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HOUSES WITH A HISTORY—16

BY "BEORCHAM"

"Ragged Row"— in Berkhamsted's West End

SHORTLY we shall extend our tour to Northchurch—which, in proportion to its size, has many more old houses than Berkhamsted—but before leaving the parish of St. Peter we have yet to visit a part of the High-street which escaped notice in earlier articles: the south side between King's-road and Gossoms End. More changes have perhaps taken place here in the past 100 years than in any other part of the High-street, but a few 17th and 18th century buildings survive among the modern, or comparatively modern, shops and houses.

Old residents can recall the time when there were no side-streets between Cox's-lane (King's-road) and Gillam's-lane (Cross Oak-road). There were elms but no houses in Elm-grove, and the forerunner of this quiet cul-de-sac was an alley which led to the gardens of houses facing the High-street. Two hundred yards or so westward, at what is now Cowper-road corner, one had a clear view of a steep meadow where Mr. V. Lintott's predecessor, Mr. W. T. Timson, kept sheep and pigs until it was time to drive them through a gate beside the almshouses to the slaughter-houses behind his shop.

Kitsbury Farm

Park View-road was a little track to Lane's stables, packing sheds and nurseries; and until 1879 Boxwell-road was a gated drive to the stables of Boxwell House and the "Lamb" public-house. Similarly, before the "meadow pasture and arable land" of Kicks End Bury came in the market in 1868, Kitsbury-road was a rustic track to a half-timbered farmhouse, pulled down about 25 years ago.

The oldest buildings surviving in this part of the High-street are the "Lamb" public-house and Mr. Basil Leatherdale's shop. Both date from early Stuart if not from Tudor times, and both look decidedly older from the back than from the front. For half of its long life Mr. Leatherdale's shop was an ironmonger's, started by a Mr. Allen about the year 1790 and owned by the Rawlins family from 1850 until some 15 years ago.

Sexton and Watchmaker

Barclays Bank retains the plain but pleasing façade of Sydney House, believed to be about 175 years old, and Mr. Sharland's shops replaced a motley group of old buildings. One, a tiny double-fronted house, was the home of Mr. John Heath, sexton of St. Peter's in mid-Victorian days, who found time to ply the trade of watchmaker while his wife sold Bibles and prayer-books in the front parlour.

The modern Westminster Bank building replaced some tiny shops. Burnham's flower shop was a popular subject for artists and photographers.

Externally, Lloyd's Bank has not greatly changed since it was a private house, named "The Elms" after the fine trees which were once a feature of this part of the High-street. The house was built on the site of the ancient home of a celebrated doctor of early Victorian times, Dr. Steele. A contemporary writer states: "To have seen him with his tight-fitting pants, his Hessian boots, and other garments to match, the most critical observer would have pronounced him the beau-idéal of a gentleman."

"The Elms" was afterwards the home of Mr. C. Bullock, a solicitor, and it is interesting to recall that the Ministry of Labour offices were built for his partner, Mr. Thomas Penny, first clerk to the Urban District Council.

The "Royal Oak"

The Sayer almshouses look much the same today as when they were built in 1684, but recent repairs have cost considerably more than the original price—£269 for the whole row, or slightly less than £45 per house! Next door stood a little public-house, "The Royal Oak." As it was for many years lighted by one oil lamp, perhaps it deserved to be replaced by the Gas offices!

An octogenarian reader recalls leaving school over 70 years ago and watching workmen demolish a long, straw-thatched barn (used by a builder named Harris) which preceded the row of villas known as Camellia-terrace. The "George" public-house looks typically Victorian, but references to a hostelry of this name in ancient

documents suggests that it has a long ancestry. In years gone by it was nicknamed "The Drum and Monkey."

Salter's Charity

The date 1834 is proclaimed by the school at Park View-road corner, known successively as the Chalk, Board, Council and Park View School. Edward Salter bequeathed the site, with other local property, to the parish in 1696, stipulating that the rent was to be distributed among "the industrious and laborious poor." A house on "Salter's Charity," as the land was called, was converted into a workhouse, and a Victorian writer described it as "one of the most wretched hovels in the town. . . . It was straw-thatched, and its tumbledown condition must have aroused the sympathy of right-minded people as they gazed upon the miserable home of the aged poor."

