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GEORGE STREET OR ST. MICHAEL'S ROAD?

## What's in a Street Name?

The Georges of Berkhamsted must be wondering whether they are in disgrace. Several residents have complained that George Street is an unpleasant name and have asked the Urban Council to change the nameplates to St. Michael's Road.

Our councillors evidently have a soft spot for George. They refuse to change the name, which—by George!—has been good enough for six Kings and our Patron Saint. Knowing our civic representatives' capacity for compromise, I am a little surprised no one has suggested St. George's Street.

George Street was so named by building speculators who started developments in Sunnyside in 1866. Having designed a road with a kink in it, they called the kink The Circus, but people living round the bend wisely declined to adopt the name.

### TWO CHARLES STREETS

In years gone by we were rather fond of giving our streets Christian names. Off George Street we still have a William Street; another little cul-de-sac in this district started off as Charles Street. Later on, however, this name was transferred to one of our longest residential streets, in another part of the town, and I wonder how long it will be before the residents start finding fault with Charles. As a matter of fact Charles Street (the second one of this name) was originally called Doctors Commons Road; the latter name was afterwards given to the road between Charles Street and Graemesdyke Road.

Montague Road and Clarence Road residents have yet to apply for a change of name, and to the best of my knowledge no one has started organising a petition to the Council from Eddy Street.

### FAMILY NAMES

Some of these names are, of course, surnames as well as Christian names. In addition we have a very fine selection of streets bearing the surnames of bygone worthies: Cowper, Torrington, Bourne, Bridgewater, Cobb and such great men as these.

You, too, may have a street named after you if you serve the town well. Unfortunately, awards are usually made posthumously. Seventy years after death

is the waiting period for local historians. No preference is given to councillors, who have been commendably modest in not staking claims for local immortality.

A very old family, still remembered by a street name, lived in the eastern part of the town hundreds of years ago. Ravens Lane was spelt Ravenyngeslane in 1357, and the most distinguished member of the Raven family was Sir John, who served with the Black Prince, Durrants Lane and the Durrants Estate are named after an old farming family (Adam Durant, 1294). We thank Reginald Asselyne (1314) for Ashlyns, the Godsalm or Gossam family for Gossoms End (Goshams yende, 1665), and John Potyn (1565) for Potten End.

### GILLAMS LANE

Some old family names have been discarded. Gillams Lane is now Cross Oak Road, taking its name from a tree shaped like a cross, or perhaps from the de Cruce family (14th century). Kings Road, formerly Bridewell Lane (named after the prison or Bridewell on the site of the present police station), was in earlier times called Cocks Lane. A 17th century document mentions "John Cokes tenement with a backside at Cokes Lane end." Chesham Road formerly bore two family names, Grubb and Elyvne (Grubslane, 1608; Elwyslane, 1525).

Kitsbury was Kicks (or Kitts) End Bury. Boxwell Road takes its name from a house (not the present one at the corner of the road) which is mentioned in a document of 1565.

Doctors Commons Road is a name which always arouses curiosity, and all we can say about it is that it stands on part of a field called Doctors Commons. A link with London's historic Doctors Commons has not been established.

Shootersway was Sugarsway in the 18th century, but by earlier names it does not sound so sweet; Shukers waye (17th century), Shokersway (14th century).

### BRICK KILN GREEN

Brickhill Green, so spelt as early as 1608, is a corruption of Brick Kiln Green; the clay pits dug by brickmakers generations ago still provide switchback walks. Kingshill was Kyngeshill in 1427. Haresfoot, a lovely park with a lovely

name (Harefotehull, 1357; Haresforde-send, 1287) was spelt Harrats Foot End in the 18th century and this spelling has a recognisable modern variant in Harriotts End Farm.

On the opposite side of the town, Frithsden is the name of a valley belonging to the wood or wooded country, "the wood called le Fryth." Old people still use a pronunciation which corresponds with the 15th century spelling Freseden.

In the Bulbourne valley, Mill Street and Bank Mill Lane remind us of the two watermills mentioned in the Domesday Book. Off Gravel Path a long-vanished windmill gave Millfield its name (le Mulfeld, 1357).

Highfield Road is named after a house (Hifeld, 16th century). Formerly this road was called The Pightle, an old word for a strip of land between two copses. Three Close Lane formerly led to three closes, or paddocks, where cattle and sheep on the way to London markets were penned for the night. Prince Edward Street was preceded by Snob's Alley; we do not know whether the snob was a humble cobbler or a supercilious person.

Red Lion Yard, in the centre of the town, recalls a bygone public-house; so does Bell Lane, Northchurch. The Crooked Billet public-house gave the first section of an ancient road to Dunstable its name: Billet Lane.

### ST. JOHN'S WELL LANE

St. John's Well Lane reminds us of the hospital of St. John, which formerly occupied the Post Office site. The well,

or spring, sent a rivulet down the lane before pumping lowered the water table. In the heart of the town, between Back Lane (mentioned in a document of 1608) and Mill Street, we have The Wilderness. The row of shops built in front of the Court House and other properties which formerly faced the High Street (now consigned to the shadows of Back Lane), was once nicknamed Grab All Row, for the shops were an encroachment upon the highway.

We no longer have Ragged Row (a row of hovels opposite the Methodist Church), Rotten Row (near the Castle), and Petticoat Lane, an ancient track from the Park gates to the Common. Tiptoes Lane and Tiptoes Bridge, at Bank Mill, have gone, and more's the pity. Other bygone names are Honey Lane, Sparrow Lane and Benethenstrete.

### FIELD NAMES

And what wonderful field names we find on the tithe map! Dog Kennel Field now bears a much larger structure, Berkhamsted School for Girls; and Maidens Bauk is now part of the boys' playing fields. St. Edmunds, the name of a field off Chesham Road, suggests an ancient religious house. Butts Meadow recalls the time when our longbowmen practised at the butts; it is a pity we have not named one of our streets after the lady who gave this meadow to the town, the late Mrs. Lionel Lucas.

Among the nice old field names are Strawberry Close, Dilly Piece, Good-speed, and Gilliflowers. Poor crops and poverty are suggested by Hunger Hill,

Little Starve Acre, Ragged Jack and Stony Bottom.

One way of preserving field names is to give them to houses. Gilliflowers (already mentioned), Timber Close, Kentish Croft, Partridge Close, Oxfield and Shepherd's Close are pleasant examples.

'BEORCHAM'

*Part of this article is extracted from "A Short History of Berkhamsted", a well-illustrated book of 96 pages which will appear in September or October, price 5s.*

The Chestnut Tree growing on the site of the car park extension in Water Lane was the subject of quite a long debate and a close decision at the June meeting of the Urban Council.

The cause was a recommendation from the Highways Committee that the previous resolution that the tree be removed should be reconsidered owing to the amenity value of the tree and the minor effect its retention would have on the number of cars which could be parked on the extension.

There were seven speeches opposing the retention of the tree, but the two members who spoke in favour of a reprieve had the silent support of the other six, for on being put to the vote the recommendation was carried by 8 to 7. This, however, is subject to a report as to the tree's condition.

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