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LOCAL COMMUNICATIONS—7

By 'BEORCHAM'

Early Days of the Railway

By the time Berkhamsted railway station was opened, on October 16, 1837, many of the engineers and labourers who had been employed locally were helping to complete the Tring—Rugby section of the London and Birmingham Railway. A few weeks later, the line was opened as far as Bletchley, and it was also possible to travel by train from Birmingham to Rugby.

For eight or nine months, a road service was operated to bridge the railway gap between Bletchley and Rugby—a service which provoked much criticism, for the coaches were crowded, and passengers were often unable to obtain seats. At the time of Queen Victoria's coronation, bids of £10 and even £20 were made for a seat in the connecting coach; donkey chaises, and even carts and wagons, were requisitioned at fancy prices. It was a sad day for the coach drivers when, in September 1838, passengers were able to travel all the way from London to Birmingham by train.

THE BOOM YEARS

Meanwhile, grass was already hiding the glaring chalk of the railway embankments and cuttings at Berkhamsted, and "Puffing Billies" chugged daily along the Bulbourne valley. No longer filled with hundreds of railway builders, Berkhamsted once more became a quiet country town, and shopkeepers and publicans bemoaned the passing of the boom years. As Henry Nash tells us, "the railway brought with it a mixture of good and evil; it came as a boon to the physical necessities of man, but morally it left some terrible desolation behind it." Yet "the crowded trains of passengers and merchandise aroused the energies of tradesmen and manufacturers."

There was some talk of building a

railway station at Northchurch, and if this project had materialised William Cooper would have built his chemical works at Northchurch.

Originally, the London and Birmingham Railway consisted of two tracks, the rails being fastened to granite sleepers. It was soon found that wooden sleepers were more effective, and the stone blocks were used for road-building and other purposes. They form part of the steps which rise from Chesham Road to the Butts Meadow footpath; others may be seen in St. John's Well Lane and Whitehill.

CHANGES OF NAME

Faster and more frequent trains, better tracks, more comfortable carriages, lower fares—these and other improvements and benefits followed as a matter of course. Two more tracks were added, bringing another large labour force to the district to widen embankments and cuttings, rebuild bridges, bore two new tunnels at Northchurch, and build a new station 300 yards west of the old station, with a private entrance for Earl Brownlow.

The London and Birmingham Railway (recalled by the initials "L. & B." on the cottages facing Boxmoor station) soon became part of the London and North Western Railway system, which rivalled the Great Western Railway in having the smoothest, safest tracks in the world. The cream, brown and gold coaches were painted "Midland red" after the 1922 amalgamation, when the L.N.W.R. became part of the London Midland and Scottish system; and since January 1948 the "B.R." of British Railways have been familiar initials.

But we must not bridge the years too quickly. What was rail travel like over a century ago? How fast—or slow—were the trains? How frequent—or infrequent—was the service? Were the fares high, or low?

THREE TRAINS A DAY

In 1838, three up and three down trains stopped at Berkhamsted on weekdays. First class passengers were protected from wind, rain and smoke, travelling in upholstered carriages which in many respects resembled stage-coaches, and were almost as rickety. Luggage was strapped to the roof. Second class passengers had to be content with coaches that were open at the sides; even so, conditions were far better than those endured by the guard, who surveyed the train from a high perch at the back of the train and usually emerged from Watford tunnel with a face as black as a negro's.

By February, 1840, four of the ten trains which ran each way between London and Birmingham on weekdays stopped at Berkhamsted. The down trains, leaving London at 8 and 8.45 a.m., and 2 and 6 p.m., reached Berkhamsted in 80 minutes, stopping

at Harrow, Watford and Boxmoor, with the exception of the 8.45 train (first class only) which ran non-stop to Berkhamsted without improving upon the time taken for the stopping trains.

The up trains, despite the fact that gradients were in their favour, were slower than the down trains. The first train left Berkhamsted at 7.55, arriving at London at 9.30. The 1.10, 4.10 and 9.10 trains required 110 minutes to complete the journey.

OPEN CARRIAGES

Trains were either "First Class" or "Mixed," the latter taking first and second class passengers. But there were two grades of both first and second classes, and consequently four scales of fares.

Single fares from Berkhamsted to London were as follows:

First Class (4 in carriage by day, or 6 by night)	8/-
First Class (6 in carriage, by day)	7/6
Second Class (closed carriage, by night)	6/6
Second Class (open carriage, by day)	5/-

Even by present day standards the fares appear high, especially when one recalls that a skilled workman was lucky to receive £1 a week in 1838. Yes, as was pointed out in an earlier article, 10s. was charged for an inside seat and 6s. for an outside seat on the coach which ran from Berkhamsted to London in 1810.

Bradshaw's "Railway Companion" of February, 1840, tells us that the second class day coaches were open at the sides, "without lining, cushions or divisions between the compartments." But closed second class carriages, like all first class carriages, were entirely protected from the weather, and each carriage had a small roof lamp which was kept burning day and night.

Smoking compartments were unknown; indeed, smoking was prohibited not only in the carriages but in the stations.

LOWER FARES

On Sundays, in 1840, there were but two trains each way between Berkhamsted and London; anyone who missed the 9.20 a.m. down train had to wait ten hours for the next train.

By 1858, the single fare from Berkhamsted to Euston had been reduced to 5s. first class, 3s. 6d. second class, and 2s. 4d. third class. But only two of the nine up and nine down weekday trains conveyed third class passengers. The Sunday service consisted of four trains each way.

On weekdays, the first up train left Berkhamsted at 7.54, arriving at Euston at 9.15; with one exception, this was the slowest train of the day. The fastest up train left Berkhamsted at 6.24 p.m., reaching Euston at 7.30.

Travel from London to Berkhamsted was a little faster than in the reverse direction; indeed, the 4.15 p.m. from Euston (first stop Boxmoor) reached Berkhamsted at 5.8. This was probably our first "under the hour" train.

(To be continued).

EMERGENCY MEDICINE

Local Arrangements

Arrangements for the emergency supply of medicine now operating in Berkhamsted are 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 2—4: Boots.
September 9—13: Figg.
September 14—22: Dickson.
September 23—29: Taylors.
September 30—October 6: Boots.

LIBRARY OPENING TIMES

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

Mon., Tues., Thurs. & 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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