

The Council's Early Days—V

by 'BEORCHAM'

The years immediately before the 1914-18 War are sometimes described as Britain's Indian Summer. Certainly it was a comfortable time for the middle and upper classes. A family with an income of £500 a year could afford to keep three servants—an indication that the servants' wages were low. Even so, most of the servants were better fed, clothed and housed than the many working men who were paid less than £1 a week.

It was a time of slow inflation, and in 1913 the Council granted increases to their workers. Carters working 51 hours a week were to receive £1 3s. instead of £1 1s. a week; those who were paid only 18s. were to have £1 1s. Total wages for 16 men went up from £14 13s 10½d. to £16 11s. 10½d.

The effects of railway and miners' strikes were known when coal (if you could get it) went up to £1 11s. a ton, but Berkhamsted was spared the high unemployment and industrial unrest of the period. Locally, however, few good jobs were available, and in deep despair many people concluded that industries were deliberately kept out to maintain Berkhamsted's standing as a residential town.

No concessions

It is significant that a Chamber of Trade started off in 1912 with proposals to advertise Berkhamsted as a residential town, only to change its tune a year or so later by urging the Urban District Council to attract new industries, perhaps making concession to manufacturers who set up factories here.

The Council replied that it had no power to grant concessions or spend money on advertising the town. Similarly, the Council had no power to discourage the erection of factories and had never attempted to do so. Special mention was made of Public Health Acts regarding noxious trades, and one wonders whether the Council had stopped something frightful coming to Berkhamsted!

Captain Scott

The minute books contain several references to national rather than local matters. For instance, the Council placed on record its admiration of the noble and heroic death of Captain Scott and his companions in the cause of scientific investigation; a reply from Mrs. Scott, the employer's mother, is in the files.

When a Royal Commission on Canals recommended the appointment of a Waterways Board and the acquisition by the state of the four trunk canals (including our own, the Grand Junction), the Council urged the Government to take immediate action, drawing

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attention to the 'cheaper facilities due to canal development in Germany, France and Belgium, the countries chiefly competing with our own manufacturers'.

Turning to local matters, it is interesting to find that 13 residents of a new road suggested that it be called Queen's Road. It is rare indeed to find residents of a road having an opportunity of naming it.

Gifts to the town

Unfortunately, we do not have a Lucas Road in memory of Mrs. Lionel Lucas, who, in 1913, thought the Council was the best recipient of one of her properties, Butts Meadow. She gave it to the town 'as an open space to be kept for ever for the use of the public'.

Another gift was offered by Sir Richard Cooper, a former councillor, in memory of his father. He invited the Council to consider three suggestions:

1. The enlargement and improvement of the Moor recreation ground and purchase of adjoining meadow, and arranging for a swimming bath.

2. The enlargement and improvement of the Town Hall.

3. The erection of almshouses.

The reference to the Town Hall is especially interesting, as the Council had asked to see the trust deeds and came to the conclusion that the Town Hall was being administered in accordance with the scheme laid down. As for Sir Richard's offer, it was revived in a new version after the war and would have been part of a huge redevelopment scheme. This was to be the town's war memorial, but was abandoned through lack of support by the townspeople.

Two resignations

In the minutes for 1914 we find a reference to the Daylight Saving Bill; the Council was in favour provided that it did not lead to the exploitation of shop assistants. The Council also drew the Railway Company's attention to low, dangerous platforms at Berkhamsted Station, and received a promise that improvements would be made.

A row or misunderstanding caused Mr. E. H. Adey, the surveyor, to resign. Mr. W. A. Burr, chairman of the Public Health Committee, was so incensed that

he, too, resigned; after placing a sovereign on the table he left the Council Chamber. A resolution was passed deploring Mr. Burr's action and assuring him of deep appreciation of his great work in the past. There was no feeling of antagonism against either him or the surveyor.

However, Mr. Adey left and the Council advertised for a new surveyor and sanitary inspector. There were 116 applications, and John Hadfield, 35 years of age and holding a similar post at Uttoxeter, was engaged at a commencing salary of £250 a year.

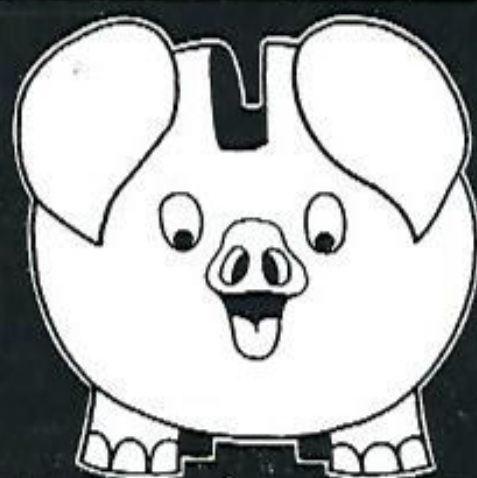
Then came the war. The Council

paid for posters regarding the billeting of Lord Kitchener's recruits, a committee was formed to provide refreshments for the troops, and a meeting was called to prevent hardship and want in the town during the war.

The Indian Summer was over.

(To be continued)

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