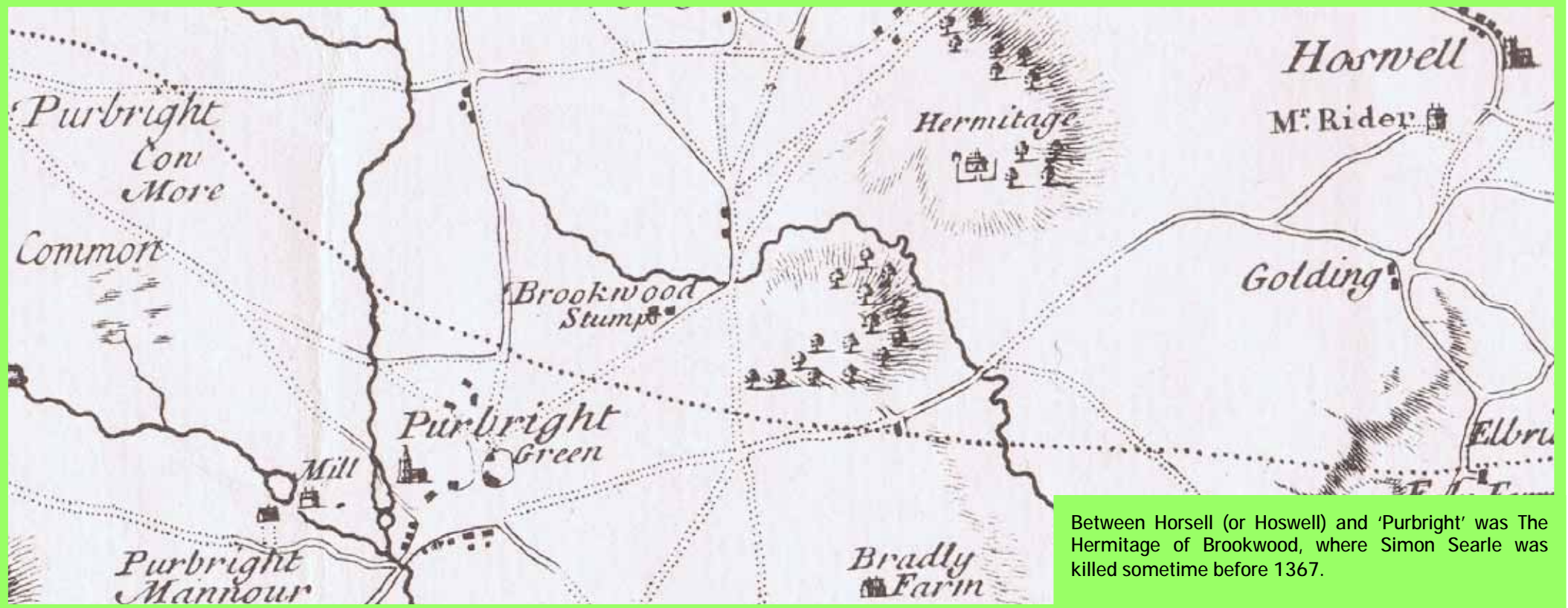


HUNTING OUT THE HISTORY OF HORSELL & THE HERMITAGE

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Between Horsell (or Hoswell) and 'Purbright' was The Hermitage of Brookwood, where Simon Searle was killed sometime before 1367.

There are many stories about the history of the Hermitage in St Johns, most of which are probably not true.

Take for instance the 'tunnels' that are said to exist beneath the houses of Batten Avenue & Oak Way. Some say they were built in Victorian times by the convicts from Woking Prison (where the Inkerman Estate is now) – but Woking was a prison for disabled convicts whom were unlikely to have been fit enough to

excavate (and neatly line with bricks) such an elaborate escape route.

Others say that the tunnels (which incidentally are really 'level wells' or underground water tanks), were dug in medieval times by the lonely hermit of the Hermitage so he could secretly visit the nunnery at St Catherine's in Guildford. That is over eight miles away, with at least two rivers in between!

In fact we have no record of there ever being a hermit at the Hermitage. The first reference we have comes from 1367 when John Tylman, described as the 'Chaplain of the Hermitage of Brookwood, in the lordship of Wokkyng' was given a royal pardon on the 11th July after he had apparently killed a Horsell man called Simon Serle in the chapel at Pirbright.

