

BERKHAMSTED REVIEW



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In and around Berkhamsted

by 'BEORCHAM'

Northchurch Tunnel

A new road now being made across Tunnel Field is the first indication of things to come—in other words, a new housing estate.

Oddly enough, I have just come across a picture and a book which have added to my knowledge of Northchurch tunnel. The large tunnel, I should add. It was built in the mid 1830s for what are now the two fast lines; the two single-line tunnels came later.

First, the picture. I found it in a special number of "British History Illustrated," one of many publications which appeared in good time for the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. The picture shows men at work in the deep cutting on the Billet Lane side of Northchurch tunnel. Two tracks had already been laid and trucks full of earth were being drawn by horses. Near the mouth of the tunnel, a timber structure, with ropes, shows how earth was dragged up the steep bank of the cutting.

Disgraceful Scenes

The second discovery was in a book which tells the story of an accident and

its disgraceful sequel when Northchurch tunnel was being made in 1836. In "The Echoing Green", published by Collins last year, Mrs Gillian Avery devotes a chapter to the recollections of a railway worker who contributed an article to "Household Words," a periodical founded by Charles Dickens.

The writer of the article was so fascinated by railways that he ran away from home at an early age and worked on the Boxmoor embankment and the Watford and Northchurch tunnels. He obviously had first-hand knowledge of a fall of sand which buried five men who were working in Northchurch tunnel; only three were dug out alive.

The overseer of the gang, named Hicks, got up a subscription, which came to £20, £5 being put aside to bury the two men, the rest of the money to go on drink. The funeral took place at Northchurch one Sunday afternoon, and the clergyman, noting the drunken condition of some 50 navvies, closed the church and led the way to the grave. There were disgraceful arguments and scenes, and several villagers had to go to the rescue of the clergyman, who narrowly escaped injury from the drunken men.

Hicks and his navvies drank their way through the funeral money from Sunday till Tuesday, when they were arrested, blind drunk, and thrown into prison.

Not a rare incident, I am sorry to say. Many residents were afraid to leave their homes when the railway navvies came to town.

Too Tired for School

Full marks to Potten End for greeting autumn with a wonderfully varied festival of flowers, pottery, song and local history. Like hundreds of visitors (and, of course, villagers!) I was particularly impressed by the display of maps, pictures and relics arranged by Mrs. V. J. M. Bryant, who, I hope, will soon find time to bring out a book on the history of Potten End.

Among the exhibits was the village school logbook. After a lapse of more than a century one can afford to chuckle at four successive entries, dated 1866:

- May 1. Girls went Maying, considered a holiday here.
- May 2. Girls about Maying.
- May 3. Girls too tired to come to school.
- May 4. A great number absent for colds caught while Maying in the wet.

Made in Berkhamsted

Many older readers will recall C. E. Southey & Co., who manufactured motor cycles in what is now Mr. Reynolds' garage and workshop between King's Road and Elm Grove.

The weekly journal "Motor Cycle" recently devoted much space to Mr. Southey, saying that he was a small-town manufacturer who had rather more substance than most. Moreover, he was the first to build motor cycles with the famous Blackburne engine, which was designed by Geoffrey de Havilland, of aircraft fame, in the year 1904 or thereabouts.

The Southey works, the article says, had long been associated with de Havilland, and it is believed that the prototype Blackburne engine was built at Elm Grove, Captain Blackburne and the Burney brothers having been acquaintances of both Mr. Southey

and Mr. de Havilland. In fact, the first address quoted for Burney and Blackburne Ltd., is Berkhamsted; it appeared in "Motor Cycle" for January 16, 1913, when the Blackburne motor cycle was launched. It was the outcome of nearly ten years of experience and until that time had been known as the de Havilland.

I wonder if this explains why the first plane to land in this district was piloted by Lieutenant de Havilland? He landed near Durrants Farm, on the meadow now occupied by Westfield School, in 1912.

STEWARDSHIP

The amount contributed to the St. Peters and All Saints stewardship fund in September was £976.06.



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