

PURGATORY

(Christine Edbury)

As I get regular enquiries about the site of Purgatory, I thought it about time I wrote down all I could find out, to either send to the enquirer by post or attach the document to e-mails. A 'ready to go' document so to speak.

Purgatory is the name of a small site just above the River Dorn, once inhabited as a farmstead. Only a barn and grass covered 'footings' of the farmhouse or cottages remain today. Photographs on various web sites now show the site as being very much smoothed over since these photographs were taken in the mid 1980s by Audrey Martin.



Just the barn standing, still in use, remains of cottages to the right



*barn and 'lumps and bumps' of cottages
There was also a deep well, now filled in*

The earliest maps found so far indicating the site are the Jefferys map of 1767-8 and the Davis map of 1793. However, at our recent AGM we were very pleased to have sight of a large map of the Bartons (approx 7' x 6') currently in the possession of Sue Greenway. The map, by James Wylie, is undated but probably made about 1870 as the Mission and Temperance Hall, built in 1888, is not

shown. This clearly shows dwellings attached to the barn. Further research on the map is being done.



Photographed by the group by kind permission of Sue Greenway

FACTS:

From the website, *'placenames.org.uk'*, Purgatory is described as: *'Purgatory (Place) located in the settlement of Sesswell's Barton. On the Davis map of 1797'*. Purgatory, according to Catholic Church doctrine is an intermediate state after physical death in which those destined for heaven *'undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven'*.

The site was called Dry Grounds c1733.

We know from the Victoria County History that eight families lived at Purgatory in 1851.

Census Returns: The 1841 census return does not give addresses and are not very clear as to which families lived at either 'first Purg' (properly called Shepherds House) or Purgatory, so although 8 families are recorded in the Victoria County History, only the two families below have Purgatory written again their names on the 1851 census.

1851 - John Buckingham (aged 48), labourer, (he was born at Chetwode, Bucks), his wife Elizabeth (aged 52, born at Rollright). The children were James (aged 22), Elizabeth (aged 20), George (aged 18), Abel (aged 11), Richard (aged 9). The older boys were agricultural labourers. Also in the household, Thomas Cleaver (aged 18), described as son-in-law, but this can also mean stepson). He was also an agricultural labourer, born at Wootton.

1851 – Joseph Cleaver (aged 51), carpenter, born at Steeple Barton. His wife Phillis (aged 40) born at Deddington. Sons were William (aged 20), agricultural labourer, Thomas (aged 9) George (aged 7), both scholars, and Henry (aged 2), all boys born at Steeple Barton.

1861 – Joseph Cleaver (aged 39), born ? Ensington, shepherd; wife Zilpah (aged 46), born Kidlington, son George aged 20, shepherd; Mary A. daughter aged 16, John son aged 9, Elizabeth daughter aged 6, son Frederic aged 3. All the children born at Barton.

1871 – Joseph Cleaver shepherd aged 47, wife Zilpah, son Frederick W. Charles Stevens, lodger aged 30, a gamekeeper, seems to be living next door.

1881 – John Proffit, a herdsman aged 31, wife Charlotte, aged 35, son Frederick, aged 10, daughters Mary Ann, Mercy and Ellen, aged 6, 3 and 11 months.

1891 – John Proffitt, ag lab, aged 42, daughter in law Lucy Prestage, aged 23, daughters Annie, Mercy and Nellie, aged 16, 14 and 10. 'dil' in the relation to head column, can also mean step-daughter.

1901 – Under Purgatory Lane, not farm, Joseph Hoare, aged 44, wife Selina aged 54, Alfred Mole aged 29 (step-son?), daughter Sarah aged 17 and son William aged 12. One unoccupied house next door.

1911 – Herbert Hoare, aged 32, farm labourer, born Middle Barton, wife Emily seems to be in an asylum, daughters Florence, aged 13, Mary, aged 10, Marjorie, aged 8, Gladys, aged 5 and son William, aged 3. Also at home that night of the census Marjorie Wilks, mother in law, aged 73. She may have been helping Herbert with the children if wife is away.

As we cannot get the information for the 1921 census until 2021, I looked at the voter's lists for 1915, 1920, 1925 and 1930. For 1915, Joseph Hoare is at Goffe's, Shepherds House (first Purg). No-one is recorded as living at Purgatory, although one tentative entry - Stephen and Agnes Hawkins are on the voter's list of 1930 living at Goffe's Shepherds Cottages, is this Purgatory?

