

From Market Stalls to Supermarkets—4

## CONTRASTS IN LOCAL SHOPPING

By 'BEORCHAM'

WITH an 1890 edition of Loosley's Berkhamsted Directory before me, I have been trying to imagine what a Victorian housewife would think and say if, after sleeping for 78 years, she once again visited the shops of Berkhamsted. This may be an unromantic version of the Sleeping Beauty legend, but it provides an opportunity to enlarge upon the facts Mr. George Loosley collected in 1890.

Of course, the Victorian lady is astonished by the heavy traffic and the huge increase in the number of shoppers. The absence of horse-drawn vehicles tells her why we no longer have corn chandlers, hay and straw merchants, saddlers, farriers, coach-builders, wheelwrights—all prosperous tradesmen in 1890.

She is amazed to see many more ladies than men's hairdressers. Her curiosity is whetted by the electricians' shops, the garages, the dry-cleaners, the antique dealers, the do-it-yourself shops, the restaurants. But she looks in vain for the coffee tavern, the specialist tea dealer, the pawnbroker, the servants' registry offices, the brushmakers and the basketmakers.

### ELEVEN BAKERS

On her last shopping expedition in 1890 she could buy bread from eleven bakers. How few are there now? And where are all the dairies where one could buy milk, cheese, cream and butter? The last one closed down a few months ago.

Our Victorian shopper wonders what has happened to the ten tailors, eleven dressmakers, three laundresses, four watchmakers, seven coal merchants and twenty-four bootmakers who were in business in the town 78 years ago.

She is surprised to find Castle Street so quiet. In 1890 it was a busy shopping street with two watchmakers, three dress-

makers, a dyer, laundress, draper, pawnbroker, grocer-cum-publican, baker, corn chandler, picture-frame maker, newsagent, corn merchant, milkman, confectioner, brushmaker, grocer, and fishmonger.

When she last visited Lower King's Road (built in 1885) it was devoid of shops. Indeed, it had no shops until the early years of this century, and with the exception of Williams' (formerly Wheeler's), all have changed their trades.

### PERSONAL SERVICE

She remembers when George Street tradesmen included two wood-turners, two general shopkeepers, an egg merchant, cabinet-maker, brushmaker, baker, charcoal burner, and milk seller. Kitsubury was the home of a grocer, laundress, yeast merchant, dry plate manufacturer, dressmaker, two general shopkeepers, two bootmakers, carpenter, plumber, baker, brushmaker, and plasterer, all of whom were self-employed.

Our Victorian shopper is astonished (as a pre-1939-45 war shopper would also be astonished) by the sight of so many women pushing or pulling light-weight trolleys along the pavement instead of carrying baskets. She is told that door-to-door delivery services are not what they were. Where are the whistling errand boys, pushing or riding trade bicycles bearing the shopkeeper's name in large letters and the slogan 'Families waited upon daily'?

Though told that many shops of today lack the personal touch, our lady friend is not likely to regret a sharp decline in the personal handling of unwrapped foodstuffs. The massive growth of pre-packaging astounds her and helps to explain why most of the shops have lost the pungent smells they had in years gone by. One no longer smells a grocer's shop two or three doors away.

Brightly lit shops fascinate our Victorian shopper. She notes that all the gas brackets with flickering fishtail jets have gone, together with the flypapers which dangled from those brackets in a pre-aerosol age. Exterior gas lamps for illuminating shop windows have similarly vanished. And bells attached to shop doors—real bells which go on jangling and can be seen as well as heard—are now as rare as hearing a shop described as an 'establishment'.

### LATE NIGHT CLOSING

Our Victorian shopper is surprised to find that few shops open before 9 a.m., and that few close after 5.30 p.m. She had never heard of early-closing day in 1890 and is amazed to hear that some shops are open only five days a week. With memories of shops staying open until 10 and 11 o'clock on Saturday nights she is perhaps pleased that errand boys no longer deliver parcels after the pubs have shut. But she may be surprised that a town of over 16,000 inhabitants has considerably fewer public-houses than the 26 that satisfied the five thousand in 1890.

It is beyond our shopper's imagination to link supermarkets with the old type of general shop, but trading stamps remind her of the tokens that were issued by Chasteneys', the grocers (now the International Stores), and 'tuppence off' does not seem at all strange to one who was well acquainted with the savage price cutting of Victorian times.

### AT THE DAIRY

Having already discovered that the last dairy shop has closed down, our Victorian shopper may wonder where we buy our milk. Not that one has to be a Victorian, or even middle-aged, to remember the time when no one had to walk very far to find a dairy. Two were owned by the Stupples family, one in Castle Street, the other in Lower King's Road, and both were known as creameries. Then, among others, there was Mr. Gibbs' dairy at Gossoms End, and Mr. Fleckney's (afterwards Mr. Draper's) dairy in the High Street.

On spotless marble-topped counters stood large china bowls of milk, covered with muslin and accompanied by pint, half-pint and gill measures on hooked handles. The aroma of fresh milk and cheese and cream was delightful. No one minded if you bought a gill of milk, though it was unusual to ask for less than two gills, or half a pint.

Women and children hurrying along the street with jugs for fresh supplies were a regular sight, though anyone

who tripped up long after tea-time was more likely to cry over spilt beer than spilt milk. Bottled milk came much later than bottled beer; jangling milk bottles are a fairly modern supplement to the dawn chorus.

### THE MILKMAN'S THREE CALLS

It may be thought a little odd that anyone ever needed to go to a dairy, for milk roundsmen called three times daily—early in the morning, in the middle of the morning (this was known as the pudding or milk-pudding round), and in the afternoon. The floats, as milkmen's carts were called, carried large brass-topped churns from which pails were filled. Housewives stood on white-washed doorsteps, arms akimbo, and watched closely to ensure that full measures of milk were transferred from pail to jug. It was possible to order a daily supply of milk from one particular cow, and have it delivered by one particular milkman. Stupples alone had ten roundsmen.

Even then there were further sources of supply. Many parents sent children to farms as far away as Little Heath to buy skimmed milk. I can remember going to Bottom Farm for milk and then, later in the morning, trotting off to North's Orchard in Cross Oak Road to buy apples. It was splendid exercise for a small boy, though ten green apples eaten on the homeward trek did not keep the tummy-ache away.

(To be continued.)

### HARVEST SUPPER

The St. Peter's Harvest Supper will be held this year on Saturday, 5th October at 7.30 p.m. in St. Peter's Hall. Tickets (6s. 0d.) will be available from the middle of September from Mr. Brooks at the Court House and from Weatherheads' Shop in the High Street.

KEEP



COOPER, McDOUGAL

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