

BERKHAMSTED REVIEW

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In and around Berkhamsted by 'BEORCHAM'

The Castle Moats

It will not surprise me if the Castle grounds are visited by a record number of sightseers this year. The great volume of water in the moats continues to arouse great interest, and several people have asked if it is at a record level.

Many years ago the water sometimes swirled over the road and even over the causeway to the custodian's lodge, but that was due to bad drainage. Now, even at high tide, the roads are high and dry, though only by a foot or so.

A walk round the moats is all the more enjoyable now that swans are there to share our pleasure. For added interest, recent excavations have exposed the walls of long, long hidden buildings outside the curtain wall.

So please do not leave the Castle to visitors from afar! Too many Berkhamstedians forget this major site of historical interest unless there is a fete or a pageant, the last of which was held nine years ago. Goodness, how time flies!

Larger Audiences

It may be news to you that several local

societies attracted larger audiences than usual to their winter and spring meetings. This revival of interest is all the more remarkable in a town which has suffered, and still suffers, from inadequate accommodation for meetings.

Now, however, the Court House is ready, or almost ready, to accommodate up to 100 people, and the re-vamped Council Chamber is expected to house an audience of over 160. The future of the Town Hall is still in doubt, but volunteers have been clearing up the mess caused by vandals, and I am assured that some portions of the building, especially the Sessions Hall, are still in fair condition.

A Northchurch Museum?

Talking of halls, the Operatic and Dramatic Society often goes "on tour" to Northchurch, where there is an enviable variety of accommodation for audiences large and small.

I particularly enjoy the meetings of the Northchurch Society, which would like to establish a museum in the village. A start has already been made, for the Society has a large, well-filled showcase containing a

great variety of by-gones—relics of the straw-plait trade, wheelwright's tools, early local newspapers, and homely items such as churchwardens' pipes and a garden bonnet of 1870.

But where can these and other relics be permanently displayed? Northchurch is in the same predicament as Berkhamsted; we would both like to have museums, but there is a housing problem!

Our Changing Town

A short time ago one of our oldest shops was pulled down. The older generation still spoke of it as Verney's, the bakers, though in recent years it was owned by Barnett's, who have moved a few doors west.

The old shop, like the one at the corner of Manor Street, survived when all the ancient property in between was rebuilt in the early years of this century. Some of the ancient cottages had already been turned into shops, but in earlier times they had stable-type front doors; in other words, one could open the top half and lean on the lower half if it was kept closed!

Anyway, another bit of old Berkhamsted has gone. A plain brick wall marks the spot.

Readers' Comments

My thanks to a reader for pointing out that the car with the earliest Hertfordshire registration number (AR 1) was owned not by Lord Brownlow but by Colonel Wheatley, his lordship's estate agent at Ashridge.

Another reader criticises my reference to the Bourne Gutter, which he found flowing much more vigorously than was stated in last month's issue. That was because the stream gathered strength between the time of writing and publication. The Bourne was well and truly guttering when I paid yet another visit to Bottom Farm on May 7th.

St. Margaret's Nunnery

"Is it true that there was a nunnery at St. Margaret's, near Great Gaddesden?" asks a reader. Yes. It is believed that the nunnery was founded in 1160, pre-dating

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BEORCHAM (from page 3)

Ashridge. It was a small foundation, and there were nine nuns at the time of the dissolution.

About the year 1740 a writer said that much of the building was still standing. The parlour and hall seemed to have been built in Henry VII's days and were not in bad condition, being of Totternhoe stone, well wrought. The writer added: "I saw the square of the Tower which was ten feet high in the memory of man. Tradition says that there were three bells in it and that one of them was carried to Nettleden Chapel, scarce half a mile from it."

Today the site is indicated only by uneven ground in a field off the St. Margaret's—Hudnall Common road.