

From Market Stalls to Supermarkets—5

Tradesmen of Bygone Berkhamsted

By 'BEORCHAM'

LONG MEMORIES have been stirred by this short series of articles on the town's shops. Comments have been received from many readers, one of whom whiled away a wet morning in North Wales by compiling a list of the shops he knew 50 years ago. I have also had the privilege of drawing upon the knowledge of Mr. R. Gilbert, of Upper Ashlyns Road, who has compiled a fascinating record of the shops and tradespeople of the 1880s.

An unexpected source of information is 'Trifles and Travels' (1924), a book of reminiscences by Arthur Keyser, who spent his youth at Kingshill in the 1870s.

'We never found Berkhamsted dull and made friends of the tradespeople with whom we dealt,' he wrote. 'The local gentry made a habit of calling at Mrs. Greedy's, a high-class stationer's shop kept by a quiet widow, ostensibly to make purchases or meet friends, but really to learn and take home the latest gossip.'

Church and Chapel

The stationer's shop, Keyser continued, 'was recognised as "Church" in opposition to "Nonconformist." The same distinction was applied to all other retail establishments in the town, there being duplicates of each.'

Another tradesman recalled by Keyser was 'Mr. Rippon the chemist, small, spruce and spry, who always seemed shaped like a note of interrogation as we entered the shop, when he asked for and supplied us with news.'

Rippon was a tobacconist as well as a chemist; his shop, facing Castle Street, is now the Castle Gallery.

Reverting to the stationer's shop mentioned by Keyser, it became T. W. Bailey's and now bears the name of A. G. Fry. Its early history was 'Chapel', not 'Church,' the proprietor in the early 19th century being the Rev.

Joseph Hobbs, one of the most notable pastors in the long history of the local Baptist Church.

After Shop Hours

Hobbs was a man of great energy and ability. At the end of a busy day in the shop, serving customers and binding books, he ran a night school, visited the sick, and served on various committees. For forty years he was pastor of the long-vanished Baptist chapel in Water Lane, where he preached 3,550 sermons. He also preached 639 times at Tring and 580 times at Chesham. He often conducted a service at Berkhamsted in the morning, another at Tring in the afternoon, and a third at Chesham or Wendover in the evening, walking all the way. He was also prime mover in the formation of the town's first Sunday School.

At a later date another great worker for his church (Box Lane Congregational, Boxmoor) was Pastor Wright, who kept a grocer's shop next door to a well-remembered chorister of St. Peter's, Joe Callard, whose corn chandler's shop occupied the vacant site at Cowper Road corner. After shop hours rats were often seen in the windows.

Leader of the Band

Then there was W. E. Timson, the draper, whose shop preceded Sainsbury's. He was an untiring worker for the Salvation Army, which started operations in a Back Lane workshop and later transferred to a hall in Lower King's Road. Mr. Timson often led the drums, cornet and tambourines of the band, and so became known as 'Alleluia' Timson, or 'Uncle Wally.'

Another prominent tradesman, George Loader, was chairman of the Urban Council from 1900-08; he owned what is now White's shoe shop.

On the opposite side of the street, 'Daffy' de Fraine kept a barber's shop

between the Swan and the Crown. A rotund little man, he was our proudest citizen when, soon after the first World War, the Council built the open air swimming bath for which he had so persistently campaigned.

Perhaps the most widely known of all the town's businessmen was J. T. Newman, the photographer; his wonderful scenes and portraits, displayed outside his house and studio (Dean Incent's), were a constant source of interest. He would go anywhere for a good picture, climbing trees to photograph birds, staying up all night to record forked lightning, following the hunt, attending every function of note, and having the satisfaction of seeing his prints reproduced in newspapers and magazines all over the world.

The Basket-Maker

A few doors away, Ezra Miller kept the ironmonger's shop opposite St. Peter's Church. An earlier reference to this shop underestimated its age; it is now known that it was an ironmonger's in 1820, having been founded by a member of the Miller family. Older readers remember when it was owned by J. H. Harper, a familiar figure at dozens of lantern lectures with his massive projector.

Among the town's many practical bootmakers was J. Bell, whose workshop, opposite the Goat Inn, is now Bobby's, the newsagent's. Mr. Bell specialised in the manufacture of long wading boots for watercress growers, who bought their skips from J. W. Richardson, a basket-maker who used willows from osier beds beside the canal. Mr. Richardson had a small workshop opposite the almshouses and then moved from one part of the town to another. His last workshop, in Middle Road, still displays a barely decipherable sign stating: 'J. W. Richardson, basket maker. All kinds of baskets and chairs made and repaired.'

In earlier times this workshop was a smokehouse for curing fish, hence Middle Road's old nickname, Fish Street. The fishmonger was J. Griffin, whose shop (Monk's House, next door to the Post Office) is now empty, with boarded-up windows. One has to be elderly to remember Mr. Griffin; middle-aged readers however have memories of W. Roberts, another fishmonger, whose amusing notices, chalked on blackboards, brought a tart retort from the *Teachers' World* when Billy advertised for 'a boy with brains if possible.'

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Two readers have asked me to mention the nurseries which formerly added to the interest of the High Street—Lane's, on the Post Office site, and Brinkman's, at Cross Oak Road corner. The glass-houses remained intact, despite the fact that they were within a stone's throw of the footpath!