The killing had probably been an act of self-defence, but why the two were fighting at



In Victorian times the Hermitage was rebuilt, replacing a stone building that had been on the site since the later medieval period.

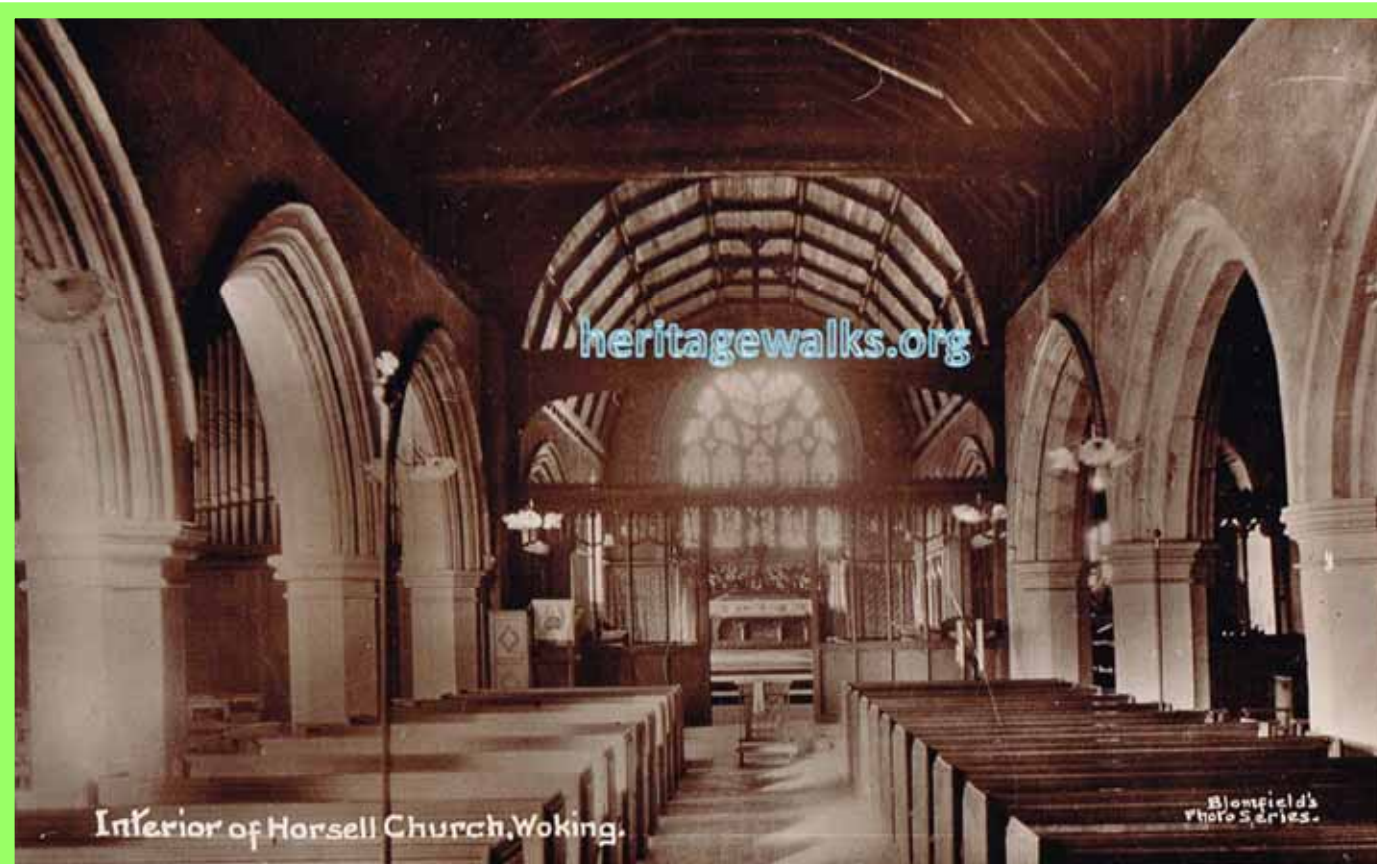
Pirbright we may never know. It is probable that Tylman was also the Chaplain of Pirbright, as the Manor of Pirbright was held at that time (together with Woking) by our old friends the Despenser family. What we do know is that the chapel had to be 'purged' by the Bishop of Winchester in February 1368 as it had been 'polluted with blod'.

