

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

by Townsman

A LOCAL MUSEUM?

The provision of a Berkhamsted museum could be one of the talking points of 1972. Different people have different ideas; I am keeping mine to myself for the time being, and will say no more than that central quarters may be made available for a small museum which, if successful, could be transferred to larger premises at a later date.

Until we have a museum, people will go on throwing away photographs, pictures, maps, costumes, and all sorts of things that may be of local interest and well worth preserving. So the sooner action is taken, the better.

CROSS OAK

Having learnt from last month's *Review* that Cross Oak Road was formerly called Gilhams Lane, a reader asks how the present name arose.

Two origins have been suggested, one that it was an old family name (de Cruce, fourteenth century), the other that there was an oak tree shaped like a cross. Many old documents contain references to 'Cross of the Oak Farm'.

But where was the oak situated? In years gone by I knew a number of old residents who remembered the tree, but they never indicated the site. However, according to a letter written in 1933 and addressed to the late Mr. G. H. Whybrow, author of *The History of Berkhamsted Common*, there was an 'island' in the middle of the Cross Oak Road—Shootersway crossroads on which stood the oak. Mr. J. A. Hatherley, who wrote the letter, said that the tree was still standing at the beginning of this century. No doubt it survived until road improvements destroyed the 'island'. The roadside pond which refreshed horses after climbing the hill remained until a few years ago.

Henry Nash (1890) says that people suffering from the old trembling disease, the ague, were advised to bore a hole in the trunk of Cross Oak, peg a lock of hair in the hole, and then tear themselves away from the tree, leaving the hair behind and, one hopes, effecting a cure. He adds: 'This is no mere fiction, as the old tree with its innumerable peg-holes was able to testify'. As he used the past tense, the curative tree could not have been the one mentioned by Hatherley.

Would it not be appropriate, now that there is a large, open space beside the crossroads, to plant one or two oaks there? Not that I expect people to go there in years to come to lose their hair.

EGERTON HOUSE

The controversy about the future of the Rex Cinema has awakened some

memories of the past. Several people have recalled the 'ghost' which was said to have haunted Egerton House, which was pulled down a year or two before the 1939-45 war to clear the site for the cinema.

Night after night people congregated on the footpath opposite the house, dreading and yet hoping that the ghost would appear. Eyes were trained on an upper window, and now and again some strange movement could be seen. Eventually it was proved that the 'ghost' was some wallpaper which, in a very damp attic, had peeled off the wall and fluttered in the breeze.

PETER PAN

On seeing pictures of Egerton House, many people say how sorry they are that such an attractive Elizabethan mansion was destroyed. An effort was, in fact, made to save it, but thousands of pounds would have been needed to bring it into a reasonable state of repair after many years of neglect, during which it had been overrun by cats, monkeys and other animals. The last owner or tenant was somewhat eccentric!

Knowing that Egerton House had associations with Sir James Barrie, some residents asked the famous dramatist if he would use his influence to help save the house, but he was too ill to intervene.

Incidentally, I have just been reading *J. M. Barrie: The Man Behind the Image*, by Janet Dunbar. This book appeared a year or two ago and contains many references to Egerton House. The Llewellyn Davies family, friends of Barrie, lived there for two or three years, partly because they thought the country air would suit their five sons, and also because they could send them to Berkhamsted School as day boys.

Barrie often visited Egerton House. When ailments stopped the boys from going to the West End to see his new play, 'Peter Pan', Barrie sent some actors and actresses down from London to give excerpts in the nursery. The players were transported in 'two large motor cars', which must have caused a stir in 1906.

BERKHAMSTED IN CANADA

A reader recently showed me a copy of a Canadian daily newspaper, the *Red Deer Advocate*, which, last summer, published a long article entitled 'Story of School Farm named Berkhamstead'.

The writer of the article, Mrs. J. L. Richards, states that at the turn of the century, Dr. T. C. Fry, headmaster of Berkhamsted School, called at Red Deer, Alberta, to visit one of his old pupils, named Simpson, who farmed a quarter-section. Dr. Fry thought it would be helpful if English boys intent on a career

in Canada could learn how to farm before starting out on their own. He consequently bought Simpson's and neighbouring quarters, 1,120 acres in all, and started a school farm for selected boys.

