

BERKHAMSTED REVIEW



In and around Berkhamsted by 'Townsmen'

OUR MINIATURE RAILWAY

From time to time I am asked for information about the narrow-gauge railway which was used by the local gasworks. The rails are still there, and as the line is now attracting the interest of industrial archaeologists, we may eventually have a learned paper on the subject.

When, in 1906, the gasworks moved from the Wilderness to a new site near Billet Lane, the Lon-

don and North Western Railway Company provided an extra track, known as a shunting neck, from the station to a coal-chute just east of the second of two subways, formerly a right-of-way to the Park. The coal, transferred to steel tubs (capacity about 7 cwt.), was then transported to the gasworks, the miniature train being drawn by a single horse until a Lister diesel engine was introduced.

EDITORIAL

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The original rails of the 18-in. gauge line came from Bochum, Germany, and were replaced in 1936 by British steel. Although the line has not been used since 1958, the rails may still be seen in the subway and running parallel with the main line, at the foot of the embankment.

It was not practicable for the railway company to provide an extra track on the south side of the railway for direct delivery of coal to the gasworks; this would have made it necessary for the coal trains to cross four main lines. Even so, the railway company had to make a longish addition to the embankment on the north side, and next time you use the 'new' right-of-way (the first subway, facing the Park Street footbridge), you should look for obvious signs in the brickwork of the subway having been widened for the fifth track.

THE BELLS OF ST. PETER

My thanks to a kind friend who recently slipped a copy of *The Ringing World* through my letter box. The front page is devoted to a photograph of St. Peter's and the start of a long, interesting article on the church and its bells, by Mr. D. Burbidge.

The article quotes a rule of 1870 that 'there are to be eight stated ringers and four probationary ringers; a fine of 2d. for each non-attendance is to be deducted from the ringer's salary, and the salary is on no account to be spent in needless feasting and drinking.' The same eight ringers served from 1877 to

1899; in 1933 four ringers had served for 46 years, and in 1939 three ringers had served for 52 years or more.

But the local record, I fancy, is held by Matthew Brooks, who rang the bells of St. Mary, Northchurch, for over 70 years—from 1844 to 1915.

THE BULBOURNE

During the autumn I was dismayed to see long stretches of the Bulbourne completely dry. The short section east of Lower King's Road, where only the towpath separates the river from the canal, looked absolutely ghastly, yet this was a favourite spot for catching tiddlers, as generations of Berkhamsted boys are aware.

A dry summer and autumn was not wholly to blame; canal pumps further lowered the water table, especially when people who mess about in boats left the lock gate paddles up, causing the wastage of umpteen thousand gallons of water.

Knowing what Hemel Hempstead has done to beautify the Gade and its surroundings, I wish we could

embark on a similar scheme for the Bulbourne.

FAMOUS HUMORIST

Last month's tribute to the late Mr. Alfred Williams, who was manager of W. H. Smith & Son's Berkhamsted shop for over forty years, reminded a former resident, now living in Devonshire, of a happy meeting with W. W. Jacobs, the famous humorist, in the shop.

He writes: 'You mention Lady Brownlow and Graham Greene as being among the customers, but the man whom I recollect—he potted round the shop every day between twelve and half past—was W. W. Jacobs, who lived up Chesham Road. Does anyone read his books any longer—except me? I also was an occasional potterer about this time of day, and I remember Jacobs once recommending to me, as the best humorous book ever written, J. K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*. Jacobs turned to Mr. Williams, asked for a copy, and presented it to me on the spot. I had it until Hitler's war, when it got burnt, along with most of my kit, when the

truck carrying my company's stores caught fire in Abyssinia.

'Mr. Williams treated me, as a small boy, as if I were an intelligent adult. In his shop he would talk to me about books and their authors, and he is one of a very few people to whom I am indebted for an interest in language and literature.'

STILL GOING STRONG

Several readers, having seen my note on Lane's Prince Albert apple (a Berkhamsted 'creation'), drew my attention to an article in the *Daily Telegraph* of 2nd December stating that 'Lane's Prince Albert, in spite of its great age, remains perhaps the best all-round cooking apple to store.'

Born in Berkhamsted in 1841 and still going strong—that's a very fine record.

CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU

The Citizens' Advice Bureau will be open to help you at the 'Gable', in Prince Edward Street on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. The telephone number is Berkhamsted 6930.



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