

Berkhamsted Before the Urban Council was Formed

Paving the Way— Victorian Style

THE MAINTENANCE of highways, as was stated in last month's article, was an obligation of the parish from very early times. The election at the annual Vestry meeting of two unpaid surveyors, reinforced in later years by a committee, continued until almost the end of the 19th century. In fact, we did not have a paid surveyor until the Urban District Council was created in 1898.

Nevertheless, the Highway Surveyors' Committee was a competent unit of local government. All the members had intimate local knowledge, and on-the-spot discussions were held in addition to monthly meetings in the Town Hall. Their minute book for 1884-91, which I recently had the privilege of borrowing, is not a dull record of purchases of stones and gravel and chippings; it tells us a good deal about the town at a time which is still remembered by our oldest inhabitants.

SIXPENNY RATE

The population, around the 5,000 mark, was increasing rapidly. Builders were especially busy in Kitsbury. Houses were knocked down to make entrances to two entirely new roads in the heart of the town, Lower Kings Road and Prince Edward Street. Cox's Lane (Kings Road) was widened.

There was much to do and little money to spend. 'A heap of stones near Kingshill was to be purchased from Mr. J. Webber and also some from Mr. H. Lee and Mr. Lucas and to be paid for as soon as the state of the funds will permit.' So runs a tell-tale entry of 1886. In that, as in many other years, the main source of income was a 6d. rate. In 1886 this produced £544. In addition there were contributions from the Treasury and the county rate. The county contribution rose considerably after the County Council

came into being in 1888, the new Council having asked the Berkhamsted surveyors to continue to maintain the main road as they had done since it was dumperked. They used very good words in Victorian times.

THE WATER-CART

Expenditure in 1886 included £162 for manual labour, £110 for team labour, £181 for materials, and £319 for tradesmen's bills. The annual accounts were printed, ending with the following note: 'Materials on hand, 288 yards of stones and 192 yards of sand.' I hope the quantities were checked by the auditor.

Property owners, especially those in the Kitsbury area, were keen to have

their footpaths paved and kerbed, and for this privilege they had to pay one-third of the cost. But when the area between Mr. Kingham's bakery (now the Ministry of Social Security office) and the west door of St. Peter's Church was paved with stone at a cost of £12, the churchwardens were asked to pay £2 and Mr. Kingham £1—a quarter of the total cost.

If we needed a steam-roller we borrowed one from the Hemel Hempstead surveyors. But Berkhamsted had its own water-cart, and payments were made for its repair and the purchase of hose. Street watering was necessary in days when horses and carts created dust-storms in dry weather.

Speaking of water, Miss Parkin objected to the erection of the Queen Victoria jubilee drinking fountain outside her property, and several meetings

later the committee agreed to re-erect the fountain outside the Waterworks office and the White Hart, the licensee and brewers having no objection to a little free competition on the pavement.

COMPLAINTS DEPARTMENT

The Gas Company, in trouble for building a wall in Mill Street which encroached on the public highway, was ordered to rebuild the wall 'further back to their own ground'. Another rap on the knuckles followed the laying of new gas pipes in Manor Street; pedestrians refused to take the rough with the smooth.

The complaints department was always active. The Post Office was warned not to obstruct Back Lane with a truck. Barrows and trucks were not to be wheeled along the footpaths, neither were horses to be ridden on the footpaths. The Sanitary Authority (which in 1894 gave birth to the Rural District Council) and the Highway Surveyors' Committee issued a joint warning to the public following complaints about refuse being thrown on roads and pavements. People who did not trim hedges were reprimanded.

UNDERNEATH THE ARCHES

The London and North Western Railway Company was taken to task about the leaky state of the arches under the railway. The Company made a fuss about next-to-nothing by claiming rent for a gateway from the railway station to newly-opened Lower Kings Road, and the surveyors proposed the payment of 1s. per annum with arrears amounting to 3s. To be sure of receiving its shilling a year, the Railway Company asked for the names of the gentlemen who would take upon themselves the obligations of the agreement to pay rent for the gateway. The clerk replied that the surveyors were elected annually and could not undertake any obligation beyond their term of office, which expired on 25th March. All this for a shilling a year!