Nursery Brewery

Mr. R. Gilbert remembers when a malting and a small brewery adjoined Lane's nurseries; beer was brewed for two public houses and for Lane's own nurserymen and gardeners. Mr. Gilbert also recalls Dean Incent's House when it was the home of a painter and decorator, T. Holloway, who was also registrar of births, marriages and deaths. Prince Edward Street existed only as a small passage named Snob's Alley; and half-way between the alley and King's Road were two tailor's shops, one kept by Mr. W. Newell, the other by Mr. S. Timson, who was also the parish clerk, the pre-Council equivalent of the town clerk. But the part-time job of sanitary inspector was held not by a tradesman but by Mr. Baines, a Northchurch schoolmaster.

Finally, here are two trifling anecdotes. On a shockingly bad day no one called at a certain shop until closing time, and the owner was then so depressed and angry that he refused to serve the customer. Then there was a draper who, after sending an errand boy a mile and a half to deliver fivepennyworth of braid, received an angry telephone call ordering him to send the boy back, as he had not closed the garden gate.

BERKHAMSTED CHEMISTS' ROTA

Between the dates given the Chemist indicated is open from 6 p.m.—7 p.m. Monday to Friday (NOT Saturday), and 11.30 a.m.—12.30 p.m. on Sunday and Bank Holiday.

- 29 Sept.— 4 Oct.: Dickman.
- 6 Oct.—11 Oct.: Boots.
- 13 Oct.—18 Oct.: Figg.
- 20 Oct.—25 Oct.: Dickman.
- 27 Oct.— 1 Nov.: Boots.

Lessons for October

- 6th M.—Deuteronomy 8 v. 7—18: Revelation 14 v. 14—19.
- E.—Deuteronomy 26 v. 1—11: St. John 6 v. 26—35.
- 13th M.—Daniel 3 v. 8—26: St. Luke 11 v. 37—end.
- E.—Nehemiah 2 v. 1—18: Philippians 2 v. 1—18.
- 20th M.—Daniel 5 v. 1—5 and v. 13—end: St. Luke 12 v. 1—21.
- E.—Ruth 1 v. 1—19: Philippians 3 v. 1—16.
- 27th M.—Daniel 6 v. 5—23: St. Luke 12 v. 22—34.
- E.—Isaiah 28 v. 9—16: Ephesians 2 v. 11—end.
- 3rd November M.—Wisdom 4 v. 7—13: Revelation 19 v. 5—10.
- E.—Ecclesiasticus 44 v. 1—15: Revelation 5 v. 6—end.

Parochial Paragraphs

(continued)

Monkeys, Parrots, a Totem Pole, 'crazy' paving, a dog-in-the-manger, and travelling fairs were ingredients in the pie of debates at the September meeting of the Berkhamsted Urban District Council, which had a much larger public gallery than usual.

The monkeys and parrots were involved in a discussion about a pet shop in Lower Kings Road, for which planning permission for a change of use from a dairy had been submitted and to which an objection had been received.

The Planning Committee had recommended that the application be deferred pending the observations of the Senior Public Health Inspector, but it was subsequently disclosed that the Inspector had already submitted his observations and that a temporary licence was issued in June to expire at the end of December next.

The list of pets covered in that licence was: Hamsters, Rabbits, Mice, Guinea Pigs, Tortoises, Fish—cold water and tropical, Birds, Dogs and Cats.

It was pointed out that in an advertisement that the above list had been added to by 'Monkeys and Parrots', but while agreeing to withdraw the deferment the Council confined the pets to the original list.

One member facetiously remarked that the monkeys might be allowed to climb the Totem Pole.

Such a display might well attract a lot of attention, but doubtless such an idea was not in the minds of Messrs. Alfords when they wrote to the Urban Council concerning the possible erection of a Canadian Totem Pole, 25ft. in

height, being erected on the grass area which they had constructed at their timber yard premises fronting the canal. It would be presented to them by Canadian timber exporters.

Welcoming the idea, the Council thought that the Pole 'might well increase the amenities of the area and of the canal towpath where much was already being done to create an area of interest,' and accordingly it was suggested to the firm that they make formal application for planning consent.

The crazy paving was laid in the carriageway; or rather, Councillor S. H. Smith imagined it was. That was, he told the Urban Council meeting, the impression he gained as he approached the line of stones laid at the junction of Graemesdyke and Cross Oak Roads as a temporary safety measure. 'But,' he added, 'I soon realised that it was the scheme that was crazy, not the paving.'

That happened to be the general idea of the council and the upshot of a very pointed discussion, plus a protest petition from residents, was that the stones were removed the very next morning!

The next meeting of the newly-formed Evening Group of the National Council of Women will be held on Wednesday, 9th October, at the Friends Meeting House.

The quiet period for a haircut is from 4 to 6 p.m., so I am told by the proprietor of the Lower Kings Road gentlemen's hair dressing saloon, the one almost opposite de Lisle's, the jewellers. Although he is open from 8 o'clock in the morning he recommends that period for those who can conveniently manage it, but whatever time prompt and efficient service is assured by the two attendants.

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