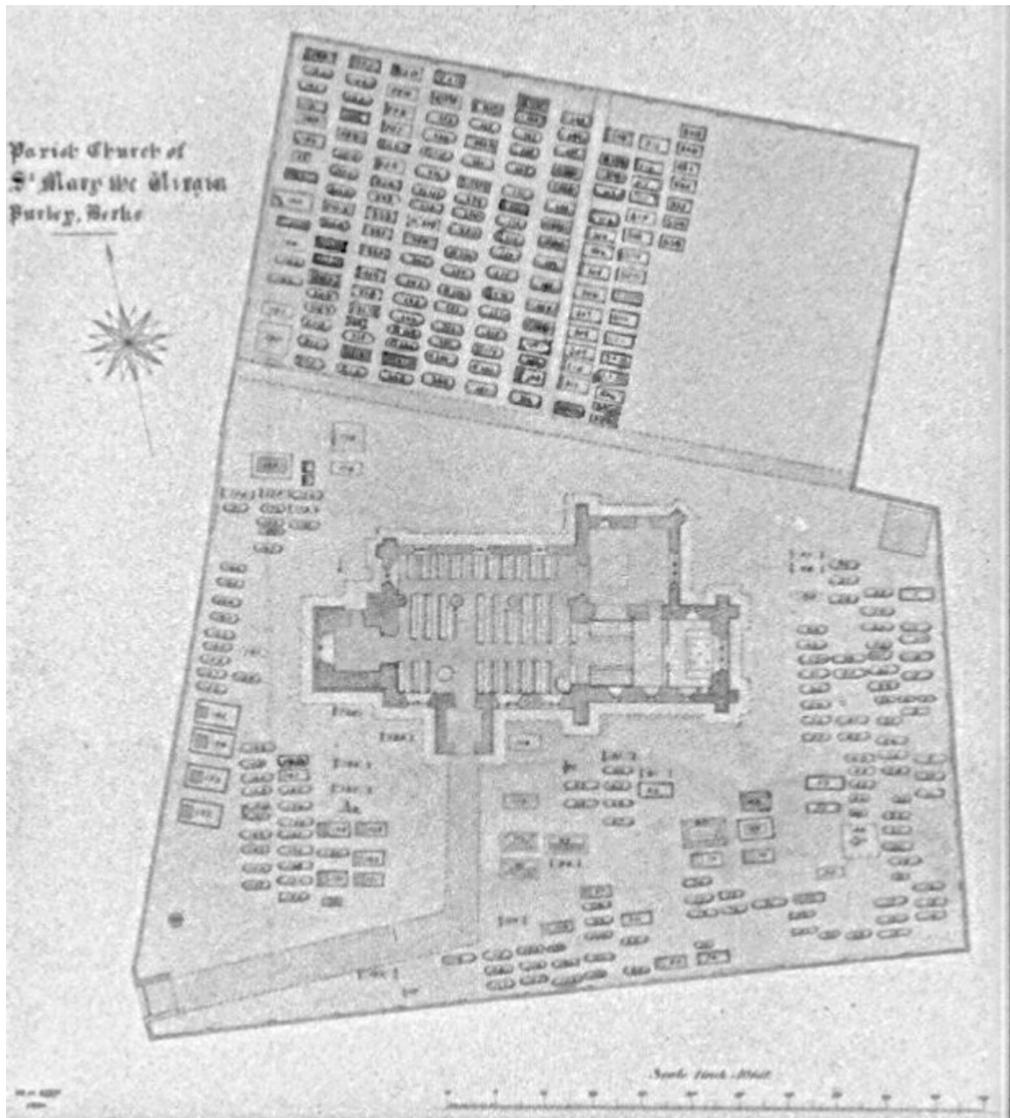
### **Churchyard Extension**

By the 1920s the churchyard was filling up rapidly and further burial space was required. A piece of land measuring one fifth of an acre was acquired to the north of the existing churchyard. The land was donated by Mr Farniloe of Purley Park who also made a contribution of £20 towards the costs which amounted to:- Legal Fees £6-6-0, Levelling £22-12-3, W Flowers & Sons £1-0-0, Fencing £13-14-2, Erection of fencing £3-7-6

The fencing was removed in 1928 and sold for £10. It was replaced by a brick wall which cost £65 plus £33-18-5 for labour. Grass seed was purchased from Percy Stone's in Pangbourne for £3-10-0. The old north wall was demolished but its line could still be seen dividing the old ground from the new. The footings of the demolished wall were once more exposed when the extension to the church was built in 1982. The first burial in the new ground was that of James Belcher in 1930.

