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PEEPS AT AN OLD CENSUS BOOK

Berkhamsted Folk in 1851

Thanks to the Public Record Office, I recently had the opportunity of looking through the 1851 Census returns for Berkhamsted. It is a fascinating book, studded with names which are still familiar in the town. Halsey, Rance, Norwood, Tompkins, Nash, Sills, Ellens, Cooper, Tomlin, Cook, Dell, Greene, Preston, Wood, Harris—these and many other family names may be found in both ancient and modern census returns.

And the year 1851 does not seem very far away when we find that Thomas Ellens, who came so near to attaining his century, was five months old when the census of 102 years ago was taken. He was brought to Berkhamsted at a very early age, for he was born in St. Pancras, London. Then, as now, longevity was not rare: in one of the Sayer almshouses lived Rebecca Wood, aged 99 years. She was a native of Royston.

From All Quarters

A surprising feature of the 1851 census returns is the large number of "foreigners." The railway was only a dozen or so years old, and one imagined that few people strayed far from their native parish. But we have documentary evidence that a very large number of the inhabitants were not natives of Berkhamsted. Many hailed from towns and villages of nearby Buckinghamshire, and almost every county was represented. Yet very few were Londoners, probably because London was a greater residential magnet than it is in this season-ticket age. Three residents hailed from the New World—from Quebec, New York and Philadelphia.

Large houses in the district were seldom staffed by local servants. At Highfield House, the five servants who waited upon their master, John Hyde, hailed from Flaunden, Cotterham,

Thame, Aylesbury, and Chenies. Ministering to the needs of Thomas Halsey, M.P., his wife and one son (aged twelve months) at The Hall were a butler, footman, coachman, groom, housekeeper, cook, nurse, dairy-maid, kitchen-maid, two laundry-maids and two housemaids—and of these only the groom was Berkhamsted-born.

William Cooper

Haresfoot had a staff of twelve servants, and at Berkhamsted Place eight servants waited upon Colonel John Finch, his wife, and an orphan who was staying at the house when the census was taken. The colonel's neighbour, Noah Newman, of Castle Hill Farm, had five house servants and fourteen labourers to farm his 310 acres.

Unlike the landed gentry, William Cooper, founder of Cooper, McDougall and Robertson Ltd., had no servant. He lived in a little house near the police station, and was described as a "graduated veterinary surgeon." A native of Clunbury, Salop, he was 37 years old; his wife, Mary, was three years his senior. Living with them were his nephew, John Simnet (14 years old, and already an apprentice); his niece, Emma Simnet, a schoolgirl; and William Wilson, his 21 years old assistant.

At the police station, George Mackay (born in Scotland) was superintendent of the Herts Rural Police. He was a bachelor. Under the same roof lived Mackay's man-servant and his wife and two children. There were no prisoners on the night of the census!

At the Workhouse

The most densely populated house in the parish was the Workhouse; here lived the keeper, James Badderley, his wife, two sons, two daughters, and 61 inmates.

No one of note was staying at the King's Arms. Even without guests, there must have been a "full house" at the Swan Inn, for Hannah Foster, innkeeper and brewer, lived there with her five children, a sister, a cousin, two servants, and an ostler. At the Red Lion Inn (replaced by the Midland Bank) lived Charles Simmonds with his wife, two servants, and six lodgers, three of whom were "hawkers of drapery," and two canal boatmen. The sixth was described as "sillioutes (artist)." Evidently a silhouetteist!

Women's Work

Highfield Road was called Prospect Place, and among the householders was Emma Shortnall, "straw-plait schoolmistress." She was not the only dame who taught children that ancient cottage craft, which was pursued by scores of local women, children, and not a few men. Several women were described as "straw bonnet sewers," and there was at least one upholstres— an occupation rarely encountered in

the feminine gender. Berkhamsted had scores of domestic servants, but only one, so far as I can ascertain, described herself as "charwoman."

A number of girls were employed as typesetters. One, Amelia Warren, aged nine years, lived in The Wilderness. It is incredible that a girl of such tender years tackled a job now almost exclusively masculine. There must have been a fairly large printing works in the district, for among the compositors were Elizabeth Picton (11 years), Fanny Picton (14), Betty Windsor (19), Elizabeth Sills (12), Elizabeth Fowler (14), and Sarah Hopkins (21).

