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WHEN BERKHAMSTED WAS A BOROUGH — III

The Corporation's Weights and Measures

On taking office, the bailiff of Berkhamsted was required to swear that he would execute justice without partiality, execute writs, warrants and precepts, maintain the grants, rights and liberties, provide necessary prisons, and "see . . . that the assize of bread, drynck and all other victuall . . . and weights and measures . . . be good, lawfull and allowable."

The reference to weights and measures is especially interesting. The visits paid to shops by Board of Trade inspectors are not, as is sometimes thought, a comparatively modern innovation; tradesmen had to submit their weights and measures to inspection centuries ago, and many were the prosecutions for giving short weight. Indeed, there was an army of local officials to safeguard consumers' interests: for instance, ale-tasters, bread-tasters, and flesh-tasters.

BUTCHERS, BAKERS . . .

As long ago as the 13th century, when Berkhamsted was noted for its trade in wool, an inspector known as an "alnager" examined and measured every length of woollen cloth, fixing upon it a seal if satisfactory. It was illegal to sell unsealed cloth. Defective or short lengths were confiscated, and a Hertfordshire man was fined for selling cloth below the recognised standard.

An old document in St. Peter's Church chest, copied from "the warrant of the Maior of St. Albans," tells us that all bakers, brewers, alchouse-keepers, tiplers, taveners, mercers, drapers, grocers, chandlers, butchers, smiths,

weavers, millers, glovers, etc., were required to "appear with weights and measures to have them tested by the Standards."

Each borough had its own standard weights and measures—not necessarily corresponding exactly with those of the adjoining authority. At Berkhamsted they were kept at the "Towne hall" (or Court House), and included a brass ell, the ancient cloth measure (45-in.) which so often comes to the rescue of crossword puzzle compilers.

STANDARD MEASURES

An inventory of the Berkhamsted weights and measures is given in "A pticuler noate of the wrightings and other goodes now in the Towne hall and delivered into the charge & custody of Ralph Benninge the Bayliffe of the Burrowe of Barkhamsted the 15th of Octobr 1642":—

- It. a brass halfe pecke.
- It. a brass pinte pott.
- It. a wayte of brass being 14 pd.
- It. a 7 pd. weighte of brass.
- It. a pyle of brass weightes being 8 in number.
- It. a brazen Ell.
- It. a box of brass weightes.
- It. a holdefast and hammer.
- It. 3 seales to seale Measures.

An earlier inventory (October 10, 1626) refers to "2 brasen mesures for corne, 1 brazen weyght of 14 lb., 1 of 7 lb., 1 of 4 lb., 1 of 2 lb., & 1 of 1 lb., with small wayghtes . . ." There was also "a payre of guld (?) wayghtes & scales." The "ell of brass" was given by Mr. Newman (rector), and an item not included in the 1642 inventory was a "cubbord" given by Mr. Barker.

What a pity the old Berkhamsted weights and measures have been lost! It would be interesting to see if they differ greatly from standard weights and measures of the present day.

ROD, POLE OR PERCH

In this connection, it is interesting to find, in a Berkhamsted Survey dated 1616, the following statement: "There is noe such name or use of a yard land within this Mannor now in being nor of any carewes of land within the tyme of our memory but wee hold a plow land does conteyne one hundred and ffifty acres or thereabouts and that sixteene foote and a halfe is accounted for a pole or perch by the custome of this Honnor. But as wee have heard that his Highnesse lands are accounted here and elsewhere to be eighteene foote to the pole."

The Berkhamsted version was, of course, correct: a pole, rod or perch is 16½-ft.

HANDCUFFS, TOO

Besides listing the standard weights and measures, the inventory of 1642 refers to the Charter, the mace, the common seal with a silver head, the arms of the borough, "the widdowes Almes," two pairs of handcuffs, a shackle, a table with a frame, a green carpet and twelve cushions, and three pay books.

Among the documents were a lease of the Church House from the Churchwardens to the Bailiff, a lease from the School, letters from the King's Commissioners concerning wood, fishing and "other things," and another "about the perfectinge of an Assurance concening the manufacture of fier wood for the yeere," an "Order from the Councell for settinge the poore on work," and "the graunte of Hempsted Markett & ffayre."

IN PRISON

The earlier (1626) inventory records "Impliments belonging to the Goale and the house of Corection," and even mentions "too prisoners"! Fixtures and fittings included "3 lockes, 3 keyes and a whipping stock; 6 cayens (chains), 3 greater and 3 lesser; 6 staples; 2 payre of gyves; 1 anvill to fasten the irons; 4 rounde locks with 2 keyes apiece, one of them doble bowed; 2 stayples and a haspe for the counter doare; 2 blocks and 2 belles to beat hemp; a mault mill given by Mr. Wethered; a new padlocke for the handcoffes."

But all was not well: "There were lost in Mr. Wethered his tyme 3 chaynes, 3 greater and 1 small; 1 payre of gyves and 1 round lock; lost more this yeare, one payre of gyves."

'BEORCHAM'

Next month's article will deal with the "Orders and Constitutions made and agreed upon for the better government of the Corporation, 1659"—only three years or so before the Corporation ceased to function—and with an abortive attempt to secure a new charter.

THE FINAL TIT-BIT

In a recent article dealing with old-time Berkhamsted feasts, surprise was expressed that menus which included chicken, beef and other good fare ended with such an unsavoury item as horsemeat.

"Beorcham" is most grateful to Mr. Vicars Bell for stating that he, too, was puzzled by this extra dish until he discovered that it referred to fodder provided by the innkeeper for the guests' horses. It is so easy to forget that "meat" is not merely flesh, but food in general!

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.; 3 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.

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:—

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

FOOD OFFICE

For information respecting the new arrangements for distribution of welfare foods, see page 10A.

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