A further extension was contemplated in 1946 but negotiations were never completed. Again in 1981 the PCC sought to purchase some of the land adjacent to the Churchyard and to Waterside Drive but at the last minute the price was raised enormously and the church just did not have the money available.

In 1984 the Parish Council took up the issue as they were actually the burial authority. At first they tried to extend the burial ground southward into the woodlands of the marina. There was a great public outcry but the deciding voice was that of the Environment Agency who decreed it could not be used for burials as it was too close to the river.



*Mr Keen's plan of the churchyard made just after the extension in 1926. Graves in the old churchyard are positioned fairly accurately but the ones in the new churchyard were added without any concern for exact positioning [M00382]*

The churchyard had its last grave in January 1998 when Jan Jones of Purley Lodge was buried. Before her death she made a contribution which enabled the Parish Council to purchase land to the north of the recreation ground at Beech Road and a new Parish burial ground was consecrated by the Bishop of Reading in June 1999.

### **Garden of Memory**

Cremations first appear in the burial register in 1961 but are believed to date from 1924. After the Second World War cremation gradually began to replace burials, to the great relief of all responsible for the provision of burial grounds. Scattering of ashes was a somewhat haphazard affair and the need for a place to erect memorials when there was no grave became apparent. Gardens of Memory began to appear in churchyards and Purley followed suit when in 1965 Ernest Spong, at the time a churchwarden, established one in memory of his wife Alice.

It is located in the northeast corner of the churchyard and measures 12.5' x 13'. It consists of a box hedge surround with some elementary shrub plantings. Memorials consisting of metal plaques or stone slabs can be placed in or around the garden. A number of such memorials however were placed in other parts of the churchyard. It had been the original intention that the memorial would consist only of an entry in a special Cremations Book also donated by Mr Spong. It has however hardly been used.



*The Garden of Memory [M20137]*

### **The Civil Cemetery**

By the mid 1990s it was becoming obvious that the new churchyard would soon become full and some additional burial space was required. The first thoughts were to extend the old churchyard southwards extending into the Marina. There was violent opposition from many natural history buffs who saw it as a threat to wildlife. Eventually the scheme was dropped after the Environment Agency deemed it to be too close to the river and that decaying bodies would be liable to pollute the Thames.

As burials was now a matter for the civil parish the requirement was passed to Purley on Thames Parish Council who eventually purchased two acres to the west of the Barn. There was strong opposition to the idea of a cemetery next to a recreation ground as it was feared the sight of funeral processions would traumatise the children, and considerable arguments about the price of land. However Jan Jones, who was an active member of Project Purley, had been diagnosed with cancer and was desperate to be buried in the parish. If she had died after the churchyard was full she would have had to go far afield to be buried so she made up the difference between the price the Parish Council was prepared to pay and the price demanded by the land owner. As it turned out she got the very last plot in the churchyard.

The purchase went through and the Parish Council laid out just under half as a new civil cemetery, using the other half for recreation until it would be needed for burials. The new cemetery was divided into four quadrants with part of the north west quadrant to be reserved for non-Christian burials. Consequently when Bishop Dominic Walker came to open the new

burial ground in 1999 this section was left unconsecrated. The southeast quadrant was allocated to cremation memorials.

This created a small problem in that the civil and the ecclesiastical parishes were not the same and Tilehurst Parish Council, which was responsible for the Denefield area, refused to contribute towards the cost. As a result the Parish Council agreed to three different tariffs for burial, one for the civil parish, one for the Denefield area of Tilehurst and one for non-parishioners.



*Dominic Walker, Bishop of Reading consecrates the new burial ground in 1999 with Roger Howel and Reg Marshal, Chairman of the Parish Council in attendance [M00491]*

