

A RAILWAY CENTENARY By 'Beorcham'

One hundred years ago a new railway station was opened in Berkhamsted. If there was an opening ceremony, I can find no reports of it. Almost certainly no tears were shed over the closing of an old, cramped station with very narrow platforms.

The needs of a growing town were not the main reason for the London and North Western Railway's generosity to Berkhamsted. To the two original tracks of 1837 a third line was added in 1857-9, and when a fourth line was planned in the 1870's it was obvious that the old station was badly sited for further extensions. Besides, the old sidings, which extended from Whitehill bridge to Gravel Path, were already inadequate.

The Old and the New

It was far, far better to build a completely new station two or three hundred yards west of the old one, and the extra track and new buildings, with very extensive sidings, probably brought the largest labour force to the town since the original lines were laid in the 1830s.

What a pity no one was present with a camera! We are very short indeed of railway pictures; there are some very early drawings but no photographs of the old station, and if there are any of the new station in its youth I have yet to see them.

Two reminders of the old station are the bricked-up entrances to the subways used by passengers. You can see them on the Castle side of the railway wall, near Whitehill bridge. A rather poor substitute for photographs is an undated plan showing three main lines, with a platform for the fast down line extending from the bridge to a point opposite Mill Street. Between the fast up line and the third line was a longer platform which continued over and beyond the bridge.

Four Classes

Happily, the first issue of the Berkhamsted Times (April 17, 1875) comes to the rescue with information about the service and fares shortly after the new

station was opened. First, the fares; not so high as they were in 1840 (see last month's Review) but much higher than they are today in relation to average incomes. There were four classes—first, second, third and what was known as Parliamentary, with the fare fixed at one penny a mile. A single ticket to Euston cost 4s.6d., 3s.6d., 2s.5½d, or 2s.4d., according to class. Return tickets may have been available for all classes, but the table shows only first class (8s.6d.) and second class (6s).

There were ten trains each way on weekdays and four on Sundays, the first up train leaving Berkhamsted at 7.47 and arriving at Euston at 9.15; this, like several other trains, stopped at eleven stations, including Bushey, Pinner, Harrow, Sudbury, Willesden, Kilburn and Camden.

Trains to Victoria

In contrast, Berkhamsted was favoured with a fast train which left at 9.33 and with one stop at Willesden arrived at Euston at 10.18. There was no comparable fast train in the homeward direction, though the 4.15 from Euston, with four stops, called at Berkhamsted at 5.15. The last down train left Euston at 9.25 and arrived at Berkhamsted at 10.36.

The time-table shows a fairly frequent service from Willesden to Broad Street; in addition, one could change at Willesden and travel by train to Kensington, Chelsea and Victoria. The first class single fare to Victoria was 5s.2d., and by using the fast train at 9.33 one could be at Victoria by 10.58. Can you beat this by the Green Line service?

By changing at Cheddington and using the long-abandoned branch line, one could leave Berkhamsted at 8.59 and arrive at Aylesbury by 9.45. Despite a 10 minute wait at Cheddington, this does not compare badly with the bus service, and it was certainly dependable!

Dangerous Bridge

But let us stay in Berkhamsted and return to the subject of the old station. This is what the Berkhamsted Times said shortly after the station was closed: "The town authorities are in communication

Continued on page 15

RAILWAY CENTENARY (from page 7)

with the Railway Company with a view to securing the use of the subway through the old station for foot passengers and thus obviate the danger arising from contact with vehicles coming to and from Ashridge under the somewhat contracted railway bridge.

Nothing final has yet been decided but we understand that the old station is being rapidly converted into a dwelling house for the station-master."

Whether the stationmaster moved in I cannot say, but part of the station building was used by Tom Meek, one of the town's last wood-turners, and also by a brushmaker.

As for the "new" station, now 100 years old, the sidings are now a car park, the glass canopy outside the booking hall has gone, and many internal changes have been made. Lord Brownlow's private entrance and waiting room have lost whatever elegance they had when his lordship welcomed Royalty and other distinguished visitors before they drove on to Ashridge. Try to picture the scene if you have a long wait for a train.