

Country life 150 years ago

THE DIARY OF AN ASHRIDGE BAILIFF (2)

By 'BEORCHAM'

THE DIARY of the seventh Earl of Bridgewater's right-hand man, William Buckingham, contains some tantalisingly short entries. For example, there is a one-line reference to a visit to Ashridge House in 1813 to look at a 'plan of intended canal to Luton'. This was certainly news to me!

Much of the Bridgewater family fortune came from canals, but it is unlikely that his lordship had any financial interest in the proposed branch of the Grand Junction Canal, as our local waterway was originally called, to Luton. No doubt the plan was studied at Ashridge because the route crossed his lordship's property, probably in Pitstone and Ivinghoe parishes. Unlike the Wendover and Aylesbury arms of the Grand Junction Canal, which still exist, the branch to Luton was never made; neither was another proposed branch, from Boxmoor to St. Albans.

NO DISSENTERS!

Talking of the canal, the collapse of a crane at the Berkhamsted wharf caused William Buckingham a great deal of trouble. He paid repeated visits to the wharf before the crane was again in working order. After one of his calls at the wharf he rode up Chesham Road 'to young Dorrien and Mr. Smith to see Sheep as reported to be rotten'—not a happy subject for discussion, but an interesting reference to two rich neighbours (at Haresfoot and Ashlyns) whose descendants, through marriage, became Smith-Dorriens and Dorrien Smiths. On one of his next visits to Berkhamsted, Buckingham called at Page's (the King's Arms) for 'wine and water.' Wine for the master and water for the horse, I suppose.

Religious discrimination is suggested by our diarist's visit to the Earl 'respect-

ing Geo. Gaddesden as Tenant for Pightstone (Pitstone) Farm, his being a Dissenter.' At tea-time George called to say he had to decline the farm, and on the following day Buckingham again consulted his lordship 'respecting a tenant for Pightstone Farm on Geo. Gaddesden being refused.'

VACCINATION

As 1840 was the date of the first Vaccination Act—the use of vaccines was still a matter for voluntary decision—it is interesting to find William Buckingham, in 1813 'making out list of persons for Vaccination at Nettleden and Frithsden.' He also went to Pitstone 'respecting vaccination of Parish.'

In the diary we find a few hints of feuds and misunderstandings. For reasons of his own Buckingham underlined the words '*Webb Chesham came to apologize*', but did not say why he made an apology. On another occasion 'Lord B shewed me a anonymous letter suppose from T. Eblethite with threat, then to office to copy letter and see for his hand writing. Gave Lord B the letter and a bill of Eblethites to compare the writing.'

CLOSING OLD ROADS

One cause of resentment could have been his lordship's closing of ancient roads. We find references to 'Lord B and Creed respecting stoping the old roads and making plans of same,' 'T. Bell ploughing the road up from the Pond to Coldharbour gate,' and 'Turving the old road to Coldharbour'. It could have been some aggrieved person who caused Buckingham 'to make enquiries about the coping of the bridge being thrown off and gates broken' at Nettleden—an obvious reference to the bridge over the sunken lane between Frithsden and Nettleden. Incidentally, '*poor Nettleden*' is heavily underlined in one of the entries.

In quick succession we find references to three Ashridge employees who died tragically: a nightwatchman, drowned in a pond on Pitstone Common; a workman, killed in a claypit; a man named Hacker who cut his throat.

MAD DOGS

A mad dog caused great trouble. On Sunday, March 7, 1821, our diarist had just finished shaving when 'Jobe Hopcraft came abt. going to Wing with his Boy who was bit by Jobe Braceys Dog—being Mad and shot near Chesham after doing much injury'. That Buckingham was a man of decision is shown by the next entry: 'I shot my Dog Lion fearing he was going Mad, then on to Ashridge . . . respecting the Mad Dog etc.' His lordship had to hear about that, too.

Then there was a shooting incident which involved two men, not a dog. It appears that a man named Ponton, who was in charge of road building on the estate, shot and wounded a man named Thorn. On Friday, March 9, 1821, Buckingham 'took P (Ponton) in hold for the night,' apparently at the village inn.

BERKHAMSTED GAOL

Next day a boy called with a letter from Dr. Lloyd, of Tring, 'proposing to compromise the matter between Ponton and Thorn being shot.' Our diarist, after consulting his lordship, went to the inn, had a glass of ale, and then 'sent Ponton off to Berkd. Prison with C. Horn and How . . . I took down the names of those in ye Taproom.' At a very late hour Buckingham paid another visit to Earl Bridgewater to tell him what had been done, and then rode home on his pony, going to bed at midnight.

Ponton spent the week-end in prison (on the site of the present police station), and on Monday Buckingham rode along the new road over Northchurch Common to Berkhamsted, calling at Page's and 'then on to the Gaol to see Ponton, and back to Page's.' The two visits to Page's hostelry were not solely for refreshment; a meeting of the Sparrows Herne Trust, the local turnpike authority, was being held at the King's Arms, attended by Lords Essex, Clarendon and Bridgewater, with other trustees.

Buckingham continues: 'After the turnpike business, Ponton was ordered in and Discharged as Thorn did not appear against him.' Before the week

BEORCHAM (Contd.)

was out Ponton was again helping to build roads over the Ashridge Estate.

After a very busy morning Buckingham dined at Page's, 'rode with Lord B and Miss Page to Mr. Steels', and then rode with his lordship 'to the Billet Lane and thro Newmans fields to Coldharbour and Ashridge, then in office to order 2 Laborers to work, and with Atty, then on horse home and at Tea, then in the yard and in again to assist Cooley pay Laborers, etc., and at books and Diary and on to Atty and back to Supper and Bed at 10 o' clock.'

RIDING WITH HIS LORDSHIP

In the entry above you will note that his lordship rode with Miss Page, daughter of the King's Arms landlord. Mr. Steel, also mentioned, was, the local surgeon.

On the following day our diarist was up at 6 o' clock and attended to a variety of estate duties before setting off in the post chaise to Grosvenor Square, with a change of horses at Watford.

In the evening he went to the Strand, Drury Lane, Covent Garden and back to Grosvenor Square 'to Supper and Bed at 10.'

But I feel sure that our man about town preferred riding his pony in the country to long journeys in the chaise. Here is his account of what seems to have been a very pleasant day:

A GOOD DAY'S SPORT

'Up at 7 and down at Breakfast, then in office at Diary and Books and then to the Barn with Laborers Threshing at Machine and in again putting on my Boots and preparing my Gun, then on old Jack by Pullridge and across over the Bridge to Chappil field and Horsleys, met George to say Mr. Field and Holloway was waiting for me, then on to them in Goodmans fields near Holybush Wood and with them in the Wood and along Potten and Marigold Wood and Evesden and back to Holybush Wood, left off at 4 o'clock and to Dr. Blacknell's to divide the game, sent mine home by Hare's the Fisherman and on old Jack home to Cromer Wood, turned horse up home. Shot at rabbit thro' the Pails, then thro' Orchard

home and at Tea and assisting Cooley pay Laborers and Boys and reading Easopes Fables, Supper and Bed at 9 o' clock.'

Here, for a while, we must leave William Buckingham. Variety is the spice of local history and other subjects will occupy this space until the time is again ripe to dip into the Ashridge diary, and perhaps do greater justice to the diarist. In the meantime, William bids us *au revoir* in this little entry:

'End of year 1826. God send us a happy New one.'

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE REVIEW

If you have a contribution to the *Review*, your magazine, please let the Editor have it by 15th Oct. at the latest.

Remember that this could be your platform.