

A Printer who sold toothache medicine

BERKHAMSTED'S FIRST NEWSPAPER

By 'BEORCHAM'

AT LAST I have been able to establish beyond doubt that a weekly newspaper was printed and published at Berkhamsted in 1793. This is a remarkably early date. With the exception of the *Hartford Mercury*, which was started in 1772, it was the only newspaper that was actually printed in Hertfordshire before 1825.

At that time it was rare to find a printing office in a small country town. But two or three skilled men and a printer's devil would have been capable of producing a weekly paper of the size then in vogue. All the type was set by hand, every copy was printed on a wooden press, so speed depended entirely upon human effort, as it did in Caxton's time. Newspapers of the period were small in size, with circulations that were limited by great poverty, much illiteracy, and a Newspaper Stamp Duty which rose from 1½d. per copy in 1776 to 2d.

in 1789, 3d. in 1798, 3½d. in 1804, and 4d. in 1815. Eventually it was necessary to charge 7d. or 7½d. for four small pages. No wonder there were many more borrowers than purchasers.

THE HERALD OFFICE

The publication of 1793 was not a local paper in the modern sense; it was intended for a very large area, hence the title, *The Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Herald*. Our first truly local paper was the *Berkhamsted Times*, founded in 1875 and incorporated in the *Watford Observer* in 1900.

For many years I was aware of the existence of some books, published in the late eighteenth century, bearing the imprint:

Berkhamsted:
Printed at the Herald Office
by W. M'Dowall.

But had he really published a *Herald* newspaper? I could find no mention of it in lists of early newspapers. There was no reason why a man should not use the name *Herald* even if he printed only handbills and posters.

LUCKY FIND

A short time ago, my doubts were put at rest by the discovery of an article entitled 'Berkhamsted 100 Years Ago', in the *Berkhamsted Times* for February 24th, 1892. The article begins: 'A hundred years ago a newspaper was published at Berkhamsted: No. 7, volume II, Saturday, February 16th, 1793, has been preserved, and is of much interest. It is a four-paged sheet, the size of the *London News*, with twenty columns, price 3½d. It was printed at Berkhamsted by W. McDowall, and its title is the *Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Herald*.'

On with the detective work. Where was the copy which the writer of the article had consulted in 1892? First I tried the County Record Office, Hertford, but there was no *Herald* in the archives. However, Mr. Peter Walne, the County Archivist, showed me a declaration in McDowall's own writing that he had a printing press and types within the town of Great Berkhamsted. This declaration, dated 1799, was made to comply with a new Act for the better prevention of treasonable and seditious practices. Anyone with a printing press was under suspicion in those times.

Next, some very helpful information from Mr. E. J. Davis, the Buckingham-

shire County Archivist. He drew my attention to a book published in 1890, which quoted a statement by Robert Gibbs, an Aylesbury local historian, to the effect that on July 18th, 1792, the first edition was published in Aylesbury of the *Buckinghamshire Herald*, price 3½d. Gibbs added that the paper appeared for eighteen weeks at Aylesbury and was then transferred to Berkhamsted, where it became known as the *Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Herald*. According to Gibbs, 'the date 23rd November, 1793, is recorded as its last appearance'.

SCHOOL BOOKS

Thus, for nearly a year, the paper was printed at Berkhamsted. Almost certainly it was continued elsewhere as the *County Herald*, which in one form or another appeared until mid-Victorian times but ceased to have any special interest in our district. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to trace the pedigree of old papers; there were removals, changes of name, interruptions, revivals, and amalgamations in what has often been a hazardous trade. Sometimes the only evidence of an old paper's existence is the discovery of a copy, and that is a very rare event. Whether the *Herald* that was consulted by the writer of the article in the *Berkhamsted Times* still survives is doubtful; any extracts I am able to use are, of course, taken from the article of 1892.

