

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

by Townsman

PITSTONE WINDMILL

EVERYBODY LOVES A WINDMILL. In Berkhamsted only the name Millfield survives to remind us of the mill which once stood in a field off Gravel Path, but one of the finest specimens in the country, at Pitstone, is only a short car ride or a long walk away.

Restoration of the windmill was started in 1963 by a group of enthusiasts, some of whom live in and around Berkhamsted. Mr. David Wray, of Little Coldharbour, has been especially active; goodness knows how many hours of hard, manual work he has put in.

And now he has written and illustrated a splendid booklet which starts with the history of the mill, gives an account of its restoration, and explains how it works. Very good value at 7½p; everybody should buy a copy. In addition to Mr. Wray's excellent drawings there are several good photographs; the one on the cover was taken by Mr. John Mullett, of Berkhamsted, a member of the restoration committee.

Some very strong links exist between the Berkhamsted and Pitstone Local History Societies. Our local historians will pay their third visit to the village in June, the itinerary including the windmill, the watermill at Ford End, and the wonderful new folk museum at Pitstone Green Farm.

What a pity that Berkhamsted, with fifty times as many inhabitants as Pitstone, cannot have a museum, too.

BOTTLED IN BERKHAMSTED

Here is an unexpected sequel to last month's references to the old bottles and jars Mr. John Wilson has found on the Ashridge Estate.

Philip Andrews, of 16 Clarence Road, called to say that under the rafters of his home he found a beer bottle which was almost certainly left behind by one of the builders in 1904.

It still bears part of the label, and the bottle itself is embossed with the name of Locke and Smith, whose brewery at the top of Water Lane was closed shortly before the first World War.

The bottle was empty, but after sixty-seven years the smell of beer lingered on!

ST. EDMUND'S

It is pleasant to learn that St. Edmund's will be the name of the principal road on the new section of the Ashlyns Estate.

John Cobb, when he wrote his *History of Berkhamsted* in 1855, referred to the town's old religious foundations and wondered whether there was one dedicated to St. Edmund, as 'the close behind the parsonage is called St. Edmund's'.

That the origin of the name cannot be traced does not really matter; it was

used for centuries, and thanks to the Council it will be perpetuated.

Curiously, there were two fields named St. Edmund's, one above the Rectory, the other in what is now the upper part of the Swing Gate Lane Estate.

If there are more roads still requiring names in the Chesham Road area, may I recommend Elvyne or Elvey? Almost any spelling will do. A family of that name was sufficiently important for the ancient road to Chesham to be called Elwynslane in 1525. The name was used for many years, though there was an alternative (Grubslane, 1608), which perpetuated the name of the Grubb family.

CHESHAM ROAD

Speaking of Chesham Road, a proposal to introduce one-way traffic reminded me that an improvement scheme was suggested as long ago as 1841.

On 26th April of that year the surveyors of highways 'required' parishioners to meet in the Vestry Room to consider the widening of King's Road (then called Cocks Lane), 'or in the event of such not being agreed to, to consider the lowering of the Chesham Road up the hill called Grubs Lane'. But no action was taken in 1841.

Many years later King's Road was widened, and much of the heavy traffic ceased to use Chesham Road, a gruelling climb for horses. They deserved the drinks that were provided by roadside horseponds, the first of which was just above Green Lane (opposite the path from Butts Meadow), and the other halfway up the steepest part of the hill.

Chesham Road is part of the ancient highway from Windsor, and I feel sure that in early times it did not end at the High Street. The splendid aerial photograph in the Berkhamsted Directory adds some weight to my theory that the road went straight ahead to the main gateway of Berkhamsted Castle, forming crossroads at the east end of the ancient market place.

Contradicting what has been said about the building of the parish church at the corner of Castle Street, I now think that Castle Street was made *after* the church was built.

OVERHEAD SYSTEM

I have been asked for information about two tall, derelict telegraph poles which soar above the canal towpath opposite the swimming bath.

They are the sole survivors of thousands of poles which, with the dozens of wires they carried, were formerly a conspicuous feature of the landscape. With high-speed wires above and slow boats below, the canal was a doubly important line of communication.

BBC programmes, I was told, were

transmitted the canal way from London to Daventry, creating some obvious jokes about the use of the word 'wireless'. The canal company—first the Grand Junction, then the Grand Union—had the privilege of sending messages free of charge.

Some years before the 1939-45 war the overhead system was abandoned and nearly all the poles were cut down. The relics opposite the swimming bath were probably spared because they continued for several years to carry a power line over the canal.

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CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Parents were less keen on sparing the rod than they are today. The attitude taken was that if teachers administered corporal punishment, the child nearly always deserved it. But a certain Mr. Benn thought Miss Brant, mistress of the Board School, should not have used 'a willow twig, 15 in. long and as thick as a common drawing pencil'. The School Board investigated the complaint, and Miss Brant said she found the cane when she came to the school the previous year. She had used it only three times, two girls receiving two stripes each and one girl six stripes.

Miss Brant could not have had an easy time. Girls and infants were taught in the same room. There was trouble when the inspector found the register 'not kept carefully', the infants 'insufficiently instructed', and arithmetic 'very defective'. An unpleasant sequel was a reduction by one-tenth of the Government grant to this department, all because the arithmetic was defective. But all was well in the boys' department: there were 120 boys on the books and their progress was 'considerable'.

NIGHT SCHOOL FOR BOYS

At a School Board meeting in 1877— at which a letter from the Education Department was read on 'how to act in the matter of children sent from Italy to earn money in the street'—it was stated that the Board school received £150 from the local rates. School fees amounted to £52 6s. 4d., and fees paid by the Board were £2 12s. 4d. Garments made in the girls' department and sold to the children raised 19s. 10d. for the upkeep of the school.

Compulsory education was foreshadowed at the first meeting of the Local School Attendance Committee in 1877, when it was resolved to meet again in a month's time to appoint a school attendance officer.

An admirable step forward was the starting of evening classes 'for such boys as are engaged in labour during the day'. According to the parish magazine, 'the necessities of life force many boys to leave school just at the age when they are most likely to benefit from its advantages', and it is cheering to find that the night school at the Court House, run by Mr. Peters, Superintendent of the National School, was described by an inspector as the best of its kind in the county. (To be continued.)