It was pulled down in 1833 and

POINTS FROM LETTERS

Stating that he was greatly interested in references to William Hazell, the enterprising grocer responsible for building the West Herts Stores (now International Stores) a century ago, a reader mentions that the old bacon smoking house, with its black walls, may still be seen, together with the "slip" where the pigs were taken down to await their destiny. The racks where the fitches were matured may also be seen, though perhaps 40 years have elapsed since they were used for that purpose.

Messrs. Crisp's shop (formerly Timson's) was once a private school for girls, kept by the Misses Simmons, writes a correspondent, who was a boarder despite the fact that she lived only four miles away, "Transport was so difficult," she states, "that girls from Tring and other nearby towns and villages were boarders from Monday to Saturday, spending very short week-ends at home. In 1892 the school was transferred to the Manor House, but was closed shortly afterwards."

Pointing out that Cox's-lane (King's-road) was not widened until several years after the "new" police station was built, a correspondent states that some old cottages caused a notorious "bottle-neck" and incensed a former owner of Rossway, who sometimes missed the train when his dog-

replaced by Berkhamsted's first elementary school.

At a vestry meeting on March 25, 1833, Mr. Augustus Smith successfully championed "a good parish school for teaching boys and girls reading, writing and arithmetic, and other useful work." Fifteen months later the school was opened, and it was not long before the rector and churchwardens decided that Berkhamsted should have a church school, too. But neither school was a resounding success so far as attendance was concerned. Until the Education Act of 1870 gave local authorities the right to make education compulsory, not more than one-third of the children attended regularly, and many on the registers never went to school at all. It is interesting to recall that the cost of educating 292 children at the Board School in 1875 was about £430, or £1 9s. 5d. per child.

So much for the school. A new site had to be found for the workhouse, and it was decided to remove another

eyesore in Berkhamsted's West End, "Ragged Row." This was not a nickname; it was officially recognised and appears in many old documents. "Ragged Row" and the workhouse have been replaced by modern shops and flats at Kitabury-road corner, and the present tenants may not be aware that the land has a somewhat slender link with Charles I.

Nugent House

In 1620, as Prince of Wales, he gave £82 to Berkhamsted for the benefit of the poor, and the money was used to buy several small cottages. Tenants were selected by the overseers of the poor, and no rent was charged. Little if anything at all was spent on the repair of the paupers' tenements, and by the early 19th century they were as wretched as the old workhouse.

And so, in 1833, "Ragged Row" was pulled down to make way for the

cart was held up. It is believed that he contributed, or offered to contribute, towards the cost of widening the road. The cottages were pulled down in 1963-4.

Another reader recalls the time when Messrs. East & Son had a small timber yard on land now occupied by the row of villas west of St. John's Well-lane. A thatched cow-shed was a quaint relic of the past.

A reader possesses a bill issued by a firm which formerly owned a small factory at Gravel-path—George-street corner, opposite the "Boat" public-house. The printed heading states: "Bought of Curtis & Ulrich, Wholesale Rag Merchants, Commission Agents, Great Berkhamsted." The heading includes a highly imaginative illustration, showing large factory buildings, some three storeys high, with a tall chimney. In the foreground is the "Boat" public-house and the canal bridge. The bill is dated March 25, 1861, and the following is written in ink: "Please to receive and dye as many colors as possible 14 Bags of Woollen Cloth." Although Curtis & Ulrich never owned a large factory in Berkhamsted (Victorian business-men were fond of publishing exaggerated illustrations of their works) it is likely that the firm built the premises at George-street corner.

new workhouse, or, as it was known when the name "workhouse" was officially frowned upon, Nugent House. The name commemorated the Rev. George Nugent, who was rector of Bygrave, near Baldoek, but preferred to live at the Red House, Berkhamsted. His heart was "moved to compassion towards those poor unfortunate creatures" condemned to live in the old workhouse on "Salter's Charity," and he left £1,000 towards the cost of a new building. Nugent House was in regular use until 1935, when, despite many protests, the inmates were transferred to Hemel Hempstead and the property was sold for £3,700.

A Berkhamsted Windmill

"Beorcham" would be pleased to hear from anyone who possesses a copy of a print of Berkhamsted dated 1724, showing the Castle, Berkhamsted Place, and a windmill on White Hill.



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