

Local Population Changes

HOW BERKHAMSTED HAS GROWN

By 'BEORCHAM'

A request for 'population tables of Berkhamsted from early times to the present day' must be one of the tallest orders a local historian is ever likely to receive.

No completely reliable figures are available before the first national census of 1801. However, local historians are always curious to know how the population waxed or waned, and from ecclesiastical records, tax returns and other documents it is sometimes possible to glean information upon which estimates may be based. From the earliest source of all, Domesday Book (1086), it is thought that the population of the manor of Berkhamsted, corresponding to the parishes of St. Peter and St. Mary, was 500.

A few years ago Mr. Lionel Munby compiled a most interesting booklet

entitled *Hertfordshire Population Statistics, 1563-1801*. The two parishes contained 183 families in 1563, 660 adult communicants in 1603, and 831 adults (over 16 years of age) in 1676. Of course, families vary in size and one can only guess the proportion of children to adults, but it seems that it took a long time for the population of the manor to reach 1,000.

FAST GROWTH

At the present time the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure is publishing much interesting material, and our own Local History Society has participated in this work by supplying statistical data from the Berkhamsted and Northchurch registers.

In 1801 the population of the two parishes was 2,425, rising to 4,778 in

1851 and 8,055 in 1901. This rate of growth was very slightly below the average for England and Wales. In the present century the census returns must be related to new areas, not the old parishes. Even today, after two enlargements, the urban district is less than half as large as the ancient parish of St. Peter. The present population of the urban district is over 15,000.

The fact that many people find statistics dull provides an excuse for turning to a great favourite of local historians, the 1851 census, for it supplies much more information of general interest than the earlier returns.

MOVING AROUND

A surprising feature is the large number of 'foreigners' in 1851. The railway was only 14 years old, and one imagines that few people strayed far from their native parish. But the 1851 census book provides plenty of evidence that people were moving around. Many Berkhamsted residents hailed from towns and villages in nearby Buckinghamshire; it may not be widely known that in years gone by more Berkhamsted people had family links with Chesham than with any other town.

Few local residents were formerly Londoners, probably because London was a residential as well as a business magnet before the season ticket era. Three residents of 1851 hailed from the New World—from Quebec, New York and Philadelphia.

At Highfield House, the five servants who waited upon their master, John

Hyde, came from Flaunden, Cotterham, Thame, Aylesbury, and Chenies. Ministering to the needs of Thomas Halsey, M.P., his wife and one son (aged twelve months) at The Hall were a butler, footman, coachman, groom, housekeeper, cook, nurse, dairymaid, kitchen maid, two laundry maids and two housemaids - and of these only the groom was born in Berkhamsted.

Haresfoot had a staff of twelve servants, and at Berkhamsted Place eight servants waited upon Colonel (afterwards General) John Finch, his wife, and an orphan who was staying with them when the census was taken. The colonel's neighbour, Noah Newman, of Castle Hill Farm, had five domestic servants and fourteen labourers to farm his 310 acres.

WILLIAM COOPER

Unlike the gentry, William Cooper, founder of the chemical firm, had no servant. He lived in a little house near the police station and was described as a 'graduated veterinary surgeon'. A native of Clunbury, Salop, he was 37 years old; his wife Mary was three years his senior. Living with them were his nephew, John Simmet (14 years old and already an apprentice); his niece, a schoolgirl; and William Wilson, his 21 years-old assistant.

At the police station, George Mackay, born in Scotland, was superintendent of the Herts Rural Police. He was a bachelor. Under the same roof lived Mackay's manservant and his wife and two children. There were no prisoners on the night of the census.

The most densely populated house in the parish was the workhouse; here lived the keeper, James Badderley, his wife, two sons, two daughters and 61 inmates.

HAWKERS AND BOATMEN

No one of note was staying at the King's Arms. Even without guests there must have been a full house at the Swan Inn, for Hannah Foster, innkeeper and brewer, lived there with her five children, a sister, a cousin, two servants and an ostler. At the Red Lion (replaced by the Midland Bank) lived Charles

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Simmonds and his wife, two servants and six lodgers, three of whom were 'hawkers of drapery'. Two were canal boatmen, and the sixth was described as 'sillioutes (artist)'—evidently a silhouettist.

Highfield Road was called Prospect Place, and among the householders was Emma Shortnall, 'straw-plait school-mistress', one of many women who taught children a once-remunerative cottage craft. Several women were described as 'straw bonnet sewers' and there was at least one upholstress, an occupation rarely encountered in the feminine gender. Berkhamsted had scores of domestic servants, but only one, so far as I can ascertain, described herself as a charwoman.

GIRL PRINTERS

Several girls were employed as typesetters. One, Amelia Warren, aged nine, lived in The Wilderness. Other girl compositors were aged 11, 12, 14, 19 and 21. They probably worked at a printing office near Three Close Lane (afterwards Lee's mineral water factory); the type and presses were bought by William Cooper, but most definitely are not used for printing the *Review*!

William Key, aged 74 and a native of Shotswell, Warwickshire, was described as a timber merchant employing 22 men; his yard is now Alsford's. Matthew Sills, a wood-shovel maker, employed two men. Henry Lane, aged 69 and born at Uxbridge, employed 33 labourers in his nurseries. Joseph Harris, a builder, employing 14 men, had a large thatched barn where Camellia Terrace stands today, between the Gas office and the George. Samuel Crew was master of the Bourne School. William de Fraine, 'hairdresser and perfumer', came from Aylesbury; he was descended from Louis XVIII's court barber, preferring to stay in England when the exiled king returned to France.

Unfortunately, houses were not numbered in 1851 and it is not easy to ascertain where many of them stood. There were three houses in Lester's Yard—but where? However, there is no mistaking Middle Row, in front of Back Lane, where, starting at the west end, William S. Rance kept the Bell public-house. Along the row towards the church were shops kept by a chemist and druggist, saddler, butcher, whitesmith and bell-hanger, tailor (also postmaster!), butcher, grocer and tallow-chandler, confectioner, saddler, shoemaker, dressmaker, tailor, grocer and tea dealer, and finally Mark Turney, shoemaker, 'employing seven men'.