

# The Council's Early Days—II

by 'BEORCHAM'

In 1900, the Urban Council received an offer from the London and North Western Railway Company to improve the bridge near the Crystal Palace public house, provided that the cost (£1,700) was borne by local authorities.

Even before the days of motor-cars this narrow bridge was regarded as a danger spot; the very first issue of the *Berkhamsted Times* (April, 1875) contains a suggestion that the passenger subway of the old railway station should be kept open for pedestrians. But the subway was bricked up, as you will see if you inspect the railway wall facing the Castle.

The sum of £1,700 horrified the Council, and the improvement scheme was turned down 'in view of the present financial position'. With hindsight we may deplore this

and many other lost opportunities, but, as was stated in last month's article, the Council was already saddled with heavy debts and liabilities. A Ratepayers' Association was formed for instant sniping, and in turn the Urban Council sent the first of many protests to Hertford about the County Council's 'enormous and ever-increasing expenditure'.

## ELECTRIC SHOCK

Now and again the Council had some ambitious ideas. For instance, in 1900 a private company's application to supply electricity to the town was turned down because the Council wished to retain the right to provide such a service. At that time a few firms and individuals had their own generators, but most of the townspeople still relied on gas, oil and candles.

In the following year (1901), Mr. J. R. Hatherly, a new councillor, proposed that the Council should seek a provisional order for powers to supply electricity for all purposes within the urban district. Sadly, the Council concluded that it was too early to entertain such a project; enthusiasm evaporated as soon as Mr. Hatherly put the cost at a minimum of £11,000. Eight years later the right was granted to the Chesham Electric Light and Power Company.

## HERO'S WELCOME

In 1900, news of the relief of Mafeking created excitement; the Council wanted to call a public meeting to arrange peace celebrations, but fighting in South Africa was still going on a year later, when the whole town gave a hero's welcome to General Horace Smith-Dorrien, whose family lived at Haresfoot. It is not known whether the General was informed that a canal boat registered at Berkhamsted was named the Horace Smith-Dorrien.

In 1902—far too early a time for

the word 'garage' to be in general circulation—the Council permitted Mr. Sills to erect a temporary shed with corrugated iron roof for a 'car shelter'. Later on we find references to car sheds—not a very elegant name for the successors to coach-houses. But more and more people were using cars, and the Council asked the Right Hon. J. T. Halsey, Member for the Watford Division (there was no Hemel Hempstead Constituency then) to 'safeguard the rights of the public', as existing regulations 'governing the motor traffic' were inadequate.

### GETTING UP STEAM

The need for a steam siren to call the fire brigade was raised in 1902, and two years later Wood & Sons provided a whistle for £13, plus £10 for connecting a pipe to the water-works boiler and fastening the whistle to the tall chimney. This was the famous bass-baritone which always gave a recital at 1 p.m. on Saturday to prove that it was in good hooting order.

At that time a manual fire engine was used. At no cost to the rate-payers it was supplemented in August, 1907, by a steam fire engine (still horse-drawn, however), and hundreds of people gathered outside the Town Hall to see Lord Brownlow, on behalf of himself and other subscribers, name the engine 'Alice'. It was then taken down Lower Kings Road for the brigade to give a demonstration, using water from the canal. 'Alice' remained in service until the late 1920s.

A sad item of 1903 tells us that James Dealey, a Council workman, lost an eye while stone-breaking. He was willing to accept £10 in full discharge of all claims 'with the addition of one for an artificial eye if the same was not provided by the hospital.' The surveyor was directed to obtain eye-guards for all men breaking stones for the Council.

### 69 YEARS' WAIT

On to 1904, when the Council decided to meet monthly instead of fortnightly. A letter was received from Dr. Fry, headmaster of Berkhamsted School, asking for a footpath on the east side of Chesham Road. The letter was referred to the works committee, and the County

Council was asked for a speed limit of 10 m.p.h. in Chesham Road. As for the footpath, it was provided a few months ago, 69 years after Dr. Fry had stressed the need for it.

Much interest was taken in roadside trees, and Mr. F. Q. Lane, the nurseryman, was warmly thanked by fellow councillors for his gift of 57 trees — chestnuts, Norway maples, poplars, mountain ash and silver birches—to beautify various parts of the High Street.

Not that the surface of the highway was beautiful. In 1906 the County Council was told that it was

a disgrace to those whose duty it was to maintain it. This was not the first complaint of its kind, neither was it the last. In 1911 a letter was sent to Hertford asking if the Urban Council could take over the maintenance of the highway.

Two important matters called for Public Enquiries—an extension of the boundaries, and the provision of suitable offices for the Council which, as late as 1908, continued to hold its meetings at the workhouse, while the surveyor's office was in his own house in Montague Road.

*(To be continued.)*



**Big or small**

**we help them all**

No matter how large or how little the amount you wish to save or invest, you'll find we can offer a great deal in good rates of interest and security with our savings or investment schemes. We have been established since 1884 — our experience is your profit.

**HEMEL HEMPSTEAD**  
**BUILDING SOCIETY**  
**IS HERE TO HELP YOU PROSPER**

Authorised for trustee investment  
 Member of the Building Societies Association  
 Assets exceeding £7,000,000  
 43 Marlowes, Hemel Hempstead, Tel: 56443/54155  
 Manager and Secretary C. R. Hunt FBS.

Local Agent: Western Insurance and Mortgage Services,  
 29/33 Lower Kings Road, Berkhamsted