

## Tradesman's Entrance

**A**FTER GAINING WIDTH on the way to the Bulbourne valley, Castle Street suddenly edges its way around small front gardens, leaving no room for a footpath on the east side of the roadway.

The curve and contraction of the street at this point was probably determined by a narrow bridge over the river. Nowadays few people are aware of the Bulbourne's existence, but in years gone by one could scarcely miss seeing the water. Two parallel streams, only a short distance apart, flowed from Mill Street and converged on the far side of Castle Street, forming a glittering little roadside sheet of water and robbing two cottagers of a large part of their front gardens.

### KEY'S YARD

Housebreakers have been busy in the valley for several years, but only a short memory is necessary to recall the buildings which adjoined the Railway Tavern, which is itself scheduled for demolition. In a narrow, wedge-shaped building just above Alsford's (Key's) yard, the *West Herts Post*, still running as the *Watford Post*, was born. Many other uses were found for this little building; for a time it was a photographer's studio, kept by an ex-clown named Lionel Jerome, who must have known how to make his clients smile.

The timber yard stands on the site of a wharf where our first supplies of cheap coal were unloaded when the canal was opened 160 years ago. This was known for many years as Hatton's Yard, and I have been told that circuses and shows by travelling theatrical companies were held there occasionally. A more popular place for these performances was the nearby Moor, which was also used for the storage of timber.

### CASTLE MILL

The wharf at Castle Street and an adjoining barge-building works eventually became known as Key's yard. This timber merchant's business was founded by William Key, a fencing contractor for the London and Birmingham Railway, whose first timber yard was on what is now the Cooper Recreation Ground. In the first World War most of Key's large sheds were taken over by the Army. At the moment they are being

replaced by Alsford's lofty new buildings.

If Castle Street was the royal road to the Castle, Mill Street (with Water Lane to link it with the High Street) may be called the tradesman's entrance. It kept its workaday character for centuries. The watermill which gave the street its name was called Castle Mill in early documents—and rightly so, for it ground the flour that was used in the Castle kitchens. It was probably in the same street where some of the King's horses were kept in 'a certain great stable without the Castle.' In more modern times barges' horses were stabled in Mill Street.

### WATER LANE CHAPEL

The watermill and the stables have gone, and so have a chapel, a brewery, a forge, two public-houses, and a gas-works. From 1849 until about 60 years ago, Berkhamsted's gas was made at the top of Mill Street, and a buttress and part of the wall of one of the gas-works buildings is incorporated in the wall of the School workshops. Adelbert House, on the opposite side of the street, was built for the gasworks manager.

A few yards west of Adelbert House stood Berkhamsted's first Nonconformist place of worship. Baptists met in barns and private houses as long ago as 1640, but it was not until 1722 that their first meeting house was built in Water Lane. It was enlarged during the ministry of the Rev. Joseph Hobbs, who kept a stationer's shop (now T. W. Bailey's), and in the course of his business he undertook many small jobs for the Parish Church, including the repair of the lectern Bible, for which he charged half-a-crown. Every Sunday he conducted a communion service in Water Lane, an afternoon service at Tring, and an evening service at Wendover or Chesham, walking all the way in all weathers.

### 3,550 SERMONS

The Water Lane chapel, in which Mr. Hobbs preached 3,550 times during his 38 years' ministry, was pulled down when the Baptist Church at Raven's Lane corner was built just over a century ago.

Small houses with front gardens survive just below the School workshops,

and no one can be in doubt that one was formerly a public-house. Berkhamsted School has found a new, non-alcoholic use for The Fish, where, in the yard, one may still see the crude sleeping quarters used when the pub was also a common lodging house.

### THE CLOWN AND SAUSAGES

The other Mill Street public-house, the Edward VI, lost its licence in 1922 and was pulled down in 1960. At one time it was known as the Clown and Sausages; a gay signboard showing a clown with sausages dangling from his pockets was kept in the loft for many years.

For a time this public-house was also a general shop. In the adjoining yard, which became part of the Music School site, there was stabling for eight horses and a loft that was used as a threshing barn. This loft, ideally situated next to the mill, was often hired by Tom George, of Sunnyside, who, with a donkey and cart, collected wheat gathered by gleaners. He used a flail in the time-honoured way and advised the gleaners to collect their flour from the miller next door.

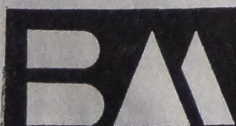
### THE FOOTBRIDGE SCHEME

Save when Mill Street is lively with the movement of schoolboys, it is a quiet backwater with very little traffic. Few people go this way to the railway station, though it would have been a useful short cut had a footbridge been built over the Bulbourne and the canal, as was planned in 1883 for the convenience of people living west of Castle Street. But a more ambitious scheme led to the building of Lower Kings Road.

Today, when Mill Street is mentioned, we usually think of the Moor, or of Newcroft, the Music School, the Gymnasium and other fine, modern school buildings. But old residents, especially those with a taste for local history, will not forget the mill that named the street. Here, until some 40 years ago, George Cook and his son kept alive an ancient industry and a great tradition. Goodness knows how many times the mill was burnt down and rebuilt after it achieved a reference in Domesday Book.

Now there are five courts in the miller's garden, and the millstones are at rest in the forecourt of the Music School. And on the opposite side of the road we see that rare and pleasant thing, a memorial tablet to a bygone industry and building.

'BEORCHAM'



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