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ESTAB. 1826

When Highfield Road was "The Pightle"

AFTER the High-street, Cox's-lane (King's-road), Castle-street, Mill-street and Water-lane—what next? We shall not find many more "houses with a history," but a number of other Berkhamsted side-streets have interesting stories to tell. Raven's-lane has no ancient buildings, but it has existed and borne the same name for at least 600 years. A document of 1357 refers to "Ravenygeslane," and in 1565 the spelling was "Ravenislane." A century ago it was still "truly rural," and the census of 1841 mentions but two householders in the lane. Henry Nash, in "Reminiscences of Berkhamsted," writes: "Raven's-lane was rightly named, being overshadowed by large trees, where, as tradition says, the ravens made their home." But the name was not the happy thought of a bird-watcher of long ago; Raven's-lane was almost certainly named after John Raven, who fought at Crecy and, as the Black Prince's "esquire," was an important figure in 14th century Berkhamsted. He is the subject of a fine brass in St. Peter's Church.

From Meadow to Factory

Raven's-lane completely changed its face eighty or ninety years ago. When a large portion of the Pilkington Manor Estate was sold in the early 'fifties, William Cooper built his factory on what was previously a meadow. Later came Sibdon (now Bartrum) House, the Baptist Church, a long row of cottages, and the inevitable public-house (the "Brownlow Arms"), which was rebuilt about twenty years ago.

Another public-house, "The Boat," is a curious mixture of ancient and

modern. From the tow-path we have an attractive view of the original cottage, built long before the canal was cut. Like the "sunken" cottages in Castle-street, it is several feet below the level of the road, which was raised when the bridge was built.

Raven's-lane and its continuation, Gravel-path (more aptly named "Gravel-hill" in Loosley's Directory for 1887) came into greater prominence when the Sunnyside area was developed. Several small businesses were started, and the 1887 Directory gives the following list of tradespeople: C. Bates, coal merchant; Mrs. A. Collins, coal merchant; J. King, bootmaker; C. Kingham, baker; D. Mead, confec-

By "BEORCHAM"

tioner; M. Millburn, shopkeeper; M. Plested, shopkeeper; J. Stacey, bootmaker; and E. Sams, fishmonger. Incidentally, the first branch shop of the Berkhamsted Co-operative Society was opened at Provident-place corner, now Mr. Geary's shoe shop.

Holliday-street (named after the former owners of the old-established wheelwright's business at the top of the street) is one of Berkhamsted's unhappiest developments. The street contains several pleasant cottages, but the view of the backyards of Raven's-lane does not satisfy modern town planners! The long-defunct Working Men's Club had its headquarters in Holliday-street for several years; here, too, were two small saw-mills, owned by Mr. T. Read and Mr. J. Silis, and the printing works of the *Berkhamsted Times*. The steam engine at Read's saw-mill not only operated the circular saw but drove the printing machines next door.

The First Review

Speaking of printing, it is interesting to recall the humble origin of Cooper's printing works, the Clunbury Press. Over eighty years ago, William Cooper, founder of the chemical works, purchased the type and machines of an unsuccessful printing business in what is now part of H. Lee and Sons' mineral water factory. The plant was transferred to Raven's-lane, and here, in the early 'seventies, the first issue of the Berkhamsted Parish Magazine (eight small pages) was printed. A much larger *Review* is now produced by a much larger printing works; in fact, the circulation of this journal has increased from 250 to over 1,800.

Let us now cross the High-street to The Pightle. Older residents will not need to be told that I refer to Highfield-road, so called because it led to Highfield House, a mansion pulled

down a few years before the war, when the estate was purchased for a Council housing scheme. In early Victorian days this steep road was known as Prospect-street or Prospect-place; we can only guess whether the name was inspired by the view or by "great expectations." It is a pity the older and more attractive name, "The Pightle," was ever abandoned. Of Anglo-Saxon origin, it means "a strip of meadow-land between two copses." But the meadow, like the copses, disappeared a long time ago!

Writing of his boyhood over 100 years ago, Henry Nash states: "The Pightle, or Highfield-road, as now known, was the site of a farmyard with its thrashing-barn, where the sound of the flail aroused the sleepers and gave a friendly call to daily duties."

Food—and Drink

The "Queen's Arms" at Highfield-road corner is of uncertain age, but its stout timbers suggest that it must be at least 300 years old. An octogenarian tells me that in the 'seventies he and fellow choir-boys at St. Peter's regularly called at the "Queen's Arms" after the weekly practices—not for liquid refreshment but for slices of a special kind of cake known as "Blanket." The licensee, George Headinge, was also a baker, and a two-penny slice of his "Blanket"—so called because it was soft and spongy—was guaranteed to keep hunger at bay for two or three hours.

"The Chaffcutters Arms"

At the top of Highfield-road was another public-house, the "Chaffcutters Arms." It is mentioned in Pigot's Hertfordshire Directory for 1824, when Joseph Howard catered for the thirsts of tradesmen who toiled to the top of the road to deliver goods to Highfield House. The "Chaffcutters Arms" was converted into two cottages over a century ago, and a former tenant tells me that when repairing the cellar ceiling he was showered with sand from the bar-parlour which had accumulated between the floor-boards.

On the east side of Highfield-road is a large building with an unmistakable ecclesiastical appearance. It was built as a Wesleyan chapel in 1848, and on March 27, 1854, it was registered under the New Chapel Acts as "Prospect Place Chapel." In 1856 the Strict Baptists moved in, and for a short time the building was also used by the Plymouth Brethren. The chapel was converted into two cottages about ninety years ago.

The Pightle Brush-Works

At the rear of one of the tall houses above the former chapel was a little brush-works owned by the late Mr. R. Plested. Here he employed a number of girls, and when business was brisk he could also count on the support of outworkers living in "The Row," the little turning off Highfield-road. Like many other small brush-works using hand methods, it gradually declined when large factories introduced mass-production. Other

Highfield-road traders mentioned in the 1887 Directory were Mr. J. Potton, tailor, and Mr. Bates, bootmaker.

Three Closes

Victoria-road was the site of a paddock or close attached to the Goat Inn—one of the three closes which gave the neighbouring lane its name. This lane was the carriage drive to Highfield House; Highfield-road was merely the "tradesmen's entrances."

Chesham-road—what a delightful sunken lane it must have been in years gone by!—tells its own story of the wear and tear of centuries. Teams of drag-horses were formerly kept to help haul wagons up this cruelly steep hill. Seven or eight centuries ago Royalty passed down this lane when riding from Windsor to Berkhamsted Castle; it was also used by Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort when they drove from Windsor to Woburn in 1841 and received the cheers of thousands in the gaily-decorated High-street while the horses were changed at the King's Arms.

Where the Ostlers Lived

In years gone by Chesham-road was known as Elvey, Elvyne, or Grubbs-lane. These are very old local family names. A document of 1525 refers to "Elwynslane," and we find "Grubslane" mentioned in 1608. The oldest buildings, other than the former brewery property at High-street corner, are the cottages just above the footpath which connects Chesham-road with Charles-street. Owned by the Oddfellows, these cottages were the homes of grooms and ostlers employed at the King's Arms in the coaching days.

The only ancient side-street west of King's-road (described in an earlier article) is Cross Oak-road. Formerly this was called Gillam's-lane, and, as at the present day, it led to Shootersway.

Here we must interrupt our tour until next month's issue—but as Shootersway is believed to be a corruption of an old name meaning "Robbers' Way," it will be seen that we still have some interesting stories to relate!

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