

# *Account of Purley on Thames*

## Memories of Purley in the 1940s

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by John Sherrott

I lived in Purley Park, in St Mary's Avenue during the Second World War with my grandmother from 1940 to 1946. My family was scattered all around the country. My sister and brother ended up in Scotland. While in Purley I went to school in Pangbourne, but before I went to school each day I did a paper round for Mr Tidbury who had a paper shop in Pangbourne and it was quite a scramble to get my round done in time to catch the lorry that took us to school. The lorry was operated by Mr. Lee and, on one sad occasion, a boy was killed, clinging to the tailboard, as the lorry backed into Long Lane to turn around. The headmaster at Pangbourne was Mr Townsend who was nicknamed 'Spotty' because he could spot everything that went on among the kids.

The church was just down the road from my grandmother's house and I joined the choir there. Mr Nelson Cooper was the organist and choir master and choir practice was held in the little primary school. Mr Cooper introduced me to the organ, which I still play and I used to practice on the huge grand piano at the old rectory then owned by the Listers. Mary Lister ran the Sunday School and my teacher for a time was Marion Dupree with whom I maintained contact after the war until she died at her home in Westham a few years ago. Mr Skuse was the rector and I used to love his wonderful sermons but during the services we choirboys used to argue over who would pump the organ as we got sixpence for it.

At weekends I used to work on Bucknell's farm who was at the bottom of New Hill. Some of the jobs I did on the farm included potato planting and assisting with the milking. The field opposite the house was used as a nursery where the cows were put for calving. Opposite the farm was a big pond where Mapledurham Drive started. When I had time to spare I also used to spend time at the lock helping the lock-keeper opening and closing the gates. The Hatton family lived in the lock house at the time.

During the war there were lots of Canadian soldiers in the area. They used to practice building pontoon bridges over the Thames and on one occasion the bridge collapsed while a tank was crossing. We boys thought it very funny to see a tank in the middle of the river.

At the corner of St Mary's Avenue and Colyton Way there was a general store run by Mr Howarth. He would stand at the counter and add all the items up faster than a calculator which was a good effort considering the imperial currency. I never heard anyone date to argue with him.

The roads in those days were made of anything that was handy like old bricks or ashes. Water was pumped up out of the ground, lighting was by kerosene lamps as there was no gas or electricity or water piped to 'the camp' as the locals referred to it.

*John now lives in Melbourne Australia*







