

## OUR HILL-TOP VILLAGE NAMESAKE

### Little Berkhamsted

LAST MONTH this page paid its respects to Barkhamsted, U.S.A., and already the article has been reprinted in full in a Connecticut evening newspaper under the heading: 'English visitor happy to be here.'

There is another namesake which makes visitors happy, and I invite you to join me on a goodwill mission to Little Berkhamsted.

From Hatfield we take the Hertford road until we see a signpost pointing to 'Lt. Berkhamstead.' The contraction is abominable, but we are correctly directed up Robin's Nest Hill to the village.

#### CONFUSING NAMES

This is no pocket edition of the valley town which continues to spread upward. Little Berkhamsted started on the top of a hill and there it stays, content to remain small and leave the hillsides to the farmers.

The villagers, unlike the townsfolk in the far west of Hertfordshire, are never allowed to forget that there is another Berkhamsted. Their letters and parcels often go west before being re-directed to the village. Sorters, it seems, are too busy to spot the word 'Little' and conclude that there is only one Berkhamsted—the large one on the Bulbourne.

It has been known for coffins to be taken to Berkhamsted while the mourners waited in Little Berkhamsted church. From long experience they guessed the cause of the delay.

#### STRATTON'S FOLLY

Yet the people of Little Berkhamsted have never been so exasperated by the confusion as to suggest changing the name of their village. They cannot drop the prefix Little, as we have done in what was once called Great Berkhamsted, though their liking for the spelling Berkhamstead may be thought to reduce the number of cases of mistaken identity.

Little Berkhamsted is not only on top of a hill; it has added to its stature by sprouting a tall, round tower which is a landmark for miles around. With battlements nearly 100-ft. above the ground, it is apt to come into view even when you do not wish to photograph it.

'Stratton's Folly,' the tower is called, and strange tales are told about a pirate

who climbed to the top to spy on shipping in the Thames, seventeen miles or so away. A notice telling me to keep out provided a good excuse for not testing the visibility and risking my neck.

A more likely story than the one about the far-seeing pirate is that the tower was an observatory built in 1789 by John Stratton so that he could see his ships anchored in the Thames by day and study the stars by night.

#### ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH

A short walk beyond the tower brings us to the heart of the village. At a road junction by the war memorial I spotted the nameplate 'Berkhamstead Lane,' but turned left along Church Road, where roses surround the churchyard.

St. Andrew's is a young church for a parish which, like St. Peter's, has a list of rectors that was started over 700 years ago. The chancel, nave and north transept are small, cheerful and modern. In two of the walls there are traces of 17th century work, perhaps a rebuilding of a much older church. A wooden turret shelters three bells, one possibly of 14th century origin, and a large blue clock adds almost a feminine touch to this pleasant, well cared-for church.

The magnificent lych-gate was a memorial to a rector who served Little Berkhamsted for 59 years. He was Walter Seawell.

#### BISHOP KEN

But the most famous name in the history of the village is that of a boy who became a beloved bishop and hymn writer. Thomas Ken was born in the parish in 1637, and to this day we are familiar with the name Bishop Ken, for he wrote 'Awake, my soul, and with the sun,' 'Glory to Thee, my God, this night,' and other beautiful hymns. He was one of the seven bishops who, in 1688, refused to read the Declaration of Indulgence.

Izaak Walton was a nephew of Bishop Ken, whose memorial in his native village is the altar table in St. Andrew's church. A few feet away, a stone in the chancel floor recalls another 17th century Little Berkhamstedian, Cromwell Fleetwood, grandson of the Protector.

Beyond the lych-gate we see the Five Horseshoes Hotel and the village hall, a building of uncertain age until one is near enough to read the inscription: 'P.C.B. 1888.'

On the opposite side of Church Road, several clapperboard cottages with nice front gardens face the church. The village post office stands between these cottages and the recreation ground, where there are swings for the children and a fine pavilion for the cricket club. This is an open space with fine views over the fields to Essendon, and a villager insisted on pointing out, on the skyline, the home of Mr. Reginald Maudling, who sometimes worships at St. Andrew's.

#### THE OLD SCHOOL

A single-decker bus labelled 'Little Berkhamsted' came along, deposited its few passengers, turned round, and headed for Bayford. Walking in the scented wake of the bus, I stopped outside a building which was being restored for use as a private residence. It had obviously started life as a school, and beneath a sundial I read the following inscription: 'Little Berkhamstead Schools. Erected by private subscription 1828, restored 1870, classroom added 1894.' But for a dozen years or more all the children of the village have gone elsewhere to school.

Beyond the former school building there are a few more houses. Then the village ends abruptly. We are in open country. Little Berks, as it is affectionately called, stays on high ground to enjoy fine views over cornfields, meadows and woods.

It is strange that the two namesakes should be so far apart. Most of Hertfordshire's Greats and Littles, such as the Gaddesdens, the Hadhams, the Amwells, the Hormeads and the Wymondleys, are within the sound of each other's church bells. Only the two Berkhamsteds are distant relations.

#### EAST AND WEST

Which came first, Great or Little Berkhamsted? Both are mentioned in Domesday Book, but apparently there has never been any link other than that of the name, between the two.

Little Berkhamsted, by the way, was sometimes called East Berkhamsted. But only once can I recollect seeing the name West Berkhamsted used for our town, and that was in the will of Thomas Bourne, founder of one of our oldest charities.

'BEORCHAM'



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