

ECHOES FROM AN EXHIBITION

By 'BEORCHAM'

Many people were surprised by the size and scope of the recent 'Bygone Berkhamsted' exhibition. That there was too much to see was a frequent comment; one could have spent many hours studying old documents, some of which were on show to the public for the first time.

Among several exhibits contributed by the County Record Office was a facsimile of the Militia List of 1763. As it shows the occupations of over 150 men, it is a document of great interest. First, however, a few words about the Militia. For many centuries it was the duty of English counties to provide trained men for national defence. The Militia was raised by voluntary recruitment, or, if volunteering failed, a levy could be made upon all men between the ages of 18 and 50. After a period of

some neglect, Pitt took the initiative which led to the passing of an Act in 1757 'for the better ordering of the Militia forces in the several counties.'

The document recently shown in St. Peter's Hall is headed: 'Berkhamsted St. Peter: The names of the persons liable to serve in the Militia.' A footnote states: 'All persons who think themselves Aggreev'd may Appeal to the Deputy Lieutenants at the Bell Inn in Hempstead within the said County on Friday the ninth day of December, and no Appeal will be heard afterwards.'

VARIED OCCUPATIONS

Of the 154 names on the list, sixteen were deleted because the men were deaf, deformed, lame, not of age, or had left the parish. One man was taken off the list because he had three children not,

surely, a rare 'handicap'. But Erasmus Hollis, who had only one eye, was eligible to serve in the Militia.

I counted 33 labourers, 31 servants, seven cordwainers, six carpenters, five tailors, five butchers, four bricklayers, four bakers, four farmers, three blacksmiths, three turners, three millers, two victuallers, two glaziers, two coopers, two gentlemen, and two shovelmakers. The list also includes one each of the following: basketmaker, staymaker, surgeon, draper, glover, heelmaker, white-smith, clockmaker, sawyer, weaver, maltster, esquire, and schoolmaster (Guy Abraham, master of the Bourne School). Right at the end of the list are the names of James Young, ox-drover to His Grace the Duke of Bridgewater, and Matthew Young, undergroom to the Duke -the celebrated 'father of inland navigation.'

THE SOLDIERS' BAGGAGE

As the Militia (and the Volunteer Corps of a later period) have not received the attention they deserve from local historians, I hope to return to this subject at a later date. Meanwhile, here is an interesting tit-bit of military interest. Recently I came across an extract from the Verney Letters of the Eighteenth Century, vol. II, referring to the Treaty of Guarantees, concluded with the Dutch in January, 1713, stipulating that if the Hanoverian succession was in jeopardy, they should send 6,000 Dutch troops to England. The first contingent of 3,000 men was brought over in 1715, and on November 27 of that year Lord

Fermanagh wrote: 'There came abt. 600 Dutch Soldiers to Winslow from Barkhamstead with 14 Carriages of Women and other Baggage and one Calesh, yesterday they went on to Towcester, but at night another Regimt. of Em came to Winslow.' By the time the Dutch reached Scotland, the crisis was almost over. The Pretender had got away by sea, leaving his followers to a cruel revenge.

A CHESHAM TURNPIKE

Now for an entirely different subject. Over 70 years after the Sparrows Herne Trust was formed to improve the highway between Bushey Heath and Aylesbury, another turnpike road was proposed.

A document shown at the 'Bygone Berkhamsted' exhibition refers to a meeting held at the King's Arms, Berkhamsted, on November 22, 1824, under the chairmanship of Thomas Dorrien. Headed: 'Proposed Turnpike Road from Berkhamsted thro' Chesham and Chalfont, to Gerrards Cross, and a branch Road from the latter place to Rickmersworth' [sic], the document states that 'travelling from these points to the Western Roads is so extremely bad as to call for the adoption of some means of improving it.'

The meeting considered the best line to be taken, and resolved that the proposed turnpike road should be extended from Berkhamsted to Dunstable and from Gerrards Cross to Eton, to open a communication with Windsor. It was further resolved that 'Mr. McAdam and Mr. Creed do make a plan and prospectus of the whole road extended as above, including an estimate of the requisite Act of Parliament, and of all the expenses attending the establishing of a Turnpike Trust on the Road.'

THE GREAT McADAM

Of especial interest is the reference to John McAdam, the Scottish inventor of a method of surfacing roads. His name and such variants as 'macadamised' are now dictionary words.

No toll-bars were in fact erected on our northern and southern approaches; nevertheless, improvements were made to Grubs Lane (Chesham Road), which was an extremely busy road before Chesham had a railway station of its own in late Victorian times. The widening of King's Road did not take place until the early years of this century.

PITCHING PENNIES

Also shown at the 'Bygone Berkhamsted' exhibition was a facsimile page from the Accounts of the Stewards of the Manor, 1725. One item, 'Received pitching pennies at the Fair, 1s. 0d.', especially intrigued me. Were the stewards profiting from games of pitch-and-toss? Surely not! The reference, I fancy, is to the modest charges that were made for pitching stalls at the fair.

Here is another interesting entry: 'Sold the ruins of an old Spittle Tree to

John Tratt & he has planted a New one in the room of it and fenced it to save it, into the bargain, 10s. 6d.' The word 'Spittle' (hospital) appears in many old documents. The tree almost certainly stood in Spittle Mead, which belonged to the old Hospital of St. John the Evangelist (for lepers) on the Post Office site. All honour to John Tratt, a miller, for making sure that a new tree replaced the old one, and was properly protected.

THE 'MUDDHOLE'

The stewards' accounts also show rents received for 'lofts' in the market house, the shambles, and the 'Muddhole', the total (including £2 market toll) amounting to £17 0s. 6d. I wonder what the 'Muddhole' could have been to justify an annual rent of £1?

Finally, a letter filed in the stewards'

accounts, dated 1750: 'A Fire broke out in a Kilne belonging to the Prince of Wales at Berkhamsted and consumed that and part of the Malthouse near adjoining, and the charge of rebuilding the same will amount to £4 and upwards. The Malthouse must have been repair'd if the accident had not happen'd. It was with great difficulty the Town Hall was sav'd. I wrote to Mr. Pouncefoot and he desir'd me to write to you to give me orders to pay the Charge out of the rents I receiv'd. The Poor man wanted it to be done before ye Malt he had left was gone to keep his Custome--- so he will be able to pay his rent as usual.'

At any rate, the Town Hall -presumably the Court House, though it could have been the Market House --was saved in 1750!

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