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"BEORCHAM" TRACES THE DEVELOPMENT OF BERKHAMSTED

## From Norman Village to Modern Town

**B**ERKHAMSTED is so often spoken of as an "old" town that we are apt to forget that only a very small area really merits that description. Not one house in seven has been standing for more than a century, and elderly residents can recall a time when the town was only half its present size. Men and women in their early twenties are old enough to remember when there were no houses on Dell Field, Castle Hill, and Hall Park; and those in their thirties have childhood memories of the lovely parkland that was transformed, between the wars, into the Swing Gate-lane estate. It is an interesting thought that youngsters of to-day will be able, in years to come, to regale their grandchildren with recollections of green fields and pleasant hedgerows on the Council's new Durrants Estate, exciting the same interest as elderly people of to-day when they speak of the days when cows grazed in the Kitsbury area.

### The Castle's Influence

Let us try, as briefly as possible, to trace the growth of our town from early times. There was a small agricultural community here in Saxon days, and by the time of the Domesday Survey, Berkhamsted was a compact little village, situated in and near such fields as had been carved out of the Chiltern forest—all on the south side of the river, incidentally.

Then the Castle was built, bringing the town prosperity and influencing its shape for centuries to come. The "royal road" from the High-street to the Castle brought into being what for hundreds of years was our only side-street of note, and the creation of a park on the north side of the valley prevented building there until quite recent times.

Here and there were rough tracks

to isolated farms, cottages and water-mills; but Leland, in the 16th century, noticed only the High-street and Castle-street ("a large strete metely well builded . . . and another, but somewhat lesser, where the ryver remith.") As the centuries passed Mill-street grew in importance, and rows of cottages were built in The Wilderness and Cox's-lane (now King's-road); but even in early Victorian days a writer was able to say that Berkhamsted was "an almost endless street, with none of the side-streets now teeming with life."

### Industrial Expansion

The years 1830-70 saw the first phase of Berkhamsted's modern development. The railway opened new trading opportunities, steam saw-mills revolutionised the old wood-turning industry, William Cooper founded his chemical works, and a flourishing brush-making trade developed. To meet the housing needs of factory workers, several side-streets were developed near the principal places of employment—Highfield-road, Victoria-road, Bridge-street, Provident-place, Holiday-street, parts of Ravens-lane, Manor-street and Chapel-street, the western ends of George-street and Ellesmere-road, Park-street, and the little turnings off Gossoms End.

### "Dormitory" Town

The practicability of daily journeys to and from London and the growing reputation of Berkhamsted School influenced the next phase of the town's development. More streets of cottages were built, but there was also a growing demand for larger houses for businessmen who elected to live in Berkhamsted because it was conveniently near London and because good schools were available.

The western half of the town was then ripe for development. In 1868 the "Kitts End Bury Estate" came in the market, and the "meadow, pasture and arable land" offered for sale included what is now Kitsbury-road and the east side of Gilham's-lane (Cross Oak-road) from the High-street to Charles-street\*. The sale prospectus stated:

"The new streets, called Kitts-bury-road and Doctors Commons-road\*, will be laid out, formed and gravelled . . . and the whole presents advantageous sites for erecting villa residences, business premises and private dwellings, so much required in this locality. . . . The residents on the Estate will be entitled to all the advantages of the richly-endowed Free Grammar School."

When the neighbouring Boxwells Estate was sold eleven years later, in 1879, "the proposed new road" (Boxwell-road) was stated to be "on the preferable side of the High-street," and the vendors stressed that "the

\* It was originally intended to call Charles-street Doctors Commons-road, but this name was given many years later to another new road in the vicinity. "Doctors Commons" was the name of a field on the south side of Charles-street.

railway station is near at hand, from whence London may be reached in 51 minutes." [Half a century later very few local trains steam to and from London in 51 minutes.]

