

Centenary of a Forgotten Local Newspaper

Berkhamsted in January 1868

EXACTLY ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO a new local weekly newspaper was born. Consisting of four large pages, the *Chesham Recorder and Berkhamstead Advertiser* was a very good pennyworth; it was also the first newspaper to include in its title the name of our town, which then had a population of 3,800.

On January 4, 1868, No. 1 came off the press of Thomas Leadbeater, printer, publisher, bookseller, insurance agent and supplier of ready-made clothing of every description, of High Street, Chesham.

Though a man of varied interests, Mr. Leadbeater was not so versatile as one of the sixteen Berkhamsted advertisers who helped to fill his front page. John Holt was a broker, furniture dealer, appraiser, house agent, rent collector, fruiterer, seedsman, dealer in china, glass and earthenware, and supplier of valuations for administration on reasonable terms.

THREATS TO THE TOWN

Berkhamsted news occupied one of six wide columns on the back page. The two inside pages, containing national and international news, were printed in London and distributed to local newspaper offices all over the country.

The centre pages, with news of the Prime Minister's latest attack of gout and the shipment of twenty elephants from Bombay to help our expeditionary force in Abyssinia, were read as avidly as the local news columns. Few people took a daily or even a weekly London newspaper. A century later it is still pleasant to read that Dr. Livingstone was safe and well in Darkest Africa, and that President Johnson (Andrew, not L.B.) had nominated General McClellan as minister to Britain.

But the biggest talking point was

Ireland, for Fenians were causing alarm up and down the country. It was Berkhamsted's turn to worry when the postmaster, Mr. Thomas, received a letter containing a threat that Fenians were about to blow up the church, post office and gasworks. The threat was not taken very seriously, for the report continues: 'As yet they have not put in an appearance, and no one expects them, but should they do or attempt anything they have threatened, woe betide them. Even those who decline to pay church rates would defend the church in such a case, or in any case if it required defence.'

BY 'BEORCHAM'

The Mechanics' Institute in the Town Hall escaped destruction when 'soot in the chimney ignited.' But on the opposite side of the street, behind what is now W. H. Smith and Son's shop, outbuildings were 'seized by the devouring element.'

Sparks from barns filled with straw, fern and furze-faggots 'flew across the whole of the outbuildings at the rear of all the houses as far as Grubb's Lane' (Chesham Road). The end of a house in Red Lion Yard, 'a notorious locality,' also caught fire. Fortunately the buildings 'were insured in the County Fire Office, whose highly respectable representative in the town is B. Martin, Esq.' What a wonderful free advertisement!

A cow with a calf, on being removed from the rector's meadow at Northchurch, attacked Mrs. Miller, a poor old woman, who was tossed twice and 'sadly injured.' The report continues: 'The Rev. Sir J. H. Seymour, to whom

not the slightest blame is attached, most kindly came out and assisted her to her home. The ultimate recovery of Mrs. Miller is a subject of doubt.'

HARD LABOUR

Magistrates regularly fined or imprisoned men for drunkenness, poaching, stealing turnips and using threatening language. A man who stole a ham in 1863 and absconded was found three years later and sent to prison for 21 days. Two Berkhamsted brothers absconded when they knew they would be summoned for attempting to take fish belonging to Reuben Bedford from the Bulbourne behind East and Son's saw-mills. In their absence, the brothers were fined 10s. and costs 12s. 6d. each, or three weeks' imprisonment. A warrant for their apprehension was issued.

Two men were sent to prison for one month for stealing hay. A man who stole 2-lb. of pork, valued at 1s. 4d., was sentenced to 21 days' hard labour, as was a tramp who stole turnip tops at Aldbury, the damage being assessed at 1s. Five weeks' hard labour was the sentence received by a man who stole two fowls. But two women at Aylesbury who pleaded guilty to stealing through destitution a bushel of turnips were sent to prison for one day only. 'Through destitution' tells a grim story of winter hardship when many people died of starvation.

A report headed 'Running away from work' states that a Northchurch man was charged by Mr. J. Lee, of Broadway, with unlawfully leaving his service. The man was fined 10s. and 12s. 6d. costs.

THE CLERGY REBUKED

Public entertainment consisted largely of concerts and 'penny readings.' Clergymen were criticised for contributing a song or reading to these homely little entertainments. A letter to the editor states: 'It seems to me strangely derogatory to the dignity of the ministry . . . when we see one who on the Sunday evenings was exhorting us earnestly to be crucified . . . now mouth forth a selection from "Pickwick".'

There was nothing but praise for a concert given by St. Peter's choir in the Town Hall in aid of the new organ. 'The elite of the town and its immediate vicinity were present, representing the aristocracy, gentry and clergy.'

But there was no fund-raising effort when a great gale loosened the vane at the top of the new Baptist Church. It

cost £15 and a very risky climb to secure the vane.

It is doubtful whether many readers of the newspaper travelled regularly to London, but a time-table was printed showing that the first of nine up trains left Berkhamsted at 7.58 a.m. There were ten down trains daily.

BERKHAMSTED BOUQUET

Of the Berkhamsted advertisers, Mr. W. D. Meikle, chymist, took the largest space to recommend his antibilious pills, pectoral drops, improved Mexican cream for the hair, oriental dentifrice, and 'Berkhamsted Bouquet, a new, choice and invaluable perfume for the toilet or handkerchief.'

Going from one Berkhamsted specialty to another, we find J. Willmott describing himself as a manure manufacturer and offering Willmott's wheat manure as the cheapest and best at £5 10s. a ton.

E. Hill, tailor and hatter, claimed that his repairs were neatly and punctually executed; J. Butters was a fashionable boot and shoe manufacturer; J. Keen of Castle Street and J. Timson of High Street both described themselves as bread and biscuit bakers; T. King built every description of coaches to order 'on the most reasonable terms and improved principle'; J. East and Son manufactured hoops, bowls, shovels and all kinds of ash handles; and Lane and Son, nurserymen, had the finest and largest quantity of *Araucaria Imbricata* (monkey puzzle trees) in Europe.

I will not give the name and address of the man who advertised 'good old port' at 10s. per gallon and 'good bright sherry' at 10s. 6d. per gallon. Those 1868 prices, I understand, may have gone up slightly.

Eight Bells Manned

BELFRY PIGEON

gives news of achievement in Berkhamsted and ringers' travels abroad.

THESE DAYS, nearly always each Sunday, all our eight bells are manned. This is achievement, since this time last year, six only were manned most times.

We are a very mixed band of ringers, approximately equal numbers male and female, most of us beginners and very young, plus a goodly, well-set-up man to ring the heavy Tenor Bell. *Bob Doubles* still is beyond us, but *Call Changes* and *Plain Hunt* go round well enough, and *Rounds* are much more even.

Our belfry is a cheerful place—we all enjoy ringing and we always welcome any who are interested and ask them to walk up to the belfry any Thursday night between 7 p.m. and 8.30 p.m. this being our practice night.

Now for news of ringers who have left the tower:

Lozzie Hartle, who rang our sixth bell last year, flew to Toronto in July for a six month's visit. After a week in the city, she drove north (at times on a sixteen lane highway) to the 'cottage country' or 'land of a thousand lakes'.

Here she stayed for eight weeks on a three acre island. All transport was by boat, mostly aluminium canoes, which, being difficult to handle, caused some hilarious incidents whilst she was learning to paddle.

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