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**Factory Conditions Over a  
Century Ago**

Local historians of the future will doubtless have something to say about the development of Berkhamsted into what, partially, is now a "dormitory" town. Top-hatted City business-men, leaving tall Islington and Canonbury villas for new houses on the hills of Berkhamsted, brought a new type of resident and started the season-ticket habit. Long before the Victorian era had ended, scores of Berkhamsted men and boys were spending their working hours away from the old home town. Apsley Mills and bicycles increased the morning exodus, and in these days of buses and private cars more people than ever before are working "out of town."

But it would be wrong to imagine that, before the days of the railway, every Berkhamsted man and woman worked in the town. It was not unknown for local wood-workers to walk to and from Chesham daily, though the lucky ones stayed with relatives and returned home for the week-end. And Tring, with its canvas and silk mills, drew a little of its labour from Northchurch and Gossoms End. The road was long, but what of that if jobs were scarce?

**SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL**  
I was reminded of Tring's old-time industrial importance and ghastly factory conditions when re-reading a London and Birmingham Railway Guide which appeared soon after the railway was built. But first, let me quote some outspoken references to Berkhamsted. The humble workers of the town could not have asked for higher praise—but oh, what a scandalous state of affairs at Berkhamsted School!

The town, says the writer, "is distinguishable for the manufacture of straw plait, the cleanliness, peace and industry of the inhabitants, and the disgraceful corruption connected with

the management of the Grammar School . . . nothing is done for it in the way of education; the master receives the wages, but does not do the work. The school is an ancient and good building, situated just by the church, and has been used only as an assembly room for the neighbouring gentry to dance in. How different is this from the sacred object for which it was erected."

Berkhamsted was no longer an important market town, added the writer, owing to the prevalence of small-pox in the neighbourhood many years ago, when "the market was done away with in order to prevent people from coming to the town."

**ON THE CANAL**

As a railway enthusiast, our guide had nothing pleasant to say about canal boats, "drawn by the wretched animal, whose convulsive stumbling and struggling forward, to get away from the excruciating lash of its fierce and brutal tormentor, gives the vessel its onward motion; brutal torture is the circumstance, and agony the motive. How different it is up the iron road where, while we dash along with an eagle's flight, we are possessed of the delightful consciousness that pain is not the impulse by which that wondrous speed is attained—that no living being is a whit the worse for our enjoyment."

**CANVAS AND SILK**

On to Tring, where "the former owner of the land on which the station now stands asked so extravagant a price for it that the directors determined to have the station at the far side of the cutting, which is three and a half miles from Tring." The inhabitants, keen to have the station as near as possible to the town, undertook to pay the difference between the price of the land according to an equitable valuation and that demanded by the owner of it. Thus, "the station now stands in the position most advantageous to the interests of Tring."

Tring was a "highly industrious and thriving little town" of 4,000 inhabitants, with 100 persons working in four canvas factories, weaving on hand-loom yarn that was brought from Yorkshire. "The work is not considered very hard, and the time of daily labour is from ten to twelve hours a day; the men get about sixteen shillings a week, the boys about three . . . The Tring people claim to have commenced the canvas trade prior to any other town in England."

The silk mill, started in 1825, "is now capable of employing 500 pairs of hands, consisting of 40 men, 140 women, and 320 children. The number

of hands in the mill is much less in summer than in winter, owing to the agricultural employment that is then afforded; this does not result from an superiority of wages, but from the natural desire to be in the open fields, and the aversion to monotonous and sedentary occupation, care and restraint. The superintendents get a pound a week; the general run of the men's wages is between twelve and fifteen shillings a week; the average of women's wages is five shillings and sixpence a week, and of children three shillings; the time of the latter is regulated by Act of Parliament to ten hours a day, the adults work twelve."

To visit the mill, one had to obtain an admission card from the proprietor, whose residence adjoined the mill. There was "an extensive fish pool, the rather stagnant nature of which must give rise to much pernicious effluvia; and considering that Tring is seldom or never without ague, and as the malaria is generally found to result from pools of this character, several of which are in the vicinity, it is to be hoped that the proprietors of these sources of pestilence will evince sufficient morality and intelligence to compel the removal of a nuisance so highly dangerous to all the neighbourhood; actually fatal to some and deeply injurious to the lives and happiness of many innocent people."

**MUSIC WHILE THEY WORKED**

Workers with haggard looks appalled the writer; but worse, far worse, was the sight of little children of "death-like colour and tottering frames." The mill proprietors paid Mr. Dewsbury, surgeon, £20 a year to inspect the workers; "after this evidence, we must not attribute the presence of the injurious marsh to a want of feeling in the proprietors, but rather to a want of information on the subject."

The "doleful and dejected" children at the silk mill were "taught to sing hymns as they work, and when a stranger comes, to affect a semblance of sanctity and sing out with unusual energy; it would, perhaps, be a wise reform to do away with this schooling in hypocrisy, and peradventure it might be found that music of a livelier character would have a more stimulating and beneficial influence upon the nerves and general health of these poor innocents."

**THE HAPPY PLAITERS**

In comparison, straw-plaiting was a pleasant, healthy pursuit. "It can be performed almost anywhere, it does not interfere so much with the liberty of the people, and from not imposing much restraint is preferable to the work of the mill; on a fine summer's day, numbers of women and children may be seen at their cottage doors, walking in the street, or sitting on the greensward in the neighbouring fields, with the straw-plaiting going on in their hands, and at the same time enjoying the open atmosphere of nature, and the freedom of conversation . . ."

'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:—

September 25—October 1: Taylors.  
October 2—8: Boots.  
October 9—15: Figg.  
October 16—22: Dickman.  
October 23—29: Taylors.

**LIBRARY OPENING TIMES**

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

Mon., Tues., Thur., & 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.  
Saturday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

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