Jackie (Wood) provided this information: *'Mr and Mrs Hawkins (not sure of his first name - Stephan or Steven - Stevie or Stivie!!!!) and Agnes lived at Purgatory until early 30s, they had two children Grace and Bill. Bill would bike to Oxford to work at Wards; Grace went to Yorkshire married a soldier but later returned to Middle Barton. Mr and Mrs Hawkins moved from Purgatory to a house in Church Lane, Greenways, then moved to Heath Cottage, Worton Road and then Mrs Hawkins had a cottage in the Dock. Don't quite know when Mr Hawkins died.'*

From County Archaeology, Sites and Monuments Record:

Site Name: Purgatory Farm (100m west of the River Dorn); building

Summary: Stone built, with possibly a Stonesfield slate roof, now a corrugated tin roof. Marked on map by Thomas Jefferys 1767-68 and the Davis map of 1793. Presumably of later 17/18th century construction.

Description: Purgatory Farm was one of 9 in Steeple Barton, and was 338 acres in 1861

Record Type: Building

Monument Type: Farm 1540-1900

Reference Number: PRN (Primary Record Number) 13142 (unique number given to all finds and sites by SMR)

Parish/District: Steeple Barton, West Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire

Grid Reference: SP 4532 2300

Theories and Suppositions:

'First Purg'. This is the local name given to the first building on the left down the lane past the church, before you get to Purgatory. This site is sometimes mistaken for Purgatory. It was the site of a farmhouse and barn, the remains of which are hidden amongst the new fir tree plantation. At one time it was called Shepherds House or Sheppers House. An article on Purgatory written in the Oxford Mail in 1978 goes to great length describing first Purg as being proper Purgatory, until right at the end she realises she is in the wrong place. The house is now derelict and cannot be seen because of the fir tree plantation.

In an article in the Oxford Mail dated 1978, the reporter trying to find Purgatory, records asking a local resident, Mrs. Kettlewell, who lived at the Old Vicarage, about Purgatory and Mrs Kettlewell thought it referred '*to the sheer hell of getting up and down the lane, especially in bad weather*'. However, Miss Joan Sullivan, who had lived in Barton since a child, talks about walking down the lane to 'Purg' to collect wild flowers for Mothering Sunday. She remembered the Hawkins family living at 'First Purg'. She said it was 45 years since anyone lived there. She also mentioned a place called 'Paradise', further down the track. However, this is the only reference found so far.

Geoff Stevenson was a local historian (he was a lecturer at the Lady Spencer-Churchill College Wheatley) and lived in Frances Road for many years. He had studied the area and history of the Bartons for many years for and with Audrey, and did not come up with any information about the origins of Purgatory either.

Another theory is the village of Steeple Barton shrinking because of the plague, this is probably true, but although academics refer to this, they do not give their references for the information. It is believed the people moved down to Purgatory to escape the plague. Local rumour was that the north side of the churchyard would never be used again because this is where the plague victims were buried, again, nothing to verify this and Graeme Arthur (the Rector) certainly does not believe this.

In his book *The History of the Bartons*, George Laws mentions Purgatory when talking about the River Dorn and says '*past Purgatory, (was this a piscatorium?)*'. In the dictionary piscatorium (a Latin word) means fish/fishing. Was this the site of a medieval fishery (not a fish pond). Did the medieval owners of Barton Manor dam the River Dorn to rear fish for the royal palace at Woodstock? Could Purgatory farm have been built on the site of a Roman building? As of this date I can find no evidence or reference for this, but there are Roman buildings recorded nearby and Roman pottery has been found in the area. (George Laws was the land agent for the Barton Abbey estate and was interested in local history. He collected a large amount of information and was in the process of writing his book. Audrey finished compiling the information and had it published in 1985). I have looked through the boxes of George's notes and found only rough notes as recorded above, but sadly no indication as to where he might have got this information.

Further Research:

A coloured Tithe map dated 1849 in the BHG archives shows the areas of ownership of the land in Steeple Barton, and indicates that the land on which Purgatory is sited was once owned by the Duke of Marlborough, who subsequently gave the land to his son-in-law, the Rt. Hon. Lord Clifden. Shortly

after 1849 the Hall family started purchasing more land, including the fields around Purgatory. If any Clifden archives survive there may be some information about Purgatory. Neither Audrey or Geoff Stevenson seem to have researched this. I have contacted the archivist for the Duke of Marlborough/Lord Clifden and as of this date as we go to production, nothing has been found.

Locate and look at the Jeffery's map of 1767; we have a photocopy of the Davis map of 1793.

Visit County Archaeology to look at aerial photographs of the area around Purgatory.

Bibliography and References:

George Laws, *History of the Bartons*, 1970s, edited by Audrey Martin

William Wing, *Annals of Steeple and Westcote Barton*, 1866

A History of the County of Oxford; Volume 11, 1983

www.british-history.ac.uk

Sheer Purgatory, article in Banbury Guardian 1978, with photograph

Acknowledgements:

Jackie Wood

John Forster

If anyone has any further information on Purgatory or the occupants, we would love to hear about it.

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