

# IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

by Townsman

## CRITICAL VISITORS

I have had the pleasure of meeting a number of former residents who, during the holiday season, called to see how Berkhamsted had fared during their absence. Some of the visitors, I am sorry to say, were rather scathing in their comments.

One man, who took a prominent part in local affairs until he moved elsewhere a few years ago, did not like what he heard and saw.

'What's gone wrong with Berkhamsted?' he asked. 'One of the joys of living here was to meet friends and enjoy a chat in the High Street. Now you cannot hear yourself speak for the traffic. It's twice as heavy and three times as noisy as it was even five years ago.'

'And parts of the town look as if there has been an air raid,' he went on. 'The police station has gone and footpaths are in a shocking state. There's another big gap next to the Town Hall, which is shut and looks utterly derelict. This isn't the Berkhamsted I knew and liked.'

I agree about the traffic noise; anyone who lives or works in or near the High Street must wonder why so little is said about it. As for the gaps created by the destruction of old buildings, there is likely to be much more of this painful dentistry in the next few years. Berkhamsted is like many other old towns, however, changing its face little by little and looking rather messy in the process.

## STRAIGHT FROM THE WOOD

Much as we like the Hertfordshire countryside, many of us enjoy crossing the Buckinghamshire border to wander through Hockeridge Wood. Once a stately beech forest with only one or two public footpaths, it is now criss-crossed by paths which enable us to enjoy the varied and very beautiful woodland.

And now seats are provided for walkers who wish to rest their weary legs. The seats consist of sections from large tree trunks, about 4-ft. long, a slice having been sawn off one side of the trunk to provide a smooth seat, the sliced-off portion being mounted on posts to form a back-rest.

Seats of this kind, I believe, are common in Switzerland, but rare in this country. Naturally, they tone in with the scenery!

## OYEZ? OH, NO!

A brief reference in the recent pageant to Mr. Elliott, Berkhamsted's last town crier, reminded a friend of an incident way back in the 1920s.

If there was one thing Mr. Elliott did not like, it was any suggestion that his words were indistinct. Knowing how easily he was rattled, would-be humorists made a point of asking, 'What was that you said?' directly after he had made a public announcement. It was a crying shame!

Unfortunately, a certain housewife was in the back garden of her house in Boxwell Road and did not hear what the town crier said. Hurrying to the front door, she asked the question which was bound to upset Mr. Elliott. He immediately stepped inside the house, slammed the door behind him, rang his bell as loudly as he could, and then almost broke the sound barrier as he bawled out the latest announcement.

The poor woman was almost deafened by the performance. Mr. Elliott, almost choking with rage, then continued his perambulation of the town.

## INFORMATION, PLEASE

Towards the end of July, land behind the Red House was bulldozed, and in the process a curious old building was destroyed. It stood near the wall which separates the Red House and Rectory gardens, and was built of

flint, puddingstone and brick, with a tiled floor and roof. Two stout flint buttresses strengthened the west wall, and three bricked-up lancet windows in the east wall added to its somewhat ecclesiastical appearance.

Frankly, I had never seen the building until demolition was threatened, and hurried along to take a few colour slides, intending to return with 'flash' to photograph the interior. But by the time of my second call the walls were down.

A pity I did not take measurements; at a rough guess the building was 20-ft. long and perhaps 9-ft. wide. There were two chambers, one twice as large as the other, each with its own door.

In modern times the building had been used to store apples. One suggestion is that originally it was a mortuary, but it was never, to the best of my knowledge, on glebe land, and almost certainly pre-dated the cemetery, which was consecrated in 1842.

Another theory is that the chapel-like construction was a cider-house or brewery. (Many householders formerly had their own brewhouses.) The thick walls and shady yews overhanging have also suggested an ice-house, but such buildings were usually partly, if not wholly, underground.

That's all I can say about an old Berkhamsted building which I knew for all too short a time. Can anyone supply further information?

## NEWS FROM CANADA

'A Berkhamsted Boy in the Foothills' is the title of a long article which occupies nearly half of the latest number of a Canadian quarterly, the *Alberta Historical Review*. It tells the story of one of several Old Berkhamstedians who, in the early years of this century, went to Alberta and studied agriculture at Berkhamsted School Farm, which was started near the town of Red Deer by Dr. T. C. Fry, headmaster of Berkhamsted School from 1887-1910.

The subject of the article, George R. Pearkes, afterwards joined the Royal North-West Mounted Police, served as a constable in the Yukon, joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force as a trooper in 1915, and by the end of the war was Lieut.-Col G. R. Pearkes, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., Croix de Guerre.

He stayed in the armed forces and after serving overseas and achieving the rank of Major-General, returned to Canada in 1942 to become General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Pacific Command. In 1945 he was elected M.P. and ultimately became Minister of National Defence (1957-60). In 1960 he was appointed Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, and, to quote the article, was 'probably the most popular man ever to fill that office.'

He retired in 1968 and now lives in Victoria, B.C.

#### **SEASON TICKET**

A reader has just brought along a third class weekly season ticket, available between Berkhamsted and Watford Junction, price 13s. 6d. The last figure of the date (2 Oct. 5?) is not decipherable, but at the latest the date was 1955, for third class became second class on June 3rd, 1956.

Today, the price for a similar ticket is £2.

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