

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

by Townsman

THE WHITE HART

Berkhamsted keeps on losing familiar if not very ancient buildings. Shortly after the dust of the demolished police station had settled, the White Hart and the waterworks offices were pulled down.

Several people, I am told, tried to acquire two plaques on the White Hart frontage, one giving the building date (1861), the other bearing the arms of Berkhamsted School. A Tudor predecessor of the White Hart was among the properties given by John Incent for the endowment of the school. It is believed that several inns have occupied the site—the Saracen's Head, the George, and then the Prince's Arms, which ceased to be a tavern in the early nineteenth century. A photograph of 1860, taken shortly after the Town Hall was opened, shows cottages on what is now an empty site. A rather scurrilous leaflet published in the same year protested against arrangements that were being made 'to turn out an old tenant from the School property adjoining for the purpose of building a public-house.'

And now the White Hart has gone, reducing the number of taverns in the town to seventeen. In the 1890s, a much smaller population could slake their thirst at thirty different ports of call.

THE WATERWORKS

If temperance reformers disliked having a public-house next door to the new Town Hall, they may have cheered up when the Berkhamsted and District Waterworks Company, in 1864, started operations on the east side of the White Hart. Between the High Street and the Bulbourne a 200-ft. boring was made, and a powerful steam engine raised water to the high level reservoir at Kingshill and the low level reservoir in Green Lane, off Chesham Road.

The Waterworks Company provided slipper baths and a swimming bath. For a season ticket in the 1890s, adult swimmers paid 10s.; the rate for children under 14 was 6s.

Some readers may remember paying their income tax to Mr. Eric Outlaw (assessor and collector of the King's taxes) at his small office in the waterworks building. But that was long before PAYE was introduced!

MEMORABLE PAGEANT

'I hope your pageants are better than ours,' writes an American friend. 'The ones here have young people walking around in blankets; you are supposed to be entranced with them as Indians—Red ones, I mean. All most pathetic.'

I wish my friend, who lives near Berkhamsted, Conn., had been able to visit Berkhamsted, Eng. Who will ever forget those magnificent living tableaux? 'Works of art,' I heard someone say. 'Just like old masters,' said another. The splendid costumes, the superb lighting, the huge golden frame—what pleasant memories will be revived when we screen the colour slides!

Unfortunately, the early performances were sparsely attended. If my second and third visits were more enjoyable than the first it was because the pleasure was shared with so many more people.

Of course, there were criticisms, especially of the admission prices. Several people thought the pageant started too slowly and were disappointed because they could not join in the singing of Henry Twells' hymn. And oak pews can be rather hard when there is no standing or kneeling!

BEST-SELLER

The Ashridge Nature Trail must be the most popular short walk for miles around, judging from sales of the descriptive booklet. Since 1969, 10,000 copies have been sold, and now there is a new edition which includes an extra map and brief but useful information about other places of interest: the Coombe Hill Nature Trail at Wendover, Pitstone Windmill, Tring reservoirs, Tring Museum, Ashridge House, and, of course, the National Trust and the Herts Natural History Society and Field Club.

Miss Phyllis Hager and her colleagues are to be congratulated on the success of a publication which has already given pleasure to thousands of people. The trail, incidentally, is about a mile and a half long and starts at the Bridgewater Monument.

A QUESTION OF SPACE

We all know how vast a room looks when all the furniture has been taken out. Why, then, do so many sites look small when familiar buildings have been demolished?

I am thinking particularly of the new car park in Lower King's Road. Of course, it is capable of accommodating a large number of cars, but I find it hard to realise that the area contained so many large buildings. The Bulbourne Factory, in its heyday, certainly made very good use of the site, and still left room for a nice front garden.

Similarly, whenever I walk down Castle Street I can hardly believe that twelve cottages--you know, the 'sunken' ones--formerly occupied what now seems an extremely small site.

'BYGONE BERKHAMSTED'

One of the last events of the Festival of Berkhamsted will be a 'Bygone Berkhamsted' exhibition in the Court House from September 19th to 23rd. It is being promoted by the Local History Society, and I happen to know that a particularly interesting contribution will be made by the newly-formed Local Archaeological Society.

Dozens of photographs, paintings and maps will be on show. It is also hoped to include relics of old local trades and crafts, such as lace-making and straw-plaiting. There may even be a demonstration or two.

If you have anything of local interest which would add to the variety, please contact Mr. P. C. Birtchnell at 195 High Street. But a word of warning: we can have too many old photographs, and only very rare ones will be welcomed!