The Shovel Makers

Then, as now, Berkhamsted was an important centre for wooden-ware. William Key, aged 74 and a native of Shotswell, Warwickshire, was a timber merchant employing 22 men. Matthew Sills, a wood shovel maker, employed two men. Specialised trades were those of the malt shovel maker, lath and hoop maker, plasterer's wood handle maker, chair maker, rake maker, shaving box turner, coach maker, and boat builder.

Henry Lane (aged 69 years, born at Uxbridge) employed 33 labourers in his nurseries. Joseph Harris, a builder employing 14 men, had a large thatched barn where Camellia Terrace stands today. Samuel Crew was master of the Bourne School. "Daffy" de Fraine, who was much to the fore in local politics during the first quarter of this century, is recalled by a census entry concerning his father (or grandfather), William de Fraine, "hairdresser and perfumer," who hailed from Aylesbury.

There were but two houses in Raven's Lane, occupied by John Floyd, coal merchant, and Cornelius Collins, farmer and coal merchant. Coal and farming are rare combinations—but then, Berkhamsted also had a "draper and tea dealer," and a master tailor was the local postmaster. Previously the mails were handled by "mine host" of the King's Arms.

Along "Shop Row"

Unfortunately, the research worker is hampered by the fact that houses were not numbered in 1851. It is not easy to ascertain where certain houses were situated, and impossible to locate Lester's Yard, in which were three houses. But we would not be wrong in assuming that the following occupied shops and houses in the ancient "Shop Row," once facetiously called "Grab-all Row," from the One Bell Inn to the Parish Church:

William S. Rance, innkeeper.
Charles Jones, chemist and druggist.
John Butterfield, saddler.
Francis Tompkins, butcher.
Anne Leaper, whitesmith and bell-hanger.
James Abbey, tailor (employing two men) and postmaster.
John Tompkins, butcher.
Charles Pearson, grocer and tallow-chandler.
Amelia White, confectioner.
George Baster, saddler.
John Tomlin, shoemaker (employing two men).
Elizabeth Hailey, dressmaker.
Joseph Groves, tailor.
Charles Austin, grocer and tea dealer.
Mark Turney, shoemaker (employing seven men).

· BEORCHAM ·

Medicine and Food

Local Arrangements

Arrangements for the emergency supply of medicine now operating in Berkhamsted is as follows:—

CHEMISTS' ROTA

The week-day evening (6-7 p.m.) and Sunday morning (11.30 a.m.—12.30 p.m.) service rota adopted by Berkhamsted chemists for the dispensing of medical prescriptions, is as follows for the current month:—

September 27—October 3: Taylors.
October 4—10: Boots.
October 11—17: Figg.
October 18—24: Dickman.
October 25—31: Taylors.

FOOD OFFICE

The Food Office, in the Town Hall, is open on four week-days as follows:—
Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2 to 5 p.m.
Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 12 noon.

LIBRARY OPENING TIMES

The Berkhamsted Branch of the County Library is open in Prince Edward Street on the following days and times:—

Monday and Friday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.; 5.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.
Wednesday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 5 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.
Thursday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Saturday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

One of the happiest occasions at All Saints' Church for a long time was the harvest festival on Sunday, 27th September.

There were particularly large congregations at the children's flower service in the afternoon and at evensong, the church was beautifully decorated, the choir admirably rendered the anthem "Jesus shall reign," and inspiring addresses were given by the Rev. W. B. Wilkinson.

The collections which were given to the Seven Churches Campaign (especially earmarked for the Bishop Loyd Memorial Church at Boreham Wood) amounted to the splendid sum of £22 7s. 11d.

The usual harvest social took place in All Saints' Hall, on Monday evening, 28th September, and was another joyous occasion, the crowded attendance including the Rector and the Rev. W. B. Wilkinson, Mr. S. H. Smith (Churchwarden), Messrs. H. E. Turpin and B. Chapman (deputy wardens), with Mr. E. J. Bayliss acting as M.C.

A musical programme was followed by a sale of produce, which resulted in £7 8s. being handed over to the Rector's Sick and Poor Fund.

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