

Account of Purley on Thames

The Rector's Daughter by Rose Matthews

R200368 2/6/2017

Rose was the daughter of the Reverend John Dudley Matthews who became Rector of Purley in 1902. Her reminiscences were published in Purley Parish News March 1975. Formerly R000060

I expect many of you have noted the grave on the left as you enter the church, to my father the Rev. J.H. Dudley Matthews, Rector of Purley 1902-1914, also the memorial in the choir which was placed there after his death.

How well I remember our arrival on Maundy Thursday 1902, and spending much of Good Friday picking masses of primroses for the Easter decoration. We must have been met by an old fashioned cab (motors were scarce in those days) and I remember getting out and running down the first hill after you passed the Park gates. No houses there but a farm house at the bottom, and to the right the Park with a path-way strictly reserved for Churchgoers. No houses at all except a cottage near the Church where the Park gardener lived with his wife and two nice little daughters.

To the left the village street - almost opposite a pond, the drive up to the Rectory with its nice garden and opposite the front door a lovely cedar tree. Beyond the Rectory a lovely walled vegetable garden with magnificent beds of asparagus, the first cutting always sent to Mrs. Powley (the widow of the previous Rector) who lived in Reading. Beyond that the school and the Headmistress's cottage and then facing the street three cottages lining the road to the second hill up to the Pangbourne Road. There were a few houses along the Long Lane and a blacksmith's forge at the corner of that and the main road.

On the other side of the village street, two cottages at right angles to the street and then four or five cottages facing it; in one lived a Mr Pinchin who earned I think only 18/- a week (plus harvest money) and worked as a labourer on the farm and whose six young children were always neatly clothed and shod. At the rectory we had three maids, a cook, house parlour maid and a kitchen maid who asked the most ridiculously low wages and seemed most happy and content. The father of the house parlour maid was our gardener and looked after our horse and carriage.

At the corner of the hill there was a nice house and garden occupied by Mr. Hodgkin one of our Churchwardens and a Manager of the Pulsometer Works on the outskirts of Reading. No houses up the hill until you reached a house occupied by Lady Sykes, the other Churchwarden, whose daughter married a Mr Petrocockino of Pangbourne. A cottage on her grounds was occupied by Mr Jarman, her coachman, his wife, son Harry (killed in the first war) and daughter Agnes who married years ago.

Turning towards Reading, no houses at all except the Park entrance, until you reached a public house (I cannot remember the name) and then Tilehurst Station and from there no more houses until you came to the Pulsometer Works and the beginning of a bus service into the town. Opposite Tilehurst Station a few private residences, but no other buildings on that side between the Long Lane and the Pulsometer Works.

No street lights, so we always had Evensong on Sunday in the afternoon. No village hall so any social events took place in the school and at Christmas time my family arranged an entertainment, acting or a concert, which was packed out for there was no other form of entertainment nearer than

Reading. The only method of reaching Reading was by foot or bicycle except for the Carrier's cart on Saturday, but we had a wagonette and constantly gave lifts to any who could not get there otherwise. We were really like a village family in those days. Everyone in trouble came to the rectory. We had two or three serious accidents - boys on stolen bicycles from Reading coming off head first at the bottom of the hill. I remember one who fractured his thigh. Of course we got a doctor and ambulance and my youngest brother accompanied him to the Royal Berks Hospital, accompanied by quite a procession of Purley people.

One of the two little side faced cottages in the village was occupied by a Mr. and Mrs. Heath, we were all so delighted when Mrs Heath declared to my father "My husband is all wrapped up in Miss Rose"

The Old Purley Squire was a very irascible old gentleman. On one occasion he found some ladies picnicking by the riverside in HIS Park. Infuriated he threw all the tea apparatus into the Thames whereupon one of the ladies said "Godbye, Sir, and will you thank your wife for lending us her tea things!" He died soon after our arrival. Later his daughter took over and tried to run the parish! Her daughter was going to be married and she wanted a peal on the church bells. Father had to tell her this was not possible as the bells were in a very dangerous condition. Later she told him she had been up to the belfry and discovered for herself that all was perfectly safe! Actually in the end I think only one bell could be used.

My father lost his life on December 20th, 1914 after taking Evensong at Mapledurham to help the aged and delicate Rector. He used to go straight there from our afternoon Evensong and had to row himself across the river - a crossing I always dreaded even in summer with the weir just below. He embarked just after preaching on "The souls of the Righteous are in the hands of God" and we never saw him again. His body was recovered near Henley, some 17 miles away, after five weeks. R.I.P.

