

BERKHAMSTED REVIEW



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In and around Berkhamsted

by 'BEORCHAM'

Hands Across the Sea

This could be Berkhamsted's "International Year". The recent formation of the Beaune Society has been followed by an invitation to share in the bi-centennial celebrations of the American Revolution at Barkhamsted, a township in Connecticut.

That some residents have never heard of our American namesake is surprising, for a picture of a school in Barkhamsted appeared on the front page of the January "Review"—a very timely salute to our American friends, if I may say so.

I was appalled to learn that the invitation was sent to Hemel Hempstead because the British Information Service in Washington thought that Berkhamsted had lost its identity. This would never have happened if my good friend, Dr. Roderick B. Jones, who lived near Barkhamsted, had not died a year ago. This distinguished American lawyer, whose 17th century ancestors included a churchwarden of St. Peter's, a master of Berkhamsted School, and an Attorney General of Connecticut appointed by Charles II, took me on a tour of Barkhamsted in 1965, and for several years we kept up an informative and often hilarious correspondence.

American Spellings

My interest in Barkhamsted started at a very early age, for I contributed a chapter on "The English Berkhamsted" to a book which was published in 1929 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the incorporation of Barkhamsted in 1779, only three years after the Revolution. But many years were to elapse before I had first-hand knowledge of our namesake. The visit, in 1965, was described in a "Review" article which was reprinted in full by a Connecticut evening newspaper.

The spelling Barkhamsted shows how the name was pronounced two centuries ago. Similarly, the state capital is spelt Hartford, and it is an interesting point that the township and capital in New England are exactly the same distance apart as Berkhamsted and Hertford in Old England. Oddly enough, the Berkshire Hills just over the Massachusetts border are known as the "Burkshires."

I sincerely hope that someone will be able to convey our best wishes to Barkhamsted, which was founded by English settlers and is not so much a town as a number of quiet villages in beautiful surroundings. It may even be possible to forge a permanent link on the lines of the Beaune Society.

Back to Back Lane

A reader is cross with me for referring to Back Lane without explaining that the name was changed to Church Lane some years ago. "I know you dislike the change," he says, "but new residents and visitors must wonder what you are writing about. Perhaps it would satisfy you if the name-plates were changed to 'Church Lane, formerly Back Lane.'"

Old Photographs

One of the most-photographed houses in the district is "Lockside", which, as the name suggests, faces the canal lock at Dudswell. Many years ago—until 1893 or thereabouts—it was a public-house called the Swan, the beer being supplied by Locke and Smith, who had a brewery in Water Lane and disliked any suggestion that the address should have been Watery Lane.

I understand that someone, somewhere, has a photograph of the Dudswell "Swan" before it lost its licence. I would very much like to obtain a copy of this photograph.

Incidentally, my appeal for a photograph of the old workhouse brought one reply—a snap taken when the building was almost, but not entirely, demolished.

Mr. G. F. A. Gilbert has kindly brought along a photograph that is completely new to me, showing a Foden 5-ton steam waggon of 1910 bearing the words "London and North Western Railway, Berkhamsted." I do not know how long a life this vehicle had in our district, but on one occasion it ran into a ditch somewhere between Berkhamsted and Chesham.

Northchurch Nonsense

A reader has drawn my attention to a book on the Chilterns by Kevin Fitzgerald, which states that Berkhamsted is a Chiltern town which has lost all its character and credits Northchurch with "a building said to be the oldest Christian church in the world."

One should always beware of the words "said to be." The reference to Northchurch is sheer nonsense, and the comment on Berkhamsted's lack of character is too sweeping to be taken seriously.

The Churchyard

I have been asked if it is true that St.

Peter's churchyard formerly extended over what is now part of the High Street. Yes, but the change was made many years ago.

In my files I have a report of a meeting held by the Citizens' Association in 1926 at which old inhabitants were asked to chat about bygone Berkhamsted.

Mr. John Bedford said that the churchyard was "shifted back" to widen the road, as the hay-carts from Chesham used to be held up for a long time. (This was when Castle Street, apart from Water Lane, was the only road to the railway station.) Mr. R. A. Norris commented that he could find no reference to the loss of part of the churchyard, but when the first electricity cables were laid bones were found below the road level.

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