

## Ancient and Modern

SOME OF THE TOWN'S earliest photographs were taken in Castle Street. One, showing a row of ancient cottages and shops between the Bulbourne and the site of Deans' Hall, has been displayed at exhibitions and reproduced in several publications. Less well known is a view looking up Castle Street towards the High Street, the foreground dominated by a plain, unfamiliar chapel at the corner of Chapel Street.

We know that this photograph must be at least 99 years old, for the Congregational Church which replaced the old chapel is rapidly approaching its centenary. On the opposite side of the street, a long brick wall encloses the former playground of Berkhamsted School, and trees obscure Dean Incent's lovely 17th century building.

But we are never in doubt that this is a view of Castle Street. There have, of course, been changes in the long row of houses between Chapel Street and High Street, but the upper part is much the same today as it was a century ago. Unfortunately, there is only a sidelong glimpse of some long-departed straw-thatched cottages near the chapel.

### SERVANTS OF THE MANOR

The east side of the street was the western boundary of a small manor known as Pilkington's, and some of the houses were occupied by servants employed at the Manor House, in the High Street.

The coachman is believed to have lived at Bailey's, one of the town's oldest established shops, and the head gardener at a cottage which was converted into the newsagent's shop lower down the hill. In two rooms behind this shop there formerly lived an old character named Charlie Wedgerfield, who made a living by taking goods to and from the railway station in a wheelbarrow.

Mr. Chilton and then Mr. G. Gill ran a pawnbroker's business at what for many years has been a ladies' hairdresser's shop. Lower down the street, in an ancient cottage which was pulled down to make an opening for Manor Close, such delicacies as tripe, cowheel, chitterlings and black-puddings were prepared and sold by Mrs. Bishop, wife of a travelling slaughterman, and then by her daughter, Mrs. H. Halsey. This

cottage may have started life as a tavern called The Sun, and in the 1840s it is said to have been the home for a short time of Mr. William Cooper, founder of the chemical works.

### THE CURATE'S MISTAKE

Opposite Berkhamsted School stand three tall buildings which proved a disappointment to a former curate. In the 1840s, the Rev. J. C. Browne took much interest in the revival of Berkhamsted School, and as a man of considerable means he built three large houses, which he felt would be required either as boarding houses or as dwellings for families who would be attracted to the town by the school. But this venture, as Henry Nash tells us in *Reminiscences of Berkhamsted* (1890), resulted in financial loss.

Henry Nash lived in Castle Street (his home was the neat house next door to Everett's shop), and in recalling the scenes of his youth he said there was 'scarcely a house in the whole street making any pretensions to architecture. The cottages were all more or less in a state of dilapidation and of the plainest description; these have nearly all been replaced by modern buildings of a better class, a few only remaining as specimens of a bygone age.'

And now most of those specimens have gone, too, though 'The Boote', having changed from public to private house, still proclaims the date 1605, and like the adjoining cottage, contains some ancient features. Two small, old cottages, nicely restored, attract the eye a few doors south of the Congregational Church, and houses at the top of the street are mentioned by Nikolaus Pevsner in *The Buildings of England*: 'nice quiet terraces of houses, Nos. 1-4, brick and timber framing; Nos. 5-9 early 19th century, purple and red brick.'

Then there is 'the fairest school building in the land,' as a 17th century writer called it; but Berkhamsted School is a subject for a book, not an article.

### ONE-ROOM TENEMENTS

Down in the valley, only 50 yards from Henry Nash's house, a dingy, long-forgotten alley led to half a dozen or more one-room tenements with earth floors. In one of the tenements,

a hole in the floor served as a coal bunker; the tenant lifted up the trapdoor and shovelled coal straight on the fire.

A group of slightly larger but equally poor cottages survived until H. and J. Matthews cleared the site for the large office building in the valley. In one of the cottages lived George Butcher, who, in a large brick oven, cooked Sunday dinners for his neighbours while they were at church or chapel, charging each family threehalfpence or twopence, according to the size of the joint and pudding. Fuel cost nothing; George relied entirely upon gorse and wood gathered on the Common.

### BREAD—AND FIREWORKS

Dinners were also cooked by Mr. Keen, the baker, next door to the Gardeners' Arms. Besides baking and selling his own bread, he was always willing to bake bread made by housewives, some of whom gleaned their own corn and had it ground into flour at Mr. G. Cook's watermill in Mill Street.

It was at this baker's shop where boys of Berkhamsted School spent their pocket-money on fireworks for a grand Guy Fawkes celebration in the large playground behind the long brick wall. Their huge bonfire consisted largely of gorse gathered on the Common.

Everett's shop, in Victorian times, was kept by a grocer, Mr. Lawrence, who also described himself as a straw-plait maker. He sold straw to housewives and bought the finished plait for re-sale to Luton and Dunstable hat-makers.

### MOVING AROUND

Behind this shop, Primitive Methodists held their first services before moving to the High Street. But Congregationalists never strayed from Castle Street, where their services were first held in the parlour of Mr. Langston. As numbers increased a barn was fitted up for regular services, conducted by the Rev. W. Baker, who started his pastorate in 1790. A few years later a little Gothic-style chapel, known as the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel, was built; this was followed in 1834 by the chapel mentioned early in this article. Then, nearly 100 years ago, the present large church was built on the same site.

We shall have a little more to say about Castle Street in next month's issue. In the meantime, does anyone know why the street broadens out in the valley before veering left over the Bulbourne bridge?

'BEORCHAM'



# BROWN & MERRY

ESTATE AGENTS, AUCTIONEERS, VALUERS, SURVEYORS  
AND PLANNING CONSULTANTS

Partner in Charge J. O. BOLTON KING, F.R.I.C.S.,

128 HIGH STREET, BERKHAMSTED

Tel. 1596

And at Tring, Aylesbury, Hemel Hempstead, Wendover, Leighton Buzzard, Bletchley, Stony Stratford and Bedford