

Account of Purley on Thames

Oral History - Elsie and Joe Kirton

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The Interview was conducted by Margaret Hughes and Barbara Mercer with Jean Debney also present. At The Kirtons home, Yew Tree Cottage on Purley Rise. Date c1983

Joe Kirton was 15 when he first came to live in Purley. He arrived the month after John Dudley Matthews was drowned. He married in 1923. He first lived at Home Farm as he was working for Mr Saunders. He later moved to Fieldings Cottage at Scrases farm. The other cottage was occupied by the Nashes. They then moved to one of the Well Cottages next door to the Winkfields. They bought Yew Tree Cottage around 1945.

The boys went first to Purley Church of England School where they were taught by Mrs Tidbury. They had to leave at age 8 and go to Pangbourne School. The headmaster then was a Mr Townsend known as 'Spotty' because he could spot any misdemeanour immediately.

Purley River Estate was sold off as £5, £10 and £20 plots because building permission had been refused owing to flooding. People moved in in force during the war. When there was flooding their son Charlie would deliver the milk to the estate in a boat. He had the milk round for over 50 years and retired in 1968 at 66, a year late because of a problem with his pension. He had been born in 1902 in Reading. Elsie was born in 1898 in Tilehurst. Jobs and the Co-op came in before they retired. Cliffords bought the round and sold some of it to Jobs. Milk was supplied in churns and someone took a photo of him with his van which had been framed and presented to him.

They had 15 cows, mixed Guernseys and Friesians. Daffodil was the first, she gave around 6 galls of milk a day. It was all hand milking although they did get a milking machine in 1967 but the old cows would not take to it and had to be replaced. They also sold vegetables from their barn behind the cottage. The dairy was built by his brother in law and he had trouble getting Planning Permission. It was granted only on the condition that he employed no other labour there. You even needed permission to buy cattle cake.

They did all their own bottling, Charlie did some of the work. The round started off at 20 galls and finished up at 150. They did a morning and an afternoon round. Jobs pinched some of their customers but most remained loyal. One went out with a loudspeaker van to advertise cream. but Joe sold only milk. They had to swish the contents of the churn around before serving as the cream settled on the top. They used two half pint ladles. They got the bottling plant in 1965 buying it when Allders in Pangbourne gave up. They bought a machine to cut the wax cardboard seals from Williams. They also kept ducks geese and chickens.

There used to be a barge to take horses across the river. They were not allowed in to Purley Park and when the Farmiloes were there he had to go up the back lane, not up the front drive. He also delivered to Cecil Aldin.

There were two Miss Pockocks, Amy kept the Post Office. This was in the right hand room of Lichfield Cottage where they kept the scales to weigh parcels. You had to knock before entering. The shop also sold sweets.

Mrs White used to live at Westfields, a big red house demolished around 1968. Most of Nursery Gardens used to be a Nursery. General White had a grey horse which he kept in a paddock by the

village in the first world war. He had spent some time in India.

There were three wells, there was one at Well Cottage shred by the Kirtons and the Winkfields, there was another at the Pococks.

The stables of Cecil Aldin was used as a staging post for horses. They used to go into the grounds to get wood for their fire.

Kennel cottages had gardens down to the road with steps to the road level. One was occupied by Tomlins, the groom, another by Base the whip, and Sheffield. Anderson was gardener to Mrs Aldin.

There were no services until the gas was taken to Pangbourne from Reading along the main road. Hodgkins paid for a spur down to the Lodge and most of the houses down there had the gas. General White had electricity, using his own generating plant. Hodgkins used to pay for the children's prizes at the school.

Matthews drowned the month before Joe came to Purley. They have seen a lot of rectors come and go. Pring was a very kindly man. When Joe's dad was killed on a bicycle in Reading, the next day after communion, he made a special effort to comfort Elsie. They had been at Wembley for the Exhibition and when they got home someone asked them if they knew where he was, they said they were expecting him any minute and were devastated when told he had been killed. His dad had lived at the cottage on Scrases farm which is where they went to live when they got married. His name was Joseph Charles Kirton as opposed to Joseph William Kirton. The latter was known as young Jack to distinguish him from his father. His mother died at age 36.

