

PEACE, PLENTY — AND POVERTY

The Good Old "Times"

By BEORCHAM

Many years ago, when the late Mr. George Loosley moved from Castle-street to High-street, he gave a neighbouring tradesman a bundle of newspapers, suggesting that they would be useful for wrapping up fish. They were file copies of the *Berkhamsted Times*, which was printed in Holiday-street and edited by Mr. Loosley for many years until the journal was incorporated in the *Watford Observer* fifty years ago.

Happily, the papers were not used for the purpose suggested. Over fifty copies have been preserved, and the earliest are dated 1876 and 1877. The *Berkhamsted Times* was then a penny four-page paper, and by the simple expedient of changing the heading it also appeared as the *Chesham News* and the *Tring Telegraph*. In the 'eighties, when the paper had grown to eight large pages, only one edition was published.

Compare These Prices!

The advertisements are as interesting as the news columns. Willmott's Dairy advertised new milk at 3d. a quart; one could buy a sewing machine for 10s. 6d.; and beardless men had to pay but sixpence for a recipe, "in plain English, which anyone can prepare for a few pence," to produce whiskers! A Tring grocer advertised port wine at 1s. 3d. a bottle, brandy, whisky and rum at 2s. 3d. a bottle, and champagne at 2s. 1d. a quart. Roberts and Wilson, of Ivinghoe Brewery, offered harvest beer at 30s. and 25s. a barrel, pale ale at 1s. 4d. a gallon, and mild ale at 1s. a gallon. The Northchurch Tobacco Works proudly announced "Oriental smoking mixture" at 4d. an ounce or 4s. 8d. per lb.

In 1893, Mr. David Pike advertised pure honey at 6d. a lb. (7 lb. for 3s.), 1s. boxes of chocolates for 11d., 5 tons of potatoes at 1s. 6d. a bushel, carrots at 1s. 3d. a bushel, and 40 Lisbon oranges for a shilling. William Simpson, at what is now the International stores, offered "good mild butter, 1s. per lb.," and Cheeld's Stores sold "choice Irish bacon gammon, 7d. lb.; hocks 5d. lb." A news item in the issue dated December 30, 1887, stated: "At the general market on Saturday evening last seven butchers had stalls, and beef was to be had at 'ten pounds for three bob.'"

Men's Overcoats 12/9 each

John M. Gammon, Berkhamsted outfitter, advertised "Men's nap overcoats, 12s. 9d. (worth 16s. 9d.); boys' cape overcoats, 5s. 11d. (worth 8s. 11d.)." Men's working boots were

such as Mr. Cheeld and other grocers use. Another was a preserve jar, which a boy hogged in his arms and which, being nearly full, overflowed down his Saturday suit, and therefore was not altogether lost, though outside instead of inside, where it ought to have gone. Some of the boys were so hard pressed that on getting to a sunny side by the wall to the station, they used the lids of their cans for vessels and, pulling a piece off a loaf, had a roadside snack. The soup was of good quality, and was alike suitable to young and old, as well as all others."

The Seamy Side

The *Berkhamsted Times*' police-court reports are largely concerned with drunkenness, poaching, and assaults on wives and neighbours. But in Victorian days we had juvenile delinquents, too, and some of the sentences passed on young people are almost staggering in their severity.

A ten-years-old girl was sent by her mother to buy a farthing's-worth of salt at Tring Co-operative Stores. While the assistant was fetching the salt from the cellar, the girl picked up a knife and cut off a piece of suet, which she hid under her dress. The crime was witnessed by the store manager, and the girl, who had been previously fined for theft, spent the next ten days at St. Albans gaol, followed by five years in a reformatory.

A 14 years-old boy stole some money from his employer, a publican, who asked the magistrates to deal leniently

At The Workhouse

For many people it was the time of peace and plenty. But scores of families were unable to afford the prices of the day, and one of the busiest men in the town was the workhouse master. February was usually a bad month, and in 1887 no fewer than 488 people in the Berkhamsted district received out-relief. Of these 238 were described as not able-bodied, 63 as able-bodied, and 187 were children. In the workhouse were 36 infirm men, eight infirm women, three able-bodied men, one able-bodied woman, thirteen boys, eight girls, and one infant.

The Soup Charity

The *Times* gives an interesting description of the distribution of soup and bread to the poor in the Castle grounds—an annual institution remembered by many old townspeople:—

The soup distribution is an important event at Berkhamsted in the (winter) season, coming twice a week, Wednesday and Saturday, from eleven till about twelve o'clock, at the soup house in the Castle grounds. On Saturday last, some 340 families experienced the benefits of the excellent charity, which was accompanied by a distribution of bread (one pound to a pint of soup) from Baltham's charity.

The recipients were admitted alphabetically, a policeman regulating their admission to the savoury precincts of the kitchen. Here two immense coppers were filled with the hot compound, Mr. Brooks and C. Wedgertield, with long ladles, supplying it to the accepted applicants, who were furnished with numbered tickets, which had to be produced.

On Saturday the names were called out by Mr. Alfred Miller, the treasurer, in conjunction with the Rector, who marked the book and stated that everyone on the list had attended. The treasurer received 17s. in coppers at a farthing a pint, which shows that 816 pints were distributed. Mr. Rippon attended to the distribution of the bread, being assisted by Mr. F. Miller, who represented his brother, Mr. E. Miller.

From all parts of the parish came the people with their 340 tin cans, or other vessels, some of which, improvised for the occasion, were of an interesting description. One had a capital contrivance, the insertion of a handle into the sides of a jam tin of considerable dimensions,

such as Mr. Cheeld and other grocers use. Another was a preserve jar, which a boy hogged in his arms and which, being nearly full, overflowed down his Saturday suit, and therefore was not altogether lost, though outside instead of inside, where it ought to have gone. Some of the boys were so hard pressed that on getting to a sunny side by the wall to the station, they used the lids of their cans for vessels and, pulling a piece off a loaf, had a roadside snack. The soup was of good quality, and was alike suitable to young and old, as well as all others."

E. T. COUGHTREY

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