

# IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

by Townsman

## LOCAL POLITICS

Is interest in local affairs declining? A friend of mine thinks that it is. He was depressed to read that fewer than 200 people attended the 'planning surgeries' (which could have had a more enticing name), and that only 28 per cent of the electorate voted in a recent Council by-election.

My friend kept on making comparisons with the old days, saying that almost everybody was then deeply interested in local affairs and awaited monthly reports of Council meetings as eagerly as if they were instalments of a good serial story. He went on to say that most of the councillors were known to everybody, whereas today he doubted whether many people could name more than nine of our eighteen Councillors.

## SPECIAL SUBJECTS

What my friend did not take into account was the growth of the town. It was much easier to know 'everybody' when Berkhamsted was half its present size.

The great difference is that today much of the Council's business is Big Business. It was the little issues that usually aroused the greatest interest in years gone by, issues that everybody could grasp and follow, the more so if they generated rows and (better still) jokes in the Council chamber.

Now we tend to be specialists, sometimes limiting our interest to one subject which directly concerns us: housing, education, planning, conservation, rubbish disposal, and so on. Hence the tendency towards acrimony in the correspondence columns of the *Gazette*, which recently culminated in a letter from the chairman of the Council to the effect that able people could be discouraged from devoting their time, talents and money to the task of local government.

But there have always been rows and rumours of rows. I can recall some very bitter controversies in years gone by, but nearly always there was a peaceful solution and the *Gazette* was able to season its reports with 'Laughter,' 'Loud laughter,' and 'Hear, hear.'

There is a lot of interest in civic affairs. There is understanding of the difficulties that face councillors and officials. But there is scope for praise as well as complaint, and a little more laughter in and outside the Council Chamber would not come amiss.

## THE TOWN'S OLDEST SHOP

Many people have been sorry to see 'Closing down' notices in the windows of a shop which has been faithful to the same trade for well over a century and a half. I refer to A. G. Fry's stationery

shop, which most of us still call T. W. Bailey's.

An early owner of this shop, Joseph Hobbs, was pastor of the Baptist Church in the early 19th century. At a later date the business was taken over by Mr. Greedy. His widow married her foreman printer, Mr. A. Slater, whose name was on the fascia until Mr. T. W. Bailey bought the shop before the first World War.

Tom Bailey took a very active part in local affairs. He was a member of the voluntary fire brigade and belonged to many societies, but is best remembered as one of the town's most able councillors. For at least one year he was chairman of the Urban Council. On his death the business was continued by Mr. W. Wild, who retired to the West Country and is still greeted by a host of friends whenever he visits the town to see his son Alan, who ran the business for some years before it was taken over by A. G. Fry.

## THOMPSON'S ROW

Those of us who pride ourselves on knowing the town well have to learn a few new street names every year. It makes a change to subtract a name from the ever-growing list, and we do so because the cottages in Thompson's Row were pulled down early in January.

To show our superior knowledge of the town, we used to ask friends if they knew where Thompson's Row was situated. But the nameplate on the south wall of the fish shop in Holliday Street has been taken down, and what was once a little road to six cottages now leads only to Tower Mill, one of Cooper's many buildings.

Demolition workers have also removed the High Street cottages which stood more or less in front of Thompson's Row. How our town keeps on changing!

## FORTHCOMING CENTENARY

Thanks to Mr. S. Chappell, of Greenway, who has presented me with three bound volumes containing early editions of the *Berkhamsted Parish Magazine*, I am able to confirm that the *Review* will be able to celebrate, in July, 1972, the centenary of its ancestor's birth.

Not that publication has been continuous; there must have been one or two gaps when no magazine was published, otherwise the copy you are now reading would be Vol. 99, No. 2, not Vol. 94, No. 2.

It will be time to review the *Review* on its 100th birthday; meanwhile, it may whet your appetite to know that early copies contain some remarkably interesting articles. The rector, the Rev. J. W. Cobb, contributed accounts of his

tours on the Continent, including a visit to Metz and Sedan shortly after the Franco-Prussian war.

## LETTER FROM AMERICA

Referring to my recent notes on local dialect words and pronunciations, a reader in the United States writes to say that during his boyhood in Connecticut he was familiar with 'chimbley' (chimney), 'ellum' (elm) and 'drownded' (drowned).

All of which goes to show how dangerous it is to assume that dialect words are confined to one locality. Obviously they are not even confined to one country! My correspondent, incidentally, lives only a mile or so from the township of Berkhamsted, our namesake in New England.

## CARELESS PEOPLE

A resident, who came to Berkhamsted from a large industrial town eighteen months ago, tells me that she soon fell in love with the town and hopes to stay here for the rest of her life.

Only one thing disappointed her: the carelessness of the residents in casting litter here, there and everywhere. She had never before been in a town where so many people threw away paper, packets, etc., in the street, even when litter baskets were in the vicinity.

This, she thought, was entirely out of keeping with the character of the town and its people.

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## BEORCHAM *Continued from page 7*

Nash says, were senior boys from the Bourne School. Children were sent as a duty by their parents without much regard as to the kind of instruction they received; they were expected to assemble at nine o'clock in the morning, when they were kept standing on the cold stones for two hours and then required to remain for the service, which kept them nearly two hours more through a dreary service that had no meaning to them. The prayers were long and monotonous; the singing, accompanied by a barrel-organ, was of such a dismal character that it would not be tolerated today.

## THE FANATICS

Nash was scathing about the Church of England at this period; he was certainly not an admirer of John Crofts, a man I dislike for a very special reason: he pulled down the old rectory which, if it had been preserved, would have become a major tourist attraction as the birthplace of William Cowper, the poet.

One more quotation from Nash: he said that the people who started the first Sunday schools were 'greatly misunderstood and were consequently misrepresented, often called fanatics; but what would England be today without its Sunday schools?'

Whatever doubts and misunderstandings existed in 1810, it seems that there were no anti-Sunday school fanatics in 1834. In that year the first day-school was opened, and it was available to children of all denominations, provided that they belonged to a Sunday school.

(To be continued.)