

Early Berkhamsted Newspapers

Has anyone seen a copy of the *Berkhamsted Herald*? This 150 years old local newspaper, undoubtedly the first printed and published in Berkhamsted, would be unknown but for the existence of two bound volumes (one of poems, the other of sermons) bearing the imprint:

BERKHAMSTED:
Printed at the Herald Office
by W. M'Dowall.

For a small town such as Berkhamsted to have a jobbing printer, not to mention a newspaper of its own, was remarkable before the 19th century. And M'Dowall was a craftsman of skill and taste, able to undertake large books in English and Latin that would tax the resources of small printers at the present day.

Through the kindness of Mr. A. E. Loosley, I recently received a copy of one of M'Dowall's productions. It is a well-bound volume of 277 pages, dated 1799, and the title page states that it is the second edition of "Poetical Prologues in the English and Latin Languages by some young gentlemen of Berkhamsted School."

Wide margins, handsome typography, good presswork and competent binding make it a book to be proud of. As for the contents, many of the verses show a maturity rare in the work of schoolboys, and one wonders whether all the charges of incompetence and absenteeism levelled against the masters of Berkhamsted School at that period were justified.

A copy of another book printed by M'Dowall is in the "Crispin" collection at the Berkhamsted Institute. Printed in Berkhamsted in 1793, it is entitled "Sermons on the History of Joseph, preached in the Parish Churches of Hemel Hempstead and Great Gaddesden, Herts, by the Rev. Nathaniel May, M.A."

It is a pity more is not known of M'Dowall and his *Berkhamsted Herald*.

Not until the 1840's do we hear of another printer in the town, and he was apparently in a very small way of business. His name would be unknown but for the fact that the Mechanics' Institute, on its foundation in 1845, ordered 100 handbills from Mr. Platrier, in whose front parlour the Institute's first reading room was established at a

By "BEORCHAM"

weekly rental of 1s. 6d., including "fire and candle." Like most small-town printers of the period, he probably had a few cases of type, a hand press, and plenty of enthusiasm!

For many years after the demise of the *Herald* Berkhamsted had no newspaper of its own. For local news one turned to the county newspapers, one of which, the *Hertfordshire Mercury*, published, in its issue of December 3, 1853, an account of a remarkable railway accident at Berkhamsted. Here are some extracts:

The express train which left London for the North of England on Thursday morning had passed through the Berkhamsted station about three-quarters of a mile, when it came to a sudden stop by the breaking of the axle of the fore wheel of the engine. The nearest wheel came off and from the velocity at which the train was going, the engine was thrown upon the bank and the carriages across the line. The guard's break (*sic*) was broken in pieces, and the guard killed on the spot. . . The passengers, among whom were Lord Lonsdale, Baron Rothschild, and several of their friends, sustained some severe bruises and lacerations. . . The express from Birmingham was expected every minute, and a labouring man named John Page, who was working close by, ran down the line just as the express was emerging from the tunnel, in order to stop it. The engine driver of the express train saw him and immediately shut off the steam, put on the breaks (*sic*), and reversed his engine. The distance, however, not being more than 350 yards from the place where the broken carriages were lying on the up-line, the express ran in among them and was thrown off the line."

The Short-Lived "Advertiser"

A brave attempt to give full reports of local news was made when the *Chesham Recorder and Berkhamstead Advertiser* was started at Chesham just before Christmas, 1867. It was a four-page penny paper, and among front page advertisers were the following Berkhamsted tradesmen:

W. D. Meikle, "chymist"; W. Archer, wholesale and retail brush manufacturer; A. Howard, auctioneer; E. Hill, tailor and hatter; D. Osborn, builder and undertaker; Isaac Bunker, corn dealer; G. Loosley, insurance agent; J. Griffin, fishmonger; J. Timson, baker; A. Wilkins, cabinet-maker; George Lingard, mason; D. Norris & Son, brick-makers; T. Read, coal and timber merchant; J. East & Son, timber dealers; J. Keen, baker; and J. Willmott, "manure manufacturer."

