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## Houses with a History

AS two-thirds of the houses and cottages in Berkhamsted High-street have been converted into shops, back-door visits must be paid to view the astonishing variety of the architecture. Much of it is ancient, not a little is downright ugly, but no one can say that we have to endure dull uniformity. Before shop fronts changed the face of the High-street, a Victorian writer remarked that "in passing on towards the West End one would have been struck by the quaintness of the buildings, in some cases approaching the ludicrous."

Perhaps the most picturesque building of all is the old Bourne School, now a branch of the National Provincial Bank. Unlike neighbouring premises, it looks much the same today as it did two centuries ago, and the fine brickwork still excites admiration.

### The Old School Hall

The story of the Bourne School is familiar to regular readers of these articles, but little has been said about the building itself. It was erected in 1737 at a cost of £700, and on both sides of the stone corridor were classrooms and separate but identical apartments for the master and mistress. In the 18th century they received 11s. 6d. and 5s. 9d. a week respectively—not handsome rewards, but at least they had free quarters and free firing.

The original classrooms faced the High-street and were apparently in regular use until 1853, when a large schoolroom, often called "the hall," was built on part of the school garden. In the course of modern extensions to the original school building, a large part of the hall has been demolished, but a notice board preserved at the Victoria School tells us that it was "erected by subscription of the inhabitants and neighbours of Berkhamsted St. Peter" and was opened on March 30, 1853. The

school bell from the turret of the Bourne School, still an attractive feature of the old building, is also preserved at the Victoria School.

A few years after the Bourne children were transferred to the Church of England school at the Court House, their old school building became, in 1888, the first "home" of the Berkhamsted School for Girls. A few "old girls" still recall the days when several forms were taught together in the hall, which was extended and altered in 1893 and was regularly used for nine more years until the new school in

### FOURTH of a new series of articles by 'BEORCHAM'

King's-road—at first nicknamed "the jam factory"—was opened. In 1903 the former Bourne School house became a bank.

Westward along the High-street, beyond a row of old and new shops, we come to "The Homestead," now the home of Mr. J. G. Richards and his sisters. It is not a large house, and architecturally it is one of the plainest in the town—but what a story it has to tell!

### Mayor who cast out Devils

Here lived one of Berkhamsted's last mayors, Dr. Christopher Woodhouse. Elected an alderman in 1856 and mayor in 1860, he was one of the "City fathers" who could have stopped the Borough Council from dying an untimely death in 1862-3. But perhaps plagues and pestilences left the doctor with very little time for local government work; he was a busy and very capable physician, who gained more than local fame for his skill in curing bewitched persons! Some of the "stinking fumigations" he prescribed caused his patients to swoon, and perhaps that was as good a way as any to rid them of the devil. The British Museum possesses a remarkable picture showing Dr. Woodhouse holding Mary Hall, daughter of a Little Gaddesden blacksmith, over a bowl of some evil-looking brew. A delightful little devil, complete with horns and tail, is seen popping out of poor Mary's head!

### Friend of William Penn

Among Christopher Woodhouse's friends was William Penn, who often cantered over to "The Homestead" from his home in Buckinghamshire. He tried to induce the doctor's daughter, Gulielma Woodhouse, to go to his long-lost American colony, Pennsylvania.

Christopher Woodhouse died in 1682, seven years before his son John was elected churchwarden of St. Peter's, and it is to be regretted that during church restorations the memorial tablet which recorded the

doctor's "great charity towards the poor, without display, and with the greatest modesty," was lost.

### Roll Out the Barrel!

"The Homestead" estate originally stretched from St. John's Well-lane almost to what is now Lower King's-road, and part of the large garden—perhaps the oldest in the town—is still attached to the house. The estate was greatly improved early in the 19th century, when the four cottages in St. John's Well-lane were built for the coachman and gardeners. At that time the estate was owned by a London brewer who, on learning that a friend had been ruined by drink, resolved there and then to abandon his trade. So great was his remorse that the brewery was closed down and handsome offers to buy the business were sternly refused. At home, the ex-brewer rolled out his barrels of beer and hurled them, with bottles of wine, into the river at the bottom of the garden.

It is interesting to recall that when "The Homestead" was sold in 1898—it was then named "Wistaria Cottage"—the house next door, now a fish shop, was let for 3s. a week.

### A High-street Clothing Factory

Now let us cross the High-street to the row of old buildings occupied by the Berkhamsted Co-operative Society. How many townspeople of today are aware that the Bulbourne Factory was started over what are now the green-grocery, butcher's and hardware departments? The premises were originally used by a firm of coach-builders (Pethybridge, later Pocock), and over fifty years ago the upper storey was acquired by Messrs. Hughes, Hawkins & Co., manufacturers of ladies' coats, costumes and capes—especially capes in those days! To the dismay of dressmakers and tailors, mass-production methods were introduced to Berkhamsted. There must be several original employees surviving who can remember working long hours by the flickering light of "fishtail" gas jets. The business prospered, and in two or three years was transferred to Lower King's-road.

### Where to Find Dollars

Mention of the Co-operative Society recalls the interesting ancestry of the tall Cowper-road building "topped" by the Progress Hall. This was built on the site of a large house which, in the 18th century, was the home of a celebrated traveller and writer named Henry Johnson. After many years in the service of the South Sea Company, he returned to England with a large fortune and settled at Berkhamsted, writing learned and sometimes lurid accounts of his South American adventures. He claimed to have found the body of a pigmy in Peru lying beside 400,000 dollars! Sir Joshua Reynolds painted a portrait of one of Johnson's daughters, Agnetta, whose husband died three days after he was appointed Lord Chancellor.

Before leaving Cowper-road, it may be mentioned that the green corrugated

iron building opposite the Progress Hall was Berkhamsted's first cinema, "The Gem." Although used for many years as a warehouse by the Gas Company, this building still retains the original pay-box to which patrons often applied for the return of their coppers when the projector broke down!

Returning to the north side of the High-street, we find some very mixed architecture west of "The Homestead." Here are buildings of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, with Mr. V. Lintott's shop and the Rural District Council office providing modern variety. The most attractive building of this row is undoubtedly the house of Mr. and Mrs. A. C. Dixon, which is thought to be about 300 years old. For generations it has been occupied by veterinary surgeons.

### One Cottage, Three Staircases

The row of shops west of Mr. Dixon's house formerly had some unusual features. Mr. G. H. Sills, the veteran photographer, tells me that the bedrooms were partly over the sitting rooms and kitchens of neighbouring houses; on going to bed one went not merely upstairs but west as well! The old cottage which was demolished some 20 years ago to make way for the Rural District Council office had three separate flights of stairs—one to each bedroom.

Wood's ironworks have occupied the same site for more than a century—the business was founded in 1826, if not earlier—and it was here where Lord Brownlow's agents, in 1866, ordered the iron fences used to enclose Berkhamsted Common. After the celebrated midnight raid, employees of the ironworks had to salvage the broken fences and erect them elsewhere on the Ashridge Estate. Some may still be seen in the Park beside the road to Berkhamsted Place.

Next door to the Iron Foundry are Monk's Cottage and Monk's House—intriguing names, indeed! And it is here where we shall resume our tour next month.

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