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How Lower King's Road Was Made

One of the most interesting photographs of bygone Berkhamsted shows a row of tall houses (four with long front gardens) between what are now Wren's sports shop and Sharland's store. Two of these houses still survive, though the front gardens were built upon long ago, when the premises were converted into the shops now occupied by Messrs. L. A. Pike & Son, the green-grocers, and Mr. M. Blake, the stationer.

To help a good cause, the middle villa was pulled down in 1884. The gap, only 20-ft. wide, provided the entrance to Lower King's Road, and later on, when this "bottleneck" could no longer be tolerated, a second house was pulled down. On the west side there remained just one house—the first of the five to be used for business purposes, for a photograph of 1860 shows that a shop had already been built over the front garden. Middle-aged and elderly residents will remember this as the shop of Mr. W. H. Morris, the watchmaker. It was demolished nearly thirty years ago, when Mr. L. A. Mayo's corner shop and the adjoining shops in Lower King's Road were built.

NOT A PENNY ON THE RATES!

But we are moving too quickly. Let us return to the 1880s, when, as was related in last month's *Review*, Berkhamsted lacked a direct approach to the "new" railway station. Originally a footpath from Water Lane, via the Moor, was proposed, but eventually the Vestry (which was the local authority before the Urban District Council was created) decided to build a road.

But was there any question of making the ratepayers foot the bill? Not at all—unless they wished to contribute voluntarily. The whole cost was defrayed by donations, and "Disgusted Ratepayer" had no occasion to write to the *Berkhamsted Times* complaining that public money was being frittered away on a scheme he did not favour.

A £1,000 CONTRIBUTION

It was apparently the London and North Western Railway Company which first suggested a road instead of a footpath. On December 17, 1883, Mr. T. Algernon Dorrien Smith, the newly-elected chairman of the special com-

mittee set up by the Vestry, enthusiastically supported the more ambitious scheme. He had ascertained that it would be possible to acquire the house which would permit the proposed road to enter the High Street, and announced that he and his family would contribute the first £1,000 to the fund.

After this splendid start, along came the Railway Company with a promise of £500. Other gifts were made by Mr. T. Curtis, Mr. F. J. Moore, Mr. C. S. Hadden and Mr. R. Valpy (£100 each), Col. Barclay and the Rev. R. Lister (£50 each), Messrs. William Cooper and Nephews, Berkhamsted School, Mr. W. H. Hobson and Mr. E. H. M. Smith (£25 each) and Mr. T. Read (£20). This brought the total to £2,120 before an appeal was made to the general public!

THE PUBLIC APPEAL

The appeal, disguised as a report, was issued early in 1884. It stated:

"The road will be from 24-ft. to 36-ft. in width except for about 20 yards at the entrance to the High Street, where only 20-ft. can be obtained. It will effect a saving of about one-third of a mile to all living to the west of the proposed road, and be a considerable saving in gradient to the inhabitants of Chesham and hamlets to the south-west. Lord Brownlow has given the land from the stream to the station.

"The cost of the undertaking, exclusive of the earth which it is proposed to take from the widening of the King's Road, will be about £3,000. The committee has received offers of subscription to the amount of £2,120, which will leave £880 to be obtained.

"They venture, therefore, to appeal to those who have not already subscribed to contribute; and it is hoped that as Northchurch will be largely benefited by the new road, the inhabitants thereof will liberally assist the inhabitants of Berkhamsted in carrying out an improvement which is to their mutual benefit. As the town of Chesham and hamlets to the south-west are also benefited, it is hoped that the inhabitants of the same will assist with their subscriptions. It is proposed to extend the

subscriptions over three years, payable by annual instalments."

Tenders for the work had already been invited. The committee consisted of men of action who, like all good Victorians, would not tolerate delays. Contractors were warned that *not more than four months* would be allowed for the completion of both road and bridge.

More than a dozen tenders, ranging from £2,920 to £1,170, were received, and the lowest, submitted by Charles J. Corrie, of Lichfield, was accepted.

SPEEDY WORK

The work progressed rapidly, but not without criticism. On at least two occasions complaints were made about the surface of the road and footpaths. Finally, £1,724 was paid to the contractor; the Canal Company received £100 for the right of way; and compensation to the sum of £971 was paid to the owner of the house which had to be demolished to allow the road to enter the High Street. With other expenses the total cost was £3,097. In January, 1885, the contractor's bill was paid, and the road was opened two months later.

This was not the end of the committee's endeavours. Although two-thirds of the cost was quickly subscribed, it took a long time to collect the last few hundred pounds. Early in 1887 the committee had yet to pay off the bank overdraft, and while final appeals were made to the general public an attempt was made to get the Railway Company to increase its original gift of £500. Not until May, 1887, was the deficit made

good, and the proceedings of the committee then terminated.

As has already been stated, at a later date another house was demolished to widen the entrance to the road, and the canal bridge was rebuilt.

OUT OF LINE

The question is sometimes asked why Lower King's Road is not in line with King's Road. Originally there was only a trifling divergence. Later, however, Lower King's Road was widened on the west side, while King's Road was widened on the east side, at the time when the Police Station was rebuilt.

Although nearly 80 years old, Lower King's Road was often referred to as "the new road" by elderly residents until quite recent times. It is strange to find that there was no rush to open shops in Lower King's Road; indeed, it was not until the early years of the 20th century that building started there on a large scale.

Three years after the road was built only one resident was qualified to use Lower King's Road as his address. He was Mr. J. Short at the Canal Lock House—and his house was standing long before the road was made.

INDUSTRY, TOO

In the 1897 edition of Loosley's Directory, we find Mr. A. C. Meek's stables mentioned; then, a year later, came the Salvation Army barracks. At the turn of the century industry came to the road: Hughes, Hawkins & Co. opened the Bulbourne Factory, and Mr. F. J. King moved, with his printing works, to the house beside the Bulbourne. The

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stationmaster's house is not mentioned until 1904. A familiar name, that of Mr. David Pike, first appears under the heading "Lower King's Road" in 1906, and thereafter building proceeded at a faster pace.

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