No. 8 of this journal gives a half-column report of a "penny reading" held by the Berkhamsted Mechanics' Institute and attended by 450 townspeople at the Town Hall under the chairmanship of the Rev. E. Bartram, then headmaster of Berkhamsted School. The rest of the local news is devoted to the Petty Sessions held on February 18, 1868. The following sub-

headings tell their own story of the seamy side of local life at that period: Poaching, Turnip Topping, Assault, Assaulting a Constable, Refusing to Support a Relative, and A Refractory Apprentice. A short item headed "A Tiresome Tramp" told of a vagrant who was sent to prison for 21 days for wilfully destroying his clothing at the workhouse.

The "Berkhamsted Times"

The *Recorder and Advertiser* did not last long — under capitalised local papers were frequent casualties in mid-Victorian days—but on April 17, 1875, our town once more had its own newspaper. This was the *Berkhamsted Times*, and, again thanks to Mr. A. E. Loosley, I have in my possession what is probably the only copy of No. 1 outside the British Museum.

It was an 8-page three-halfpenny paper, originally printed in London, and the first leading article stated that "it is gratifying to know that eighty shareholders, representing all shades of opinion, have voluntarily identified themselves with the movement."

The front page, wholly devoted to advertisements, gives prominence to many good old Berkhamsted names. For instance, there is an announcement from Messrs. Wood, the iron-founders, who still favour the *Review* as an advertising medium. Another old business still extant is that of William Nash, shoeing smith, who was able to advertise even in 1875 that his forge had been established for upwards of 100 years.

Compare These Prices

Old residents may remember Ezra Miller, who advertised in the *Berkhamsted Times* of 1875, that he not only had 400,000 bricks for sale but "unlimited quantity of coal." J. Bowler, another coal merchant, proudly drew attention to "a conveyance for pleasure parties to be let." Edward Platt, grocer, announced champagne at 2s. 5d. and whisky, brandy and rum at 2s. 3d. a bottle. E. G. Page & Co., of the Herts Tobacco Works, Northchurch, offered "good fine shag, 3s. 3d. per lb." and the best Cuban cigars at 8s. 6d. per 1 lb. box of 100. Willmott's Dairy drew attention to "new milk from the cow, 3d. per quart," and J. Hale, draper, listed almost everything, from sunshades, bonnets, crinolines, flowers and feathers to mourning bonnets, white and fancy skirts, and stays and corsets. Sills & Son advertised wooden shovels and brush handles from their turning mills in Holliday-street, and James Elliott was proud to announce that he had "decorations, flags, lamps, etc., for festive occasions." Mr. George Loosley, editor of the paper and leading local newsagent, told new products of universal education that "A Newspaper is a Necessity."

The first number of the *Berkhamsted Times* published a 2½ column report of the 29th annual meeting of the Mechanics' Institute, and Battalion Orders for the 1st and 7th Herts Rifle Volunteers. It was reported that water had just been laid on at the new railway station, and a suggestion was made that

the public should be allowed to use the subway through the old station "to obviate the danger arising from contact with vehicles coming to and from the Ashridge New-road under the somewhat contracted railway bridge."

Fourth Class on the Railway!

The back page of the *Times* gives local railway timetables and details of fares. Even in 1875 one could leave Berkhamsted at 9.33 and arrive at Euston by 10.18—a 45 minute run to be envied even at the present day. But the first train for Euston did not leave until 7.47 a.m. (the last return train left Euston at 9.25 p.m.), and the number of trains on weekdays was ten each way.

Passengers could travel first, second, third or "Parliamentary" class. First class single fare from Berkhamsted to Euston was 4s. 6d. (8s. 6d. return) and third class and "Parliamentary" single fares (return fares were not quoted for these classes) were 2s. 5d. and 2s. 4d. respectively.

Under the heading "Postal Services" it was stated that Berkhamsted Post Office was open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., and that there were three deliveries of letters on weekdays and one on Sundays. Latest time for posting letters to London was 9.5 p.m.—not 7 p.m., as now.

A house agent, incidentally, advertised the auction of five cottages let at a total rental of £29 6s. per annum—just over 2s. per week for each cottage. "Small capitalists seeking a safe investment to pay good interest" were advised to note the date of this property sale.

The *Berkhamsted Times*, afterwards printed by Mr. George Loosley in Berkhamsted, flourished for several years before it was absorbed by the *Watford Observer*.

The *Berkhamsted Gazette*, an offshoot of the *Hemel Hempstead Gazette*, was founded in 1904. A small local paper, printed on green paper and called the *Berkhamsted Independent*, made a brief appearance after the 1914-18 war.

A. HAR

(A. C. HART, FEEL)

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