A polite exchange of letters with Lord Brownlow concerned the erection of a gate behind the station across the road to the Common. His lordship assured the surveyors that there was no intention to interfere with the public use of the road, though to establish his ownership he closed the road one day a year.

VANDALISM

A Victorian vandal tarred a newly-erected boundary post at Gossoms End, between the parishes of Berkhamsted and Northchurch, and it was necessary to repaint the post, the cost of which was

shared by the two parishes. A Mr. Pinnegar wished to put up a warning to cyclists at the top of Grubbs Hill (Chesham Road), and was allowed to do so on condition that the board stated to whom in particular the hill was dangerous. The carefully chosen words were 'Notice to Cyclists. This hill is dangerous.' So far as we know, this wording was never obliterated by tar.

Locke and Smith, the brewers, were reminded of a request to have a gutter and pipe fitted to the Royal Oak public-house, long since supplanted by the Gas offices. Cooper's buildings were not perfect, and the firm's attention was drawn to the 'want of spouting' to their property in Holliday Street. Then there was a building belonging to the Gardeners Arms which was 'dangerous to passengers in consequence of some of the slates being loose.'

COMPENSATION

We learn little from the minute book about Lower Kings Road, which was built by public subscription; but when a house was pulled down to provide an entrance to the new road the surveyors were asked to pay the quit rent for the house. After much discussion they paid the claim for 18s. 4d. Then, when Kings Road was widened, Mr. T. Tompkins asked for compensation for damage done to his meadows. He asked for £22 and was awarded £10.

Lower Kings Road was not the only voluntary effort. When the surveyors agreed to widen Ravens Lane canal bridge, it was stated that part of the cost, £310, would be met by voluntary subscriptions.

Times have certainly changed. And so has Berkhamsted.

OUR CHILD NEEDS HELP

THAT BERKHAMSTED has an adopted daughter is probably unknown to quite a number of people in the town—particularly to those who have taken up residence in recent years.

How the relationship came about is an interesting story.

Following on Berkhamsted's successful response to the World Refugee Year appeal in 1960, an anonymous donor offered £1,000 to inaugurate a fund for the purpose of adopting a refugee child who was to come and live here.

The idea was taken up enthusiastically, a committee was formed under the leadership of the then chairman of the Urban District Council, and on 13th May 1961 Berkhamsted's civic daughter arrived in the person of an eight-year-old refugee girl who had been living in a displaced persons camp in Germany.

Ever since she came, the committee has, through its periodic meetings, supervised the child's maintenance, clothing, education, recreation and holidays; a responsibility which will continue until she is 18. (She was 14 this summer).

HAPPY

Berkhamsted's adopted daughter is now living as a happy member of a Berkhamsted family. Her health is excellent; she is making satisfactory

progress at school; is a member of a local young people's organisation, is fond of riding and took part in the Berkhamsted Pageant.

When the Berkhamsted Daughter Fund was inaugurated, it was estimated that the total amount needed to meet all expenses over the ten years would be £2,200. Up to date the fund has reached £1,900, of which the present credit balance is £720 invested in 5% Defence Bonds, and £40 in current account.

CONFIDENCE

Thus another £300 is required, and the committee are anxious that the additional amount should be raised as soon as possible. They greatly appreciate the support given to the fund by local organisations and individuals, and now appeal with confidence for a renewal of that interest and practical help.

Berkhamsted's daughter is not the protégé of one organisation; she is the foster daughter of the whole town.

Donations may be sent to the hon. treasurer of the Berkhamsted Daughter Fund, at the Berkhamsted Branch of the Westminster Bank. The committee also suggest that local organisations might bear in mind the fund when making grants; or, alternatively, arrange such events as coffee mornings, bring and buy sales, or wine and cheese parties.

The members of the committee are County Councillor S. H. Smith (Chairman), Mrs. E. M. Deighton (Hon. Secretary), Mr. D. F. Whittle (Hon. Treasurer), the Rev. Canon Robert S. Brown, Councillor Mrs. H. Talbot-Ponsonby, Mrs. J. Chinneck, and Mrs. D. W. Bailey.

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