

CLOCKS
WATCHES
JEWELLERY

E.C. de Lisle

TEL. 1258 BERKHAMSTED

"Time is our Business"

Repairs a Speciality

PAINLESS EAR PIERCING

P. D. CLARK
& SON

High Class
Groceries &
Provisions

100 HIGH STREET
BERKHAMSTED Phone 87

For all
heating queries
consult the old firm

James Wood
and Son

Domestic Heating & General
Engineers, Plumbers & Ironworkers

294 HIGH STREET,
BERKHAMSTED

Phone 194

COURTIER and
RAYBURN ROOM
HEATERS. IDEAL,
BEESTON, RAYBURN
and other BOILERS
SUPPLIED. HAND and
MOTOR MOWERS
OVERHAULED and
REGROUND ON THE
PREMISES. ALL
MAKES OF MOWERS
SUPPLIED.

Est. 1826

OUR OLDEST SOCIETY (2) By 'BEORCHAM'

The Institute's Later History

As was stated in last month's article, the Berkhamsted Mechanics' Institute grew apace in the 1850's, and was seeking larger premises when a splendid opportunity arose from a local disaster.

In 1854 the old Market House at the top of Water Lane was burnt down, and the debris had scarcely been cleared away when a public meeting was held at the King's Arms Hotel to press for a new Market House.

No one wanted a replica of the old Elizabethan structure, a half-timbered building which consisted of a store-room (used as a granary), supported on stout oak posts. The lower part was open on all sides, and provided shelter from the rain, if not from the wind, for the few traders who were lucky enough to pitch their stalls beneath the granary.

THE TOWN HALL.

The townspeople agreed that the new Market House was to be a much grander affair, with a large public hall, smaller rooms for lectures and committee meetings, and a reading room for the Mechanics' Institute.

Few people favoured building on the old site, and there was only lukewarm support for a suggestion that the combined Town Hall and Market House should be built on the opposite side of the High Street, at Prince Edward Street corner. Eventually the present site was acquired at a cost of £825 by William Hazell, founder of the grocery business now owned by the International Stores.

Voluntary subscriptions provided £2,610 of the building cost of £3,291, and a further £575 was raised by a bazaar in the Castle grounds. After the rooms were furnished, a comparatively small debt, eventually wiped out from the profits of the Town Hall,

remained when the opening ceremony took place in August, 1860.

Although the reading room over the market hall was obviously intended to be occupied by the Institute, all the building costs were met by public funds, and the Institute has always been the tenant of the Town Hall Committee. The tenancy, however, has already lasted 97 years—surely a local record!

TOWN'S EXPENSE

The fact that accommodation was provided at the town's expense is striking evidence of the respect and goodwill achieved by the Institute in the space of a dozen or so years. This friendly attitude was due largely to the wholehearted support of the rector (the Rev. J. Hutchinson), who championed the Institute's cause during the Town Hall negotiations.

But the rector's enthusiasm was shattered at the Institute's annual meeting in 1867. Berkhamsted was one of the last towns to surrender compulsory Church Rates, and two prominent members of the Institute, the Rev. F. B. Harvey (Usher of Berkhamsted School) and Mr. William Longman, the publisher, had the task, as churchwardens, of forcing payment of the rate. They had to prosecute nearly twenty townspeople, among whom were several fellow members of the Institute, and at the annual general meeting the air was thick with recrimination and bad feeling.

Mr. Harvey, in particular, was subjected to personal taunts, and was not re-elected treasurer of the Institute. This was too much for the rector, who protested to the secretary that "after witnessing the gross, noisy and premeditated insult which was offered to Mr. Harvey," he (Mr. Hutchinson) could not continue to hold the office of President nor allow his name to appear on the list of members.

FRIENDS AGAIN

A deputation urged Mr. Hutchinson to reconsider his decision, but without success. However, he was a broad-minded man, and sent a friendly letter stating that he wished the Institute well, hoping that "wisdom and zeal on the part of its members may hold it to its high purpose of increasing the knowledge and guiding the judging of the intelligent inhabitants of the town."

This storm in a teacup soon subsided, but not before Colonel A. Smith-Dorrien and Mr. Longman had expressed their indignation at the treatment of Mr. Harvey by resigning from the Institute. Later, they rejoined, and Mr. Longman gave a lecture to the members in 1871.

