

# THE OLD MARKET HOUSE

## DESTROYED BY FIRE AFTER THREE CENTURIES

By "BEORCHAM"

Most townspeople must be familiar with old prints showing a quaint half-timbered building at the top of Water Lane, almost adjoining the One Bell Inn. It was Berkhamsted's ancient market house, and picturesque though it appears from illustrations, it must be confessed that it was anything but lovely in the eyes of Berkhamstedians of the period.

They criticised it as ungainly, badly situated, and an eyesore, and no one can say that those criticisms were altogether unjustified. For the market house literally stood in the High Street, and pedestrians had to pass under the building if they wished to avoid being splashed by the mud churned up by stage coaches and farm wagons. Under the building? Yes, for the market house stood on "stilts," so to speak, and it was beneath the upper chamber—used as a granary towards the end of its career—where the principal market stalls were situated. There was not room for all of them, of course, and traders whose stalls overflowed into the High Street cast envious eyes in wet weather towards the more fortunate stall-holders beneath the market house.

### Probably Elizabethan

The market house was probably built in Elizabethan times, when the weekly market at Berkhamsted ranked among the best in the county. Later on the market declined, mainly owing to the fact that three new markets were set up in neighbouring places. The tolls, incidentally, were for the benefit of the poor of the parish, and for repairing the Parish Church.

By the time Queen Victoria was on the throne, many residents were openly deriding the market house as an eyesore and an obstruction. One was daring enough to attempt to bring it to the ground, and no one apparently had the slightest inclination to intervene. As Henry Nash tells us in his 60-years-old "Reminiscences of Berkhamsted," the man "was accustomed to the use of the saw, and this he vigorously applied to some of the posts that supported the fabric. But eventually he had to abandon the task; he had not carefully considered the labour involved in cutting through some twenty oak posts filled with nails—the accumulation of ages."

### A Hectic Night in 1854

But there was another and easier way of getting rid of the building—by fire! No one knows exactly how the market house came to be reduced to ashes, but tongues wagged knowingly long after that hectic night in the autumn of 1854, when the town was lit up by flames as the building

crashed down among the stout oak posts that had supported it for three centuries. Strong views had been expressed about the "eyesore," and at least one townsman was glad to have a perfect alibi on the night of the fire—business had detained him many miles away from Berkhamsted!

### Culprit Never Found

Many townspeople were, however, under suspicion, but the culprit, if there was one, was never found. In any case it would have been rather late in the day to give him a taste of that good, old-fashioned discipline once available in the ancient stocks and whipping post which, in years gone by, stood beside the market house.

At the October meeting of the Parochial Finance Committee, it was reported that special donations had been received as follows: For General Church Expenses £5 and £4, Assistant Clergy Fund £10, and Church Membership Fund £20. The gifts have been suitably acknowledged with grateful thanks.

### THE MINISTRY OF HEALING

For the sins and sicknesses of the world there is only one remedy—Jesus Christ, the Word made Flesh, Love Incarnate. The time has arrived when we must face up to our lives and the work we are doing, and apply our energies vigorously to the object for which He gave His Life. That object was Love. Love in action. Love laying down its life for its friends, and even for its enemies. We must realise that the needs of the world today, are such that Jesus Christ Our Master would mobilise the forces of Love against unbelief, evil, disease, avarice and ambition; that He would lead His armies against all the institutions and the ways of the world which usurp the reign of the God of Love, that the Kingdoms of the world may become the Kingdom of God and of His Christ.—From "Healing in the Name of Jesus" by the Rev. John Maillard.

Two interesting birthdays occurred last month within a day or two of each other: the Bishop of St. Albans was 71 on October 12th, and Mr. Thomas Ellens, the Grand Old Man of Berkhamsted, was 91 on October 10th.

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Mr. Ellens had the pleasure of being congratulated on the Wireless by Christopher Stone in the "Anniversaries" Programme.

# J. J. Stevens

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