

## Trades of Bygone Berkhamsted

IN LAST MONTH'S *Review*, with the help of Pigot's directory for 1839, I commented upon some of the changes and trends (notably the building of the railway) which started the modern development of Berkhamsted.

Not that there was a sharp, sudden transition from the stage-coach era to a bustling industrial age. Berkhamsted had no factory in the modern sense of the word. It is doubtful whether any tradesman employed more than half a dozen men. Many craftsmen were either self-employed or worked in very small family businesses. Almost every woman or girl who went out to work was in domestic service, which for many years was less profitable, and certainly more arduous, than plaiting straw at home for Luton and Dunstable hat makers.

Pigot gives brewing, malting and straw-plaiting as the main industries of the town, adding that the manufacture of wooden articles, 'formerly carried on extensively in Berkhamsted', had become nearly, if not wholly, extinct.

### A WOMAN WOOD-TURNER?

This obituary notice for the industry is contradicted on the very next page of the directory, for Pigot gives the names of four wood-turners and shovel-makers: Joseph Grove and Samuel Meek in Castle Street, Thomas Howard in High Street, and Martha Foster in Back Lane. Whether Martha was herself a wood-turner or employed a man to do the work, I cannot say.

Additionally, there were two coopers and vat-makers: Thomas Brinkman in the High Street, and Samuel Underwood in Grubs Lane (now Chesham Road). Their best customers must have been the town's three brewers and maltsters: James Foster of the Swan Inn, John Mills, and William Tomlin.

It required Job East, William Key and others to expand the town's ancient woodenware trade, but in 1839 many years were to elapse before the whine of steam-powered saws was heard in the valley.

As was shown in last month's article, the number of shops increased considerably between 1824 and 1839. But the weekly market did not thrive. Held as now on Saturday, it was chiefly for

corn and, according to Pigot, indifferently attended. As for the three annual fairs, they were of the 'toy and pleasure' type and, like the market, 'unimportant as regards advantage to the town.'

The courts baron and leet still took place annually, and once a fortnight the petty sessions were held at the King's Arms Inn, where most of the town's important meetings took place until the Town Hall was built in 1860.

### NO LOCAL POLLING STATION

The Reform Act of 1832 gave the right to vote in Parliamentary elections to every male occupying a house or shop to the clear annual value of £10 a year, but we had no polling station in Berkhamsted and almost certainly went to Hemel Hempstead to vote. Hertfordshire returned seven members to the House of Commons, two each for the boroughs of Hertford and St. Albans and three for the rest of the county. The polling stations were at Bishop's Stortford, Buntingford, Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead, Hoddesdon and Stevenage, in addition to the two boroughs.

An interesting point is that the qualification to vote for Berkhamsted Town Hall Committee is still confined to householders rated at £10 upwards per annum, in accordance with the Parliamentary franchise at the time of the building of the hall. With the rise in rateable values this is scarcely a handicap nowadays, and many years have elapsed since the qualifications of any voter at a Town Hall election have been examined. Strictly speaking, however, one of the provisions of the Reform Act of 1832 lingers on unchanged in Berkhamsted.

### PART-TIME POSTMASTER

In 1839 our postmaster did not have a full-time job. George Scott, whose post office is now Mr. Shambrook's shop, was also a land surveyor. One of his successors was a tailor. Letters from London arrived at 1 and 10 p.m., and were despatched at 5 a.m. and 12 noon. Letters from the North arrived at 4 a.m. and were despatched at 9 p.m. It is not clear whether the mails were conveyed by coach or by train at that time.

An impressive list appears under the heading 'Academies and Schools':

Bourne Charity School, High Street—Wm. Fenteman, master; Mary Ann Bourne, mistress.

Cutforth, Sarah (English and French, boarding), High Street.

Dell, Mary (boarding), High Street. Grammar School, Churchyard—Rev. Thomas Dupré, master.

Green, Mary Ann (boarding), High Street.

National School, High Street—Samuel Crew, master; Elizabeth Trott, mistress.

Parochial School of Industry, High Street—Robert Gamble, master; Willows Gamble, mistress.

Spicer, Miss (boarding), High Street.

It is curious to find the address of Berkhamsted School given as the Churchyard. Thomas Dupré was the last of several negligent masters who all but wrecked the school; but in 1839 he was almost due to be pensioned off. Thereafter the school made rapid progress.

Sarah Cutforth, whose boarding school specialised in English and French, was a most unfortunate lady. A widow, she married John Tawell, who poisoned another Sarah (Miss Hart) at Salt Hill, Slough, and was hanged for the crime at Aylesbury in 1845. He was the first murderer caught as the result of a message flashed by the new-fangled electric telegraph.

### FAMILIAR NAMES

The list of tradespeople in 1839 contains many a name still found in Berkhamsted—Austin, Clarke, Halsey, Sear, Sutton, Bunn, Nash, Pocock, Harris, Margrave, Norris, Tomlin, Tompkins, King, Timson, Gomm, Duncombe, Osborn, Bartlett, Martin, Deacon.

James Holliday, whose descendants still live in the town, was a wheelwright who gave Holliday Street its name. William De Fraine was one of the town's two hairdressers in 1839—and who among middle-aged and elderly townspeople does not remember his son or grandson, 'Daffy' De Fraine? A spirited councillor as well as a good hairdresser, he kept a little shop between the Swan and the Crown.

But the Crown, in 1839, was called the Chaffcutter, a good country name for a hostelry in a High Street which was then bordered by farmhouses and barns as well as houses and shops.

'BEORCHAM'

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