The first manager was Mr. Edward Greene, a younger brother of Mr. C. H. Greene, Dr. Fry's second master and his successor as headmaster.

In 1910, Mr. and Mrs. Eversole took over the management of the farm, not to run it as a school but as a farming operation on a profit-sharing basis. The ownership remained in the Fry family for many years.

These scanty excerpts do not do justice to a very interesting article. I have been in communication with the writer of the article, who is following up a suggestion that a street in or near Red Deer might perpetuate the name Berkhamsted.

JOYFUL OCCASION

Even if you are not aware that there was a great public outcry when George IV tried to deprive his discarded wife, Queen Caroline, of her royal position, I think you will be interested in this report from *The Times*, of November 17th, 1820:

'The loyal inhabitants of Great Berkhamsted, Herts, on receiving the delightful news of the rejection of the odious Bill against the virtuous and much-injured Queen, immediately met at the King's Arms Inn and unanimously resolved to meet there the following Monday.

'At two o'clock about a hundred loyal and respectable inhabitants of that ancient and loyal town sat down to an excellent dinner. The day was spent in the greatest harmony. The bells of St. Peter's Church rang a merry peal, a capital band, composed of the inhabitants, played melodiously, every face glowed with pleasure and every heart was filled with delight.

'Sir John Barleycorn [the personification of malt liquor] cheered the hearts of the people with a plentiful supply and in the evening the town was illuminated with such zeal, as to appear at a distance one entire blaze. Never was loyalty more conspicuous or better expressed.

'It should be mentioned that Lord Jersey, as he passed through this loyal town on Saturday, was drawn a considerable way by the inhabitants, amidst enthusiastic demonstrations of joy and gratitude for his exertions in behalf of our good and beloved Queen'.

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My thanks to Mr. O. T. Tewson, of Frithsden, for the above extract.

A LINK WITH DACCA

A reminder of Britain's long links with the city of Dacca, which has figured so often and so tragically in the news recently, may be seen in St. Peter's Church.

There you will find a memorial tablet to Paul William Pechell, who was Judge of the Court of Appeal at Dacca. He died there on 25th May, 1821, aged 38 years.

He was an uncle of Augustus Smith.

BEORCHAM (*from page 7*)

'opened at Mr. Price's school', and continued until March 1845, except for a period when it was closed 'on account of the small-pox'. Perhaps the change was made because Mr. Price's school was in or near Northchurch, thereby saving a long walk along the unlit highway to the Court House; but that is only a guess on my part. There was a two hours' session for men on Wednesday evening, and a similar period for women on Friday evening.

Unlike the National School, which had oil lamps, Mr. Price's school was lit by candles. The heaviest expenditure was 10s. on candles. In addition, the parish paid 3s. for 1 dozen copy books and 1s. for pens. Mr. Price donated the cost of the fuel—10s. for half a ton of coal.

NO SUNDAY DIGGING

On 1st April, 1847, poor parishioners were given an opportunity of buying seed potatoes at the cut price of 2s. 6d. a bushel. The rector paid £3 15s. for 15 bushels, which were all immediately sold at half price to the needy poor.

Throughout the period covered by the account book, and for many more years, the rector of Northchurch was the Rev. Sir John Hobart Culme-Seymour; his ministry lasted from 1830 to 1880, a local record. A rich man, he provided a 'garden ground', or allotment gardens, for poor parishioners, and drew up the following rules:

The Land to be cultivated by the Spade.

Not more than two-thirds of the Garden to be sown yearly with Potatoes.

No Tenant is to work on his Land on Sundays, or at hours belonging to his Master, without his leave.

Every Tenant is expected to attend Divine Service regularly.

The Land will be forfeited, if any of these Rules be broken; if a Tenant be guilty of Drunkenness, Dishonesty, or other misconduct; or if he offend against the Laws.