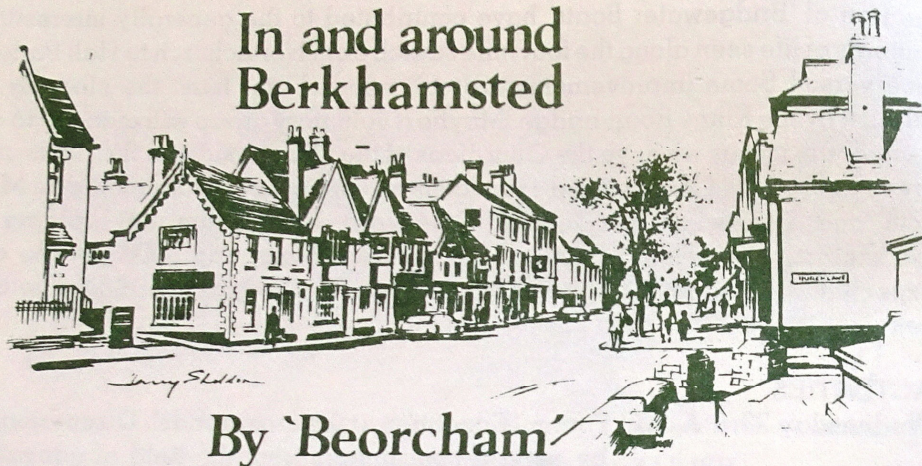


In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

CHAPEL STREET SCHOOL

A recent addition to my collection of old local pictures is a photograph of one of the classrooms of Chapel Street infants' school. Twenty boys and girls were making little pyramids with small wooden blocks, but all eyes were on the photographer. The period? The early 1920's, I fancy.

Although the school was closed thirty years ago, the building and playground still look much the same as they were before the children were transferred to other schools. Here I must tell you that my interest is due to the fact that I attended Sunday School in Chapel Street before starting day school at the age of five. That was a long time ago, when Miss. Melmoth (afterwards Mrs. Goss) was headmistress.

We were very proud of the school in the valley. Chapel Street was a very interesting road, with a barber's shop at Raven's Lane corner facing a Co-operative Society shop. Almost opposite the school was a baker's shop and Mrs. Channer's little general shop at the bottom of Manor Street. On the way to Castle Street we could see the town's first telephone exchange in someone's front room. At the west end of Chapel Street was the huge Congregational Church at one corner and a public house, now a private house, at the other corner.

At school we had many a laugh when a big boy living in a house nearby had the knack of sounding the large and very loud school bell. This naughty lad afterwards started a dance band and accompanied Gracie Fields on some of her tours abroad.

Now for a sad event. On August 12, 1886, a plumber's shed caught fire and the flames spread to the whole length of the school. The roof soon fell in with a great crash and only the walls were left standing. But no time was lost. Matthew Brothers at once agreed to restore the building to its former condition, and a month after the fire the school was completely rebuilt and opened to the children.

GRAHAM GREENE, O.M.

A short time ago I had the pleasure of meeting two former residents of Berkhamsted who now live in South America. Thousands of miles away they were surprised to see on television a film showing lots of scenes in and around Berkhamsted.

It must have been 'The Human Factor,' by Graham Greene, the recent recipient of the Order of Merit, the Queen's personal gift limited to 24 members. Why hasn't the Town Council sent our congratulations to a world famous writer who was born in Berkhamsted and lived here for many years?

One has only to read Mr. Greene's autobiography, 'A Sort of Life', to know that he has a host of memories of his early years in Berkhamsted. Nowadays he is a rare visitor, the last time I saw him he was with his brother, Sir Hugh Greene, when they spoke at a meeting called by the Citizens' Association, ten years or so ago. To my pride and delight I received a signed copy of 'The Human Factor' before the book was in the shops.

FAMILIAR NAMES

A reader has shown me the envelope of a letter she recently received from Eindhoven, in the Netherlands. It was addressed to Doctors Commons Road, Berkham Ted, Herts.

Good old Ted! Much better than Berko, which has been revived by our free local newspapers.

FULL HOUSE

The Sessions Hall is now very smart and popular, but I wonder if you know that it was the last addition to the Town Hall complex? With the large billiards room below, the Sessions Hall was opened in 1890, thirty years after the Town Hall and Market House.

But our forefathers knew how to make good use of what was available. The Berkhamsted Times of 1887 reported: "On the evening of the 3rd February every room of the Town Hall was occupied for some social purpose. The Reading Room, as usual, was in full use. In the adjoining Committee Room was the choral class, some 40 strong. In the Town Hall was the weekly dancing class. In the Corn Exchange and Market Hall was the Volunteers' drill, the first

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since Christmas. In addition to these, there are the clubs, open daily: the Conservatives, the Working Men's and the two Liberal Clubs, also the gentlemen's club, all of which have bagatelle or billiards and are well attended."

And all this when there were twice as many public houses in Berkhamsted as there are today!

LOOKING AROUND

My thanks to a reader for the gift of 'The History of the Foundling Hospital', a very hefty tome with a faded ticket to attend the laying of the foundation stone of the Foundling Hospital at Berkhamsted by the Duke of Connaught in 1933.

For some time the governors had been seeking a site in the country, of not less than 150 acres, and not more than 40 miles from London, with easy access to the capital.

I fancy that very few people know that one of the properties inspected was Ashridge. Other sites included Claremont at Esher, Stowe in Buckinghamshire, and Addington. But, as we all know, Ashlyns was selected.

IN MEMORIAM: 'Beorcham'

On 12th March in Berkhamsted everyone who heard the news of Percy Birtchnell's death was affected - how sorry people were.

He was a kindly man, always seeking the quieter ways of life; punctilious about detail - no editor of the 'Review' dared face him when there was a printer's error in his 'Beorcham' articles - but with a wry sense of humour which lightened all that he did. I suppose we could truly call him 'Mr. Berkhamsted': he was born in the town, educated at the Bourne School and worked here all his life. His two best known books, 'A Short History of Berkhamsted' and 'Bygone Berkhamsted' reflected both his love of his birthplace and his careful eye for detail in researching its history. He knew so much about the Town and its past. No one could have maintained the constant flow of anecdotes and fact which appeared in the 'Review' for over forty years without a zeal for the history of its inhabitants and their doings. He informed without being pompous and enlightened you without pedantry. Nearly always there was the light joke and frequently a whimsical tail piece. One could imagine him gently smiling as he typed it.

On the day news of his death was running through the Town I was collecting the new Town Flag - to which he had contributed with enthusiasm (and characteristically, with a request for anonymity). How sad it is that the same flag should fly so soon at half mast for one of the Town's most loyal and best-loved citizens.

The Editor