The first reference to Horsell comes from over a century earlier when Horsell (together with Sythwood – an area of land in the Lower Knaphill area), were tythings of the Manor of Pyrford, owned by Westminster Abbey. It was probably the Abbey who commissioned the construction of the original stone chapel at Horsell, in the mid-12th century. Part of the present west wall of the Nave is thought to date from about that time.

By 1262 both Horsell and Pyrford chapels had been granted to Newark Priory (who also owned the advowson of Woking Church). They presumably provided the priests to preach here, the two chapels being worth £10 annually to the priory in 1291.

Unfortunately much of St Mary's Church at Horsell was 'restored' in Victorian times, but we do know that the chapel was partially rebuilt in the early 14th century (part of the Nave roof surviving from that time) and that by the end of that century the base of the tower had been added at the west end of the church.

The South Aisle was added in the 15th century, presumably after 1457 when, owing to the smallness of the receipts of the chapel of Horsell and its ruinous condition, Roger Hallye, a canon of Newark, received licence from the Bishop of Winchester to administer the sacraments to the parishioners for one year



during which time he would take all the profits (presumably in exchange for him paying for the necessary repairs).

On the outside wall of the church can still be seen the remains of two windows removed from the north wall of the Nave (when the North Aisle was added in 1909), the larger one dating from about 1320, with the smaller probably being mid 15th century – about the time of Roger Hallye.

One early 14th century window does still remain in the church, removed from the south wall of the Nave to its present position east of the south door.

When the North Aisle was built in 1909 two old windows had to be removed from the North Wall of the Nave. They can now be found displayed on the wall outside (below)

Perhaps the most unusual item in the church is the iron spit, probably used for roasting an ox or pig at parish festivals. There were originally two of these, as an inventory of 1552, records two 'brochis' (brackets).

Was this the original 'fast food stall' that can still be found at local festivals, such as the Horsell Scout & Guides May Fayre on Wheatsheaf Recreation Ground every May Day Bank Holiday?



THE LISTED BUILDINGS OF HORSELL CHURCHYARD

Despite being heavily restored in Victorian times (and added to and altered throughout the 20th century), St Mary's Church at Horsell is still a Grade II* listed building.

A Grade I building (like St Peter's Church at Old Woking or even Sutton Place) is considered by English Heritage to be 'internationally important' – the top 2.5% of buildings in the country. Nevertheless still only 5.5% of Listed Buildings are deemed worthy of a Grade II*, which are of 'more than special interest', whilst the vast majority of listed buildings are recorded as just Grade II.

Having said that, any listing is important and in Horsell Churchyard we are fortunate to have not just the Grade II* church, but two other Grade II listed buildings as well – if you can actually call them 'buildings'.

Henry Roake, who died in 1758, is buried in the Grade II listed tomb to the south of the South Aisle (below), whilst Ann Roake's similarly listed chest tomb is to the north of the North Aisle.

There have been Roake's in the Horsell area for centuries and one of the first references to a churchyard at Horsell comes from the will of a Thomas Rooke, in October 1485 when he asked to be buried in the 'churchyard at Horshyll' and left to the High Alter the princely sum of two shillings. He also left in his will to the 'light of St Mary of the said church, one sheep', with another sheep to the 'light of Corpus Christi'.

I wonder whether they found their way onto the parish spit at festival time too?



THE GROWTH OF PIRBRIGHT CHURCH



Although Pirbright Church was first recorded in about 1210, most of the present building dates from 1785 when according to a guide to the church the parish vestry met '*at the Wyte hart to impower Thomas Woods and John Collins Churchwardens - to Bori mony towards the Bilden of the Curch*'. Unfortunately cash was hard to come by until apparently George III was traveling through the area when his coach overturned. The villagers gave him

hospitality and repaired the coach and in return the King issued a petition for all the churches in England to contribute to its rebuilding. The old church and tower were taken down and rebuilt, although whether it was exactly to the villagers liking is in doubt as according to Matthew Alexander (one time curator of Guildford Museum) in his book, *Tales of Old Surrey* - 'Legend recites how the people of Pirbright considered that their church was too low for a village of such

importance. A meeting was held to consider means of raising the height of the church. Many proposals were made and rejected, until someone suggested manure. This was a splendid method of making things grow.

All the dung in the village was collected and dumped against the church walls. That night it rained and washed down the manure. It left stains behind, but when the villagers gathered in the morning they agreed that the church had risen several inches during the night'.