Although the *Herald* had only one year's life at Berkhamsted, McDowall continued his work here as a printer, picking up some useful orders from Berkhamsted School. He printed several books, one of which, entitled 'Musae Berkhamstedienses', contains poems by 'some young gentlemen at Berkhamsted School'. The first edition of 146 pages appeared in 1794; a larger edition of 277 pages followed in 1799. McDowall also printed a book called 'Philosophical Questions', written by Ralph Hartley, teacher of mathematics at Berkhamsted School, and a book of sermons.

A POSTILION'S APOLOGY

It is amusing to find, in the *Herald*, an advertisement for sore throat ointment that was to be had of Mrs. Elizabeth Waller, Essex Arms, Watford, or of Mr. W. McDowall, 'Herald' Printing Works, Berkhamsted, in 2s. 9d. pots. McDowall also sold a toothache medicine and Dr. Sibly's Reanimating Solar Tincture, or Pabulum of Life, in 6s. 6d. and 12s. bottles. Mr. Luxmore, a surgeon, of Uxbridge, advertised that he was well known to several physicians in London and treated dropsy. Advertisements also appeared for state lotteries, books, and Roman antiquities.

A postilion took space to publish the following apology: 'False Accusation: I, Thomas Neyler, postilion to Edward Waller, of Watford, Herts, do publicly acknowledge that I have falsely accused Mr. Ralph Thrale, of Wheathampstead Mill, Herts, and Mr. John Smith, of the parish of Edlesborough, Bucks, of being the two highwaymen who committed a robbery on Bushey Heath, near Stan-

more, on Monday, the 7th day of January last; for which I am heartily sorry, and ask their pardon, and make this publication accordingly, and promise never to offend in like manner again. Watford, 11th Feb., 1793'.

DECLARATION OF WAR

A news item of local interest: 'We have the pleasure to inform our readers that, notwithstanding the opposition which had been long talked of and expected, against the Grand Junction Canal Bill, the same was carried on the second reading, before a committee of the House of Commons, on Wednesday last, and that without a division'.

Parliamentary news ran to five closely printed columns and was followed by news of the declaration of war against England by the French nation. Another item stated that officers of the Buckinghamshire Militia 'have received orders from the War Office to hold themselves

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5 WAYS

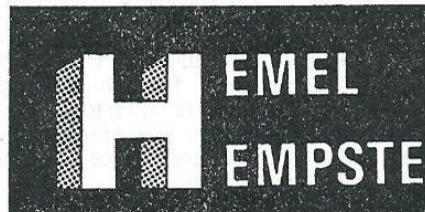
MASTERPLAN	7%
PAID-UP SHARES	5%
SUBSCRIPTION SHARES	5½%
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BEORCHAM *Continued from page 7*

in readiness to join the regiments which are sent for the protection of the coast of Hampshire'.

At the end of the paper appears the following announcement: 'Articles of intelligence, advertisements, essays and other literary communications, intended for this paper, addressed (post paid) to J. Webster, the editor, at the 'Herald' Printing Office, Berkhamsted, or to Mr. Adams, of Aylesbury, will be punctually attended to'.

READ IN THE COFFEE HOUSE

Then follows a list of agents to whom advertisements could be sent in Buckingham, Stony Stratford, Newport Pagnell, Olney, Chesham, High Wycombe, Great Marlow, Eton, Henley, Thame, Bicester, Bedford, Hatfield, Woburn, Oxford, Uxbridge, Banbury, Hertford, Hemel Hempstead, Aylesbury; 'and to Mr. William Tayler at his office, No. 5, Warwick Square, London, where this paper is regularly sent weekly and filed'. The paper was also sent to and filed at the Chapter Coffee House in Paternoster Row and Peele's Coffee House in Fleet Street, London.

It is pleasant to think of McDowall and his craftsmen and devils setting up type and printing a newspaper at Berkhamsted, knowing that a few hundred copies would have a wide circulation, and that at least one copy would be read in Fleet Street.