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LOCAL COMMUNICATIONS—9

By 'BEORCHAM'

The Sixpenny Horse Bus

Recent articles in this series described the planning and development of the railway. Now it is time to return to the open road, resuming the story which was interrupted when we left the High Street and its stage coaches for the old railway station and its "Puffing Billies."

Locally, by the early 1840's, the "coaching days" were over in the sense that long-distance travel by road had been superseded by the railway. But there was a constant increase in the volume of local road traffic, and coach-builders were busier than ever before. Away from the railways the horse was supreme, and remained supreme until the first decade of the 20th century.

LATEST MODELS

Berkhamsted, with five or six thousand inhabitants, had hundreds of horse-drawn vehicles, from tiny carts to brakes seating thirty or more people. Just as boys of today are quick to detect the various makes of cars and aeroplanes, so, in Victorian times, "spotters" recognised the brougham, barouche, phaeton, raleigh, landau, victoria, governess car, four-wheeled dog cart, and goodness knows how many types of trade vehicles.

The leading firm of coach-builders, E. King & Son, was "patronised by the nobility and gentry"—and by the milkman and baker, too. In the High Street premises now occupied by Donald Lockhart Ltd., almost every type of vehicle was made from start to finish. Customers were as keen on the "latest design" as their car-buying descendants; what's more, every whim could be satisfied on the spot.

Another coach-builder, Mr. Pethybridge, had a busy workshop near Cowper Road corner, now the grocery,

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butchery and hardware departments of the Co-operative Society. Incidentally, it was in these premises, after Mr. Pethybridge and his successor Mr. Pocock had given up building coaches, that Hughes, Hawkins and Co. manufactured ladies' coats and costumes before moving to the Bulbourne Factory.

Another skilled coach-builder was Mr. Holliday, who gave his name to Holliday Street. In a changing world he had the sagacity to cater for the town's cyclists, a steadily growing band from 1870 onwards.

EARLY TRAFFIC PROBLEMS

There were traffic problems even in those clippity-clop, bone-shaking days. Narrow, winding roads were the cause of cursing matches between drivers of long timber carts of the "pole" type and common carriers in charge of wide, heavy wagons. It is said that the widening of King's Road was hastened because the owner of Rossway, having missed his train through a traffic jam near the police station, made his influential indignation known in the right quarters.

Road accidents were frequent; so were prosecutions for careless driving. Many a local man appeared before the magistrates on a charge of being "drunk and incapable" while holding—or, if asleep, not holding—the reins. But some of the worst offenders were saved from prosecution by the homing instinct of a faithful, sober old horse.

AT THE STATION

Morning and evening, Berkhamsted railway station was the scene of great activity. Many season ticket-holders arrived in their own carriages, some with undue pomp and circumstance. It was the age of snobbery, and a carriage had considerable snob value.

There was almost a "state entry" when Lord Brownlow was driven from Ashridge to Berkhamsted station, where he had a private entrance and, nearby, a large coach-house.

Several men earned a precarious living by pushing hand trucks loaded with luggage and travellers' samples to houses and shops. It was a joy to behold a top-hatted commercial traveller striding along, followed at a respectful distance by a porter pushing a truck-load of samples. "Star" salesmen hired cabs and arrived at the shops in grand style.

THE HORSE BUS

Cabs were available almost as soon as the railway was opened, and, as was stated in an earlier article, road passenger and goods traffic was especially heavy between Berkhamsted and Chesham. In mid-Victorian times a "Town Omnibus" service was started by Mr. H. Lane, of the King's Arms

Hotel, who, in the local paper, advertised that he had "at the repeated wish of many persons made arrangements for the convenience of Berkhamsted and to meet the requirements of the present age to run an omnibus to and from the railway station and principal trains. Fares: Sixpence each. Orders for passengers and parcels received at the King's Arms will be punctually attended to."

LOCAL JOBBASTERS

If, as sometimes happened, passengers had such varied destinations as Bank Mill, Kitsbury and Kingshill, the last passenger enjoyed—or endured, according to taste—a long, circular tour. But the fare was always sixpence.

Mr. Lane's thriving business was in due course continued by Mr. Harvey Bedford, who kept a dozen horses in stables behind the King's Arms and owned wagonettes, a 31-seater four-horse brake, landaus and victorias.

In the 20th century the omnibus fare was still sixpence per person to a destination in the town, or one shilling to Northchurch. The vehicle was drawn by one horse, had six inside seats, and ample space for luggage on the roof. The omnibus met every train up to 8 p.m. Thereafter, it was not unknown for late-comers to be transported home on a trolley!

Another well-known jobmaster, Mr. A. C. Meek, was proud of his high-stepping horses and smart vehicles. Mr. G. Callaghan, too, had brakes, wagonettes and governess cars for hire, and advertised: "Covers taken on or off in three minutes." He also supplied horses to draw the fire engine.

MR. TOOLEY'S MEMORIES

For first-hand recollections of the "good old days" I interviewed Mr. A. (Jack) Tooley, who was born at Ivinghoe, came to Berkhamsted as a groom 58 years ago, and will soon celebrate his 75th birthday. He worked for Mr. Bedford and Mr. Meek, and, in 1913, was invited by Mr. Dwight to drive the first motor taxi-cab with a stand at Berkhamsted station, the fee for the stand being 2s. per week. The first fare in the seven-seater Darracq asked to be taken to Whetstone.

Mr. Tooley's most distinguished passenger was the Prince of Wales, now the Duke of Windsor. That was when Mr. Tooley worked for Major Dorrien Smith in the Scilly Isles; the vehicle was a humble estate cart.

THE PETROL AGE

It is strange how, in a relatively short period, road transport has changed completely. The cry "Whip behind!" means nothing to the younger generation. The town's "horsey" smell has been replaced by the reek of petrol.

To continue our story of transport through the ages, the next article will recall the early days of motoring, incorporating an interview with 92-years old Mr. W. Wood, son of the first Berkhamsted man to own a motor-car and himself the first local man to own a motor-cycle.

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:—

October 28—November 3: Boots.
November 4—10: Figg.
November 11—17: Dickman.
November 18—24: Taylors.
November 25—December 1: 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., 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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