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Variety in Local History

One of the pleasures of writing this monthly feature is the correspondence it brings from readers who are constantly adding to my store of local knowledge.

A new resident supplies documentary evidence to support my statement that Foundling Hospital children were boarded out with foster-mothers in Berkhamsted over a century and a half before that famous institution was transferred to our town. He has in his possession the following letter, addressed to Thomas Collingwood, secretary to the Foundling Hospital:

"Berkhamsted, November 1st, 1767. I intend sending Mary Johnson up to the Hospital next Thursday by the Waggon. I have today had information of her having got the Itch, I therefore give you notice of her coming that care may be taken of her. The Girl takes on sadly at leaving her nurse, that I hope she will be us'd with tenderness, tho' she has that disagreeable distemper."

THE RECTOR'S WIFE

The letter continues: "I have inclos'd patterns of the Lace the Children make, there is no other employment for them at this place. The nurses teach them to read and say their Catechism, and it cannot be expected that common nurses are capable of teaching them well. The following six are the names of those under my inspection; Judith Hearn, Sarah Mowers, John Pinfold, James Talbot, John Davis, and Paul Simpson. I am, Sir, your humble servant, E. Jeffreys. I will send Mary Johnson's Ticket with her."

Poor little Mary, having to return to London on the common carrier's cart! It would appear almost certain that the writer of the letter was Elizabeth Jeffreys, wife of John Jeffreys, rector of Berkhamsted from 1756-98. She was obviously the right person to supervise both the children and the "common nurses" in this parish.

FOSTER'S BREWERY

From another reader comes some interesting information about Foster's Brewery behind the Swan Hotel, with maltings in Chapel Street. My correspondent states that Henry James Foster, owner when it was taken over by Chesham Brewery in 1897, subsequently became a director of the Buckinghamshire company.

He adds that Foster's Brewery, prior to 1897, controlled the Swan, George, Brownlow Arms and Rose and Crown in Berkhamsted, the Surprise at Buckland Wharf, the Rose and Crown at Buckland Common, the Eagle at Leighton Buzzard, the Eagle at Bierton, the long-defunct Pheasant at Northchurch, and a beerhouse at a place called Cradles at the bottom of Tring Hill, as well as off-licenses in Charles Street, Kitsbury and George Street, Berkhamsted, and one in George Street, Aylesbury.

My correspondent would now like to have information about the licensed houses supplied by Locke and Smith's Brewery, which flourished in Water Lane until nearly fifty years ago.

FROM THE "DAILY NEWS"

And now for an interesting coincidence. On the very day the *News Chronicle* ceased publication, a Holiday Street reader sent me a copy of an advertisement which appeared in the first number of the *Daily News*. Dated January 21, 1846, it states "To be let . . . a Cottage Residence with paddock in the front; coachhouse, stable, pleasure and kitchen garden, hothouse and conservatory, situated in the town of Berkhamstead, within five minutes' walk of the railroad station. Berkhamstead possesses the advantages of a Free Grammar School. For particulars apply to Messrs. Hyde, 61 Fleet Street, London."

VILLAGE BAND

Over to Little Gaddesden, where a friend has discovered a 60-page book containing the report and statement of accounts of the Little Gaddesden Brass Band for 1902-3. I could not help chuckling over a printed gummed slip stating: "We much regret the unfortunate way in which the illustrations have been printed. It is entirely the fault of the printing, and not of the blocks or photos."

Expenditure incurred by the band (motto: *Nil desperandum*) included 4s. to lamp-bearers, 2s. 6d. to "curtain puller," and 10s. for a second-hand clarinet. The report mentions a bazaar to help band funds at which the playroom of Little Gaddesden House was used for "a phonographic entertainment." That was before Bandmaster Hager, of

Berkhamsted, had started instructing the band.

Among the Berkhamsted advertisers in the book were J. Stupples (customers can depend upon having the milk supplied from one cow), Mr. J. W. Bamford (gloves, shoes and feathers cleaned or dyed in a few hours), A. Nash (suits to measure from 30s., trousers from 10s. 6d., rainproof overcoats from 25s.), John Walklate, saddler (lawn boots, letter and cartridge bags made to order), Southey and Co. (petrol—three kinds always in stock; free trials given to intending purchasers of motor cycles or cars), David Pike (our mint rock at 6d. per lb. is recommended by thousands), and Edwin King and Co., coach-builders (landaus, broughams, victorias, dog carts, governess cars, station carts, etc.).

SWING GATE LANE

To yet another reader I am indebted for a reminder of an important development between the two World Wars. He sends me the "particulars of sale" of the upper part of the Swing Gate Lane estate in 1926. A photograph brings back memories of rolling parkland which for over thirty years has been the home of more than 200 families.

Prices have changed, too. "Many people," stated the Urban Council, "buy so-called cheap land and afterwards discover that with heavy road charges and cost of main sewerage, the land is very dear. The prices of these plots vary from £60 to £75, according to position etc. Each plot measures approximately

one-twelfth of an acre, and such prices include all road charges and main sewer along the roads."

The awful "bottleneck" at the junction of Swing Gate Lane and the High Street is recalled by a statement that the Council intended in the near future to widen the entrance, having acquired three cottages at the corner for demolition. Previously it was known as Swing Cat Lane! I do not know whether anyone remembers the swing-gate which gave the lane its name, though hundreds of townspeople knew it as a rustic way with only one house between the High Street and Bottom Farm.

A COTTAGE FOR £3 10s. A YEAR

Particulars of an earlier sale—that of portions of the Haresfoot and Ashlyns Estates in 1920—show that the Eagle public-house at Ashley Green, with the adjoining cottage, a blacksmith's shop and a small meadow, were let to Chesham Brewery at £30 per annum.

Another cottage at Ashley Green (living room, scullery, two bedrooms, water laid on, earth-closet, and nice garden) was let at £3 10s. per annum. In other words, just over 1s. 4d. a week!

Finally, a complaint. "When are you going to give us the story of Peter the Wild Boy?" asks a reader. "I was most disappointed to find him scarcely mentioned in your new book."

But Peter was a Northchurch man, and as a "History of Northchurch" is being prepared I cannot afford to fire all my ammunition at once! There will be an article about him in these pages soon.

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£33 3s. 4d. has been sent to the Additional Curates Society this year. This amount is more than last year's and is all "straight giving." Very many thanks to all who contributed and to those who regularly pray for the Society.

The parish secretary, Mrs. L. E. Crook, 65 Greenway, Telephone 1347, would be pleased to have new subscribers to *Home Mission News*.

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