

# FRITHSDEN'S LINKS WITH THE PAST

By "BEORCHAM"

Few parishioners of to-day are aware that the first daughter church of Berkhamsted St. Peter's was established in the tiny hamlet of Frithsden. Before Kitsbury was large enough to have a church of its own, before Sunnyside possessed the mission room that was the forerunner of St. Michael's Church, before Potten End was graced by Holy Trinity Church, services were regularly held in a Frithsden cottage parlour by the rector and curate of Berkhamsted.

The Rev. James Hutchinson, rector from 1851-71, was responsible for this development. He often trudged over the Common to conduct services at Frithsden, but more usually the work was in charge of his curate, the Rev. Henry Twells, afterwards Canon of Peterborough and a famous hymn writer. So well were the cottage services attended by worshippers from Potten End as well as Frithsden that the provision of a church soon became imperative. But where should it be built—in Frithsden or Potten End? The honour went to Potten End—a wise decision, for that village grew apace while Frithsden stagnated. Indeed, the hamlet is smaller to-day than it was a century ago.

Fire was largely the cause of Frithsden's decline. In the 1850's three straw-thatched cottages along the glade were burnt down, not without loss of life, and fifty years ago a large thatched building beside the green, comprising an Elizabethan inn and a cottage, met the same fate. (The present "Alford Arms" was built on the site of the old inn). Another group of cottages, long since demolished, stood on a strip of heath land known as Cherry Bounce.

## A Cherry Fair

Frithsden and cherries have always been synonymous. In grandfather's time scores of wild cherry trees studded the valley and hillside and every summer a Cherry Fair—a simple rustic gathering that was nevertheless a red letter day for the inhabitants—was held. Tradition has it that the cherry turnover was originated by a Frithsden housewife.

Perhaps it is as well that Frithsden cherry turnover is not given a local name in the same way as Banbury cakes, Bath buns and Bakewell tarts. For then the pronunciation of "Frithsden" (sometimes spelt "Frithesden") would be a national instead of a local issue. Some pronounce the name as it is spelt; others, the writer among them, stick to the old rustic form of "Freezedden". An interesting point is that the spelling "Fresden" appears on an 18th century map. The name is derived from "Del Frith", as the beech forest on Berkhamsted Common was called in the 12th century.

Despite the loss of several thatched

cottages, Frithsden still has an old-world air. Facing the little triangular green is one of Hertfordshire's most interesting Tudor houses, its front and sides decorated with emblematic white plaster panels, two recording that the house was built in 1513 and restored in 1879. Before the county boundaries were adjusted 50 years ago, the front door was in Herts and the back door in Bucks! Nearby stood an old cottage where an elderly dame taught straw-plaiting, a profitable domestic industry in Victorian days. Outbuildings included a communal wash-house and a large brick oven, fired by "fuzzen-sticks", where housewives of the hamlet baked bread and cooked the Sunday joint at a cost of one penny.

## Down "Spooky Lane"

From the green a curious deep-cut lane switchbacks over the hill to Nettleden. For nearly half of its length brick and flint walls tower on either side to a height of as much as 20ft., and at the highest point the lane is crossed by a handsome stone bridge that now carries nothing more than a grass-grown cart track. The bridge and walls, erroneously supposed to be of Roman origin, were built by the Duke of Bridgewater 150 years ago, when he lavished a fortune on improving the Ashridge Estate.

It is not surprising that this quaint old lane is said to be haunted; indeed, it was once known as "Spooky Lane". There is a tradition that Henry I, passing along this lane when riding from Dunstable to Berkhamsted Castle, was thrown from his horse and trampled on by a mare ridden by a monk. It is also believed that John Bunyan rode along the lane on a preaching tour that established Frithsden's long Nonconformist tradition. There was a meeting house in the hamlet long before the little Bethesda Baptist Chapel was built in 1835.

A quarter of a mile beyond Bethesda Chapel stands a one-storeyed building that is often mistaken for a church. Austere flint walls and "churchey" windows certainly give it an ecclesiastical appearance, but it was a school founded by the Duke of Bridgewater and attended by children of Potten End, Nettleden and Frithsden until it was closed in 1880. Now the school forms the main part of a dwelling known as "Bede Cottage". Nearby stands a terrace of six cottages, built in 1632, and at the end of the road is a fairly large house that was once the home of a brother of Lady Brownlow. In the huge walled garden thousands of pounds of tomatoes are grown every year.

To-day Frithsden is better known for tomatoes than for cherries—but there is no annual Tomato Fair on the village green!

Phone: BERKHAMSTED 43

## WATTS' STORES

Proprietor: — H. A. RATCLIFF

For

CHINA, GLASS &  
HARDWARE  
BULB BOWLS  
OVEN GLASS

NOW OPEN:

FURNITURE RENOVATING  
DEPARTMENT  
ENQUIRIES SOLICITED

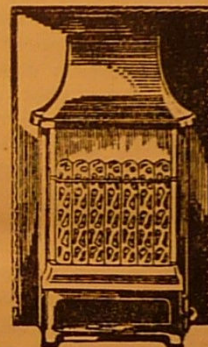
127 HIGH STREET,  
BERKHAMSTED

COSY—

but never stuffy

"BEAM" GAS FIRES

In attractive colour finishes



Berkhamstead Gas Co.

PHONE 90

The Best Value for Coupons

Your Coupons will go  
further if you

**BUY  
GOOD SHOES**

OUR REPAIRS ARE  
NOTED FOR  
SMARTNESS AND  
DURABILITY

**WHITE & SON**

THE FOOTWEAR SPECIALISTS

High St., Berkhamsted

Phone 68

Also at Hemel Hempstead  
& Chorley Wood