

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

by Townsman

OLD FRUIT

Here is a sequel to a recent reference of mine to the discovery of a seventeenth century jar of gooseberries in the Castle moats some forty years ago.

Mr. A. D. Horn, who lives in Douglas Gardens, tells me that he was timekeeper when the Ministry of Works employed a strong labour force to preserve the ruined walls, carry out certain excavations, and generally tidy up the site. All the finds were brought to Mr. Horn, who had the task of removing the wax which sealed the jar. The smell, he says, was appalling.

Hurriedly throwing the ancient fruit away, he swilled out the jar time and time again. Eventually the foul smell abated, but next morning, on entering his hut, he was again assailed by the odour of rotten gooseberries. Eventually the jar was rendered hygienic, and it was taken to the British Museum with other finds, including the famous thirteenth century bow.

A LOCAL MUSEUM?

As Berkhamsted is desperately short of halls, this may not be the best of times to talk about the provision of a museum. But Hemel Hempstead hopes to have one, and Kings Langley has similar ambitions.

An opportunity for Berkhamsted to discuss the subject will arise in February. The Local History Society is to hold a meeting at which a talk will be given by Mr. Richard Harrison, director of the Area Museums Service for South Eastern England. More details later.

BIG IDEAS

Last month I referred to the suggestions that were made by a Council sub-committee in 1946 for public halls, ranging from one seating 1,200 people to smaller halls for club lectures and committee meetings.

At the same time, various suggestions were made by other sub-committees set up by the Urban Council: public bowling greens in the Castle grounds, a

children's playground in Dell Field, a public promenade on the north side of the canal all the way from Lower King's Road to Billet Lane, a footpath in King's Road all the way to Kingshill, widening of the bridge near the railway station, and the transfer of the Town Hall to the Council. Public conveniences at the east and west ends of the town, and a more up-to-date one in King's Road, were also recommended.

Five sites were suggested for Council houses: Stoney Field (east of the top of Swing Gate Lane), the area between Swing Gate Lane and Hall Park estate, Tunnel Field, Durrants Farm, and Kitchener's Field. Two sites were immediately rejected: the area between Swing Gate Lane and Hall Park, and Kitchener's Field. Durrants was preferred because 'it breaks up the Council housing estates and sets one at each end of the town.'

Note the date, 1946. What about a progress report?

FINDING THE WAY

'Bless you, mate. I've asked five other people, and they don't know,' said a lorry-driver when I directed him to Northbridge Road.

Strange—*isn't it?*—that a road which contains several factories should not be better known. I suppose the town is getting too big for residents to explore every avenue or street. And I confess that only once have I walked the full length of Northbridge Road.

A BYGONE INDUSTRY

I have received a most interesting reminder that brushmaking was formerly an important local industry. Writing from Offley, near Hitchin, Miss Lilian M. Nash recalls that her father, a brushmaker, was thrown out of work by a strike in Lancashire. With only his Post Office savings book and a few small belongings, he walked all the way to Chesham, and then moved to Berkhamsted to set up a wholesale business in George Street in 1884.

From another source I learn that all of Mr. Nash's employees came from George Street or Ellesmere Road, some twenty girls earning an average of 6s. weekly. Much of the work was carried on at home, brushmaking having taken the place of straw-plaiting.

What was known as pan-work was done only by men. A pan of pitch was kept at a certain temperature, and bristles of pure Russian hog were dipped into the pitch and then put into the holes.

As happens in so many industries, new methods of manufacture reduced the demand for hand-made brushes. But I can remember seeing, in the 1920s, women using hand methods—hard work it was, too—at Goss Brothers' brush factory on the site now occupied by Underhill & Young's garage at Gossoms End.

LAST POST

Ten times in two years lorries and cars have grazed the wall or dislodged downpipes of the almshouse at Cowper Road corner.

The last direct hit bowled over a gatepost which, as long as anyone can remember, had stood beside the almshouse. Scarcely an ancient monument, but it was a reminder that a field-gate was a rustic feature before Cowper Road was made.

The gate was opened to admit cattle and sheep which grazed in Steele's Meadow while awaiting slaughter at the butcher's shop on the opposite side of the High Street.

WELSH CAROL CONCERT

Berkhamsted Welsh Society is holding its third annual carol concert at the Baptist Church, High Street on Saturday 16th December 1972 at 8 p.m. The conductor will be Rev. Arthur Llewellyn Jones, vicar of Nettleden with Potten End and the organist will be Mrs. Mona Evans.

The choir will sing several carols but it is hoped that the congregation will join heartily in most of the singing.

Nearly 500 people attended the Society's Festival of Song in September, so if you want a seat this time please come early.

A collection will be taken in aid of Christmas Charities.