Truth to tell, few people could afford to ignore the institute at a time when Berkhamsted had few social activities. Some of the greatest lecturers of the

day were engaged, at fees as high as 10 guineas. "Penny readings" aroused as much interest as lectures, with an average attendance of 300. Spelling bees were enormously popular, too; one, held in 1876, made a profit of £8 10s.

Another function of the Institute was the organisation of exhibitions. It was necessary to use the entire Town Hall building to accommodate the exhibits; every encouragement was given to amateur artists and craftsmen, and prizes and medals were awarded on a lavish scale. At the exhibition of 1886, opened by Earl Brownlow and lasting for ten days, electric light was brought into practical use for the first time in Berkhamsted. £56 was spent on prizes and medals.

Evening classes, too, were held by the Institute. An "essay class" was started in 1847, and later came elocution, chemistry, singing, wood-carving and other classes. One of the teachers was Mr. David Osborn, a friend of Sir Isaac Pitman, who gave his students so much homework that one was known to get up at 4 a.m. to practise shorthand!

THE LIGHTER SIDE

Not that the Institute was interested only in education. A billiards and smoking room was suggested as early as 1869, but no accommodation was available until 1890, when the Town Hall Committee extended the building. Beneath the newly-built Sessions Hall the Institute was offered the use of a large room which was furnished at a cost of £75, the contents including a billiards table, two packs of cards—and six spittoons! A second billiards table was purchased in 1902, and five years later interest in the game was increased by an annual billiards handicap competition for a silver challenge cup presented by the late Sir Richard A. Cooper. The "Cooper Cup" remains the Institute's principal competition.

Today the recreation room is as popular as it was half a century ago. But in the educational field there has necessarily been some contraction of the Institute's activities. Lectures which once drew crowded audiences lost their appeal when the cinema, radio and television provided new distractions; and it is no longer necessary for independent bodies to organise evening classes.

Even so, the reading room links the present with the past. It was mainly for the purpose of having access, at low cost, to newspapers and periodicals of the day that Henry Nash and his colleagues founded the Institute 112 years ago. The Institute still provides a reading room with a good selection of daily and weekly publications at what is still a "Victorian" price: 10s. a year.

An especial point of interest is that the Institute reading room has what is almost certainly the largest selection of books of local interest, augmented a few years ago by a fine collection presented by Mr. Geoffrey H. Crispin.

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:—

April 28—May 4: Boots.
May 5—11: Figg.
May 12—18: Dickman.
May 19—25: Taylors.
May 26—June 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., 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.

CHURCH ELECTIONS

At the annual church meeting of the parish of Berkhamsted St. Peter and All Saints' held in St. Peter's Hall, the following elections were announced: *Representatives on the Ruri-decanal Conference*—Mrs. Alsop, Miss Cutler, Mrs. Mayo, Mr. Mayo, Mr. Morris, Mr. Randle, Mr. Smith, Mrs. Turpin.

Parochial Church Council—Mr. Alsop, Mr. Babington, Mr. Bayliss, Mr. Blunt, Mr. Chapman, Mr. Chappell, Mr. Collins, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Crowe, Mr. Dye, Mrs. Furber, Mrs. Gerard Smith, Mr. Gillard, Mrs. Hervey, Miss Myers, Mr. Orchard, Miss Popple, Mr. Tanner, Miss Timson, Mr. Tooley, Mr. Turpin, Miss Wait, Mr. Willmore, and the Churchwardens ex-officio.

Sidesmen—Messrs. Aitchison, Alsop, Arnfield, Babington, Blackall, Cole, Cooper, Cowan, Honour, Jack, Mole, Morris, Orchard, Randle, Ross, Sayer Todd, Turner.

OUR FISH
is fresh daily
OUR PRICES
are reasonable

W. W. WARD

Fishmonger, Game Dealer
and Fruiterer

MARKET HOUSE
BERKHAMSTED

Telephone 146

William
LOCKHART
Ltd.

Coal & Coke Merchants

Special fuels stocked for all
Central Heating Boilers and
Patent Stoves

LOWER KINGS ROAD
BERKHAMSTED

Telephone: 1
BERKHAMSTED 66

9

HEMEL HEMPSTEAD:

Alma Road. Phone: Boxmoor 1399

TRING:

Wacarn Road. Phone: Tring 2009

W. W. SAUNDERS
(Berkhamsted) Ltd.

STATION GARAGE

Phone 1267

Agents for:—

MORRIS

VAUXHALL

BEDFORD