

## LIFE IN 1851

by 'BEORCHAM'

Did you know that in 1851 there was a public-house at Frithsden called the Tyrant's Arms? It is a strange, forbidding name, but William Newman, the landlord, obviously had no objection to it. He was described as a beerhouse keeper and farmer (many publicans had two jobs), and besides having two labourers for 29 acres of farmland, Newman and his wife employed a servant girl, Ellen Holloway. She was 11 years old! I hope that Ellen and the labourers never found the Newmans tyrannical.

This is but one of many interesting tit-bits I found in a long but rewarding study of the 1851 census returns, with 3,395 entries.

As males (1,595) were outnumbered by women and girls (1,800), I was surprised to find that there were more men over 60 years of age (113) than women (109). This proportion, however, was distorted by the Workhouse, where 22 men and only eight women were over 60 years old. The oldest inhabitant was Rebecca Wood, who lived in one of the Sayer almshouses. She was 99 years old. The oldest man, Richard Rouse, of Haresfoot Park, was 90 and still described as an agricultural labourer.

### 441 STRAW PLAITERS

Turning from the aged to the young, it is pleasing to find that long before school attendance was compulsory, over 500 children were listed as scholars, the youngest being two years old. In addition, 21 "scholars at home" were taught by parents or governesses, while some 50 boys and girls were boarders.

Many children went out to work at a very early age, though girls usually stayed at home (unless they became domestic servants) to plait straw. Altogether I counted 441 straw-plaiters in the parish. An older craft is recalled by a number of elderly women who described themselves as retired lace-makers. But jobs for women were few unless they were dressmakers, bonnet sewers, laundresses, char-women or household servants. Surprisingly, five girls, their ages ranging from nine to 21, were typesetters, and another girl of 14 was described as a printer's assistant. No local newspaper was produced at that time, and the only reference to a master printer, William Barrett, suggests that his works were in London, for he had about 40 men in his employ.

### SHEPHERD BOYS

In these days of mechanised farming we seldom think of the enormous labour force that was needed on the land in Victorian times. At Coldharbour Farm, Alfred Cooley employed 14 men for his 266 acres. Joseph Chennells of Little Heath Farm (235 acres) employed 16 men; of these, two ploughmen, two horsekeepers, a cowman and a shepherd boy

of 16 lived at the farm. Other local farmers employed shepherd boys aged 11, 12 and 13.

The largest employer was Henry Lane, the nurseryman, with 33 outdoor labourers in 1851. At that time William Cooper's business was still very small, and the East family had to wait for the Crimean War for the big orders which started them on the road to fortune. William Key, however, already employed 22 men in his timber yard, which was later transferred to what we now know as Alsford's yard.

There were many other woodworkers who plied their trade alone or in twos or threes. Among the specialists were hoop-makers, lath-makers, shaving box turners, chair-makers, wood shovel makers, rod hurdle makers, saddle-tree makers, rake-makers, wheelwrights, boat-builders and coach-builders. There were also two coach spring makers. I counted 27 carpenters, two "rough carpenters", 16 sawyers and a few woodmen and timber carters.

### PAYING GUESTS

Before continuing what is beginning to look like a trade directory, let me turn to some of the town's old inns. The King's Arms was not busy on the night of the census. Mary (Polly) Page, mine hostess, was there with sister Catherine, three servants, two waiters, and just one visitor—Edward Twells, "landed proprietor", aged 70 and probably the father or grandfather of the curate, the Rev. Henry Twells.

Thomas Ricketts, who kept the Five Bells (now Weatherhead's shop), had several lodgers—two labourers, a boatman, a ropemaker, an assistant ropemaker, a jobbing bricklayer, a gunsmith, a carpenter, and "a traveller with whips." An interesting reminder of pre-motoring days.

The Red Lion (replaced by the Midland Bank) was kept by Charles Simmonds with the help of two servants. His lodgers included three hawkers of drapery (all Irishmen), two canal boatmen, and a man described as "sillhouetes (artist)". Obviously a silhouettist.

### THE SWEEP'S APPRENTICE

On the opposite side of the entrance to Red Lion Yard (where the Evening School now stands), Eli Olliffe, chimney sweep, lived with his wife, two children, a widowed aunt who was there as a general servant, a sweep's apprentice aged 11, and a journeyman sweep aged 15.

John Abbey, a tailor employing two men, was also the town's postmaster, his daughter working as an assistant in the post office. Apparently there was only one postman at that time.

Another tailor, Frederick Loader, also had another job—he kept an inn in Castle Street. As a tailor he employed three men. A widower, Mr. Loader lived with three sons, three daughters, two servants, one apprentice tailor, and three lodgers. A very busy house!

Here are some of the descriptions under the heading, "Rank, profession or occupation": Drayman's wife, laundress's daughter, proprietor of

houses, gentleman's grandson, son of a draper, brewer's wife. Sadly, there are also such descriptions as pauper of unsound mind, lunatic, and idiotic.

Finally, a few more occupations: electric telegraph labourer, railway policeman, dealer in wool, net maker, errand boy (11 years old), umbrella maker, silk winder, furze cutter, tallow chandler, malt maker, hay binder, chalk drawer, soap boiler—and just one Member of Parliament!

### **THE WAYFARERS' CHORAL SOCIETY**

The Society's first rehearsal was held in the Music Room of the Boys' School at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, September 17th, 1974.

Any lady or gentleman interested in joining the Society will be most welcome. There are vacancies for all voices. Subscription £2 (half price for full-time students).

The proposed programme will be Walton's "Belshazzar's Feast" and Faure's "Requiem." These will be performed, in conjunction with the Aeolian Singers, at the Pavilion on Sunday, May 18th, 1975.

### **THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY**

The Autumn Rally of the Society will be held on Thursday, 10th October, commencing at 3 p.m. in the Berkhamsted Baptist Church. There will be a "Bring and Buy" stall and a book stall.

### **COURT HOUSE APPEAL**

Forthcoming events in aid of

#### **THE COURT HOUSE RESTORATION FUND**

Ploughman's Lunches in St Peter's Hall 11.45 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. on Fridays in October 4th, 11th, 18th and 25th.

**Sponsored Knitting** in St. Peter's Hall 2.30 p.m. to 3.30 p.m. on Thursday, November 7th.

### **RHEUMATISM RESEARCH**

If you are interested in this subject or if you suffer from rheumatism or arthritis, come and see the film "A touch of rheumatism" on Tuesday, October 8th at 8 p.m. in the Catholic Church Hall. Mr. A. Benjamin F.R.C.S. will speak at the meeting. It is hoped that a local group of the arthritis and rheumatism council for research will be formed.

### **WEST HERTS CHURCH COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WORK**

The West Herts Church Council for Social Work invites you to their meeting on Friday, October 10th at 2.30 p.m. in St. Mary's Church Hall to hear a speaker from the Cyrenians.

All are welcome. Admission free.