After the Kitsbury and Boxwells developments came the sale, in 1887, of Steele's Meadow and the Doctors Commons Building Estate. Several new roads were then created—Cowper-road, Torrington-road, Montague-road, Angle-place, and part of Charles-street. Before 1887 there were no buildings at all on this estate other than a few houses and business premises adjoining the High-street, among them Pethybridge's Coach Manufactory on the present Co-operative Stores site.

### More Victorian Enterprise

In 1888 the first part of the Kingshill Estate, stretching from King's-road to Cross Oak-road and comprising the whole of the Gramesdyke-road area, was sold. Another part of the Kingshill Estate, including what is now Doctors Commons-road and part of Charles-street and King's-road, was sold in 1897; four years later 50 plots of land in another new road, North-road, were sold by auction; and in 1902 a start was made on Shrublands-avenue and a further part of Cross Oak-road. In 1907 came the sale of the old allotments between Cross Oak-road and what is now Queen's-road, then indicated on the map as a mere footpath.

Meanwhile, there had been great activity elsewhere in the town, notably in the Sunnyside area.

The year 1886 was notable for proposals which, fortunately, came to nothing. It was intended to extend Prince Edward-street (Princes-street, according to the vendors' map) to

Butts Meadow and sell six plots of land "for the building of good middle-class houses" on the land afterwards occupied by the Victoria Schools.

### When Butts Meadow was Sold

At the same time there was a possibility—at the time it seemed a certainty—of Butts Meadow passing into the hands of building speculators. "The valuable freehold building estate known as 'The Butts,'" to quote the prospectus, was offered for sale by direction of the churchwardens of Aldbury, the land having been purchased in the 17th century with £100 given to the parish of Aldbury by Thomas Hyde. The six acres involved in the sale included both Butts Meadow and the adjacent allotments, but not a small strip of land on the north side of the meadow, which an unknown donor entrusted to the safe keeping of the Berkhamsted churchwardens centuries ago.

### The vendors stated:

"The Butts' afford numerous inviting sites for the erection of superior houses, for which there is a continual and increasing demand. . . . The Church of St. Peter, the Post Office (with four deliveries daily), the Bank and the Town Hall are in the immediate vicinity. . . . Apart from these advantages attaching to the land as a speculative building site, to a private individual it possesses great attractions for the erection of a single residence."

Happily, Butts Meadow was not "developed." It was purchased and presented to the town by the late Mrs. Lionel Lucas, of Kingshill. The sister of Sir Julian Goldsmit, a famous Jewish M.P. in Victorian days, she gave Berkhamsted one of its most valuable "lungs," and it is unfortunate that no nearby street bears the name Lucas in memory of a great and generous benefactress.

### BELLRINGERS AT BERKHAMSTED

More than fifty bellringers from Herts, Beds and Bucks, and one from London University, attended a meeting at Berkhamsted on Saturday, November 13. Ringing commenced at 3 p.m., and the various methods included Grandsire, Stedman and Bob Major. At 4.30 a service, conducted by the Rector, was held in the church and was followed by tea in St. Peter's Hall and a business meeting at which Kings Langley was chosen as the venue for the next meeting, on December 11. The ringers again visited the belfry for further ringing until 8 p.m., a few afterwards remaining in St. Peter's Hall to ring various methods on the hand-bells.

In addition to the Berkhamsted ringers were visitors from Tring (7), St. Albans (7), Hemel Hempstead (5), Leighton Buzzard (2), Stoke Poges (1), Dunstable (2), Apsley (11), London University (1), Redbourn (1), Hatfield (2), Edlesborough (2), Kings Langley (1) and Watford (2).

### A PAGEANT OF CHRISTMAS

On Wednesday, December 15, at 7.30 p.m., the children of Victoria Primary School will present a Christmas Pageant, in aid of the School Fund. Tickets at 2s. 6d. and 1s. 6d. will be on sale at the school, after Monday, December 6.

### WHIST DRIVE

A whist drive will be held in All Saints' Hall on Wednesday, December 15, at 7.30 p.m. Tickets, 2s. Refreshments—cup of tea, 1d.; cake, 2d. Proceeds in aid of the Organ Appeal Working Party Funds.

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