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From Kitts End Bury to Kingshill

Until mid-Victorian days, Berkhamsted was still a valley town. Though there had been a little expansion beyond the ancient triangle formed by High Street, Castle Street, Mill Street and Water Lane, early Victorian developments, with trifling exceptions, were limited to an area within a quarter of a mile of St. Peter's Church.

After the sale of the major part of the Pilkington Manor Estate in the early 'fifties, Manor Street, Chapel Street and several other roads in the valley were created. On the opposite side of High Street, we had Highfield Road and, later, Victoria Road.

FEW SIDE-STREETS

But west of Mill Street and Water Lane the long High Street had few off-shoots. Continuous rows of buildings blocked what are now the entrances to Prince Edward Street and Lower King's Road.

King's Road (then Cox's Lane) had a row of humble cottages, but was "truly rural" 100 yards from High Street. One had to go half a mile westward to find another lane—Gilham's, now Cross Oak Road. On the opposite side of High Street, St. John's Well Lane already existed, and Park Street was made in the 'sixties; but the river, canal and railway—and of course, the Brownlows' determination to preserve their vast Ashridge Estate—limited further building opportunities in that part of the valley.

The southern hillside, however, was ripe for development. There must have been great excitement when, on November 13, 1868, at the King's Arms Inn, Mr. G. Alexander Smith sold by auction the Kitts End Bury (Kitsbury) Estate.

The prospectus referred to the "meadow, pasture and arable land," and said that the new streets would be "laid out, formed and gravelled . . .

The whole presents advantageous sites for erecting villa residences, business premises and private dwellings so much required in this locality . . . The residents on the Estate will be entitled to all the advantages of the richly-endowed Free Grammar School."

A "NEW TOWN"

Sixty large and small plots of land were available. The smaller plots were on both sides of a farm track which was to be named Kittsbury Road (note the spelling), and on the east side of Gilham's Lane. Higher up the hill, considerably larger plots of land were for sale.

Victorians living in the valley looked upon Kitsbury as a "New Town." Somehow, it did not quite belong to Berkhamsted; it was a "long way out of the town," an impression created by the fields and meadows which isolated Kitsbury from the compact valley streets.

It is interesting to recall that in this district Berkhamsted did not spread outward. Building started in the west and gradually—very gradually—extended eastward towards the town centre. It was years before the "green belt" (the Cowper Road area) was built upon, though at one time it seemed likely that the whole area as far as Chesham Road would be devoured. As we shall see in a minute, Butts Meadow was threatened by building speculators.

THE BOXWELLS ESTATE

Eleven years after the Kitts End Bury sale, the neighbouring Boxwells Estate, for many years owned by the Littleboy family, came in the market. The proposed new road (Boxwells Road) was advertised as being "on the preferable side of the High Street." The vendors stressed that the "railway station is near at hand, from whence London may be reached in 51 minutes." And that was in 1879.

Then, in 1887, Steel's Meadow and Doctors Commons Building Estate were sold. There were 108 plots "having important frontages to four newly-formed streets, called Cowper Street, Torrington Street, Charles Street and Montague Road . . . The site commands near and lovely views of the extensive domain of the ancient Castle, which, with the verdant slopes that encircle the town, and the evergreen plantations that wave on every hill, complete a landscape of unrivalled beauty." What's more, the Metropolis was reached by train in only 45 minutes. Progress!

It was expected that 24 houses would be built in Torrington "Street." In fact, less than half of that number were built.

BUTTS MEADOW

Berkhamsted was certainly growing apace. To give the residents better access to the railway station, one villa and then

another was pulled down to provide the entrance to a new road—Lower King's Road. Similar demolitions in "Snob's Alley" opened the way to Prince Edward Street.

Great things were expected of Prince Edward Street. The building of villas on the land subsequently occupied by the Victoria Schools was envisaged. And on 7th July, 1886, the "valuable building estate" of Butts Meadow (with the adjacent allotments) was offered for sale by the Aldbury churchwardens, the land having been purchased in the 17th century with £100 given to the parish of Aldbury by Thomas Hyde.

"SUPERIOR" HOUSES

It was stated that "The Butts affords numerous inviting sites for the erection of superior houses for which there is a continual and increasing demand . . . The Church of St. Peter, the Post Office (with four deliveries daily), the Bank and the Town Hall are in the immediate vicinity . . . Apart from these advantages attaching to the land as a speculative building site, to a private individual it possesses great attractions for the erection of a single residence."

Happily, Butts Meadow was spared this fate; Mrs. Lionel Lucas purchased the land and gave it to Berkhamsted for use as a recreation ground.

Incidentally, the plan of 1886 shows that the Haresfoot Estate extended to the boundary of Butts Meadow.

A short distance away, 15 plots of land were offered for sale in 1888, on the east side of King's Road. A continuous line of villas was planned from a row of old cottages (long since pulled down) to Butts Meadow, and no provision was made for Clarence Road. The plan shows a gated way to the gardens of the Red Lion Inn.

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

The land between High Street and Charles Street was now a built-up area, and it was time to start devouring the hillside above Charles Street. In 1888, the first portion of the vast Kingshill Estate came in the market; seventeen plots of land, three facing Charles Street and the others between King's Road and Doctors Commons Road, were offered for sale.

Another part of the Kingshill Estate, including what is now Doctors Commons Road, was sold in 1897; four years later 50 plots of land in another new road, North Road, were sold by auction; and in 1902 a start was made on Shrublands-avenue and a further part of Cross Oak Road. It is interesting to note that the modern road known as Crossways was planned as early as 1902. In 1907 came the sale of the old allotments between Cross Oak Road and what is now Queen's Road, then indicated on the plan as a mere footpath.

VICTORIAN ENTERPRISE

In years to come some local historian will have a similar story to tell of developments in our own time. He may praise modern planning and criticise the haphazard developments of an earlier age. But he will never be able to accuse the Victorians—who trebled the size of Berkhamsted—of lack of enterprise.

'BEORCHAM'

EMERGENCY MEDICINE

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:—

Feb. 27—Mar. 5: Figg.
March 6—12: Dickman.
March 13—19: Taylors.
March 20—26: Boots.
March 27—April 2: Figg.

LIBRARY OPENING TIMES

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

Mon., Tues. and Fri.—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.;
2 p.m. to 5 p.m.; 5.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.
Wednesday—CLOSED ALL DAY.
Thursday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Saturday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

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