



# BERKHAMSTED REVIEW

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## In and around Berkhamsted

by 'BEORCHAM'

### On the Front Page

Some time ago I was given a number of photographs taken by Mr. George Sills, whose studio is now Heath House, facing Cowper Road. For most of his 81 years (he died in 1951), George was a very good professional photographer, and many of his prints are of great local interest.

A particularly good specimen appears on the front page. Several officers of the Inns of Court O.T.C. and a blacked-out street lamp enable us to date the picture to the 1914-18 war. Of especial interest is a view of Morris's shop at Lower King's Road corner long before it was replaced by the present block of shops and offices. You will see that part of Sharland's block (then Ward's) has been rebuilt. Incidentally, the T-model Ford bears the initials L.N.W.R. (London and North Western Railway).

It is hoped to include more of Mr. Sills' pictures in future issues of the *Review*.

### St. Peter's Hall

In last month's *Review*, Mr. Christopher Morris admirably summed up the reasons for granting a long lease of St. Peter's Hall for commercial use.

Many readers, I am sure, remember the great efforts that were made to provide this hall. The scheme was first announced in the late 1920s,

and fund-raising was hampered by the worst slump of the century. A healthy contribution was expected from a pageant held in the Castle grounds in 1931, but it was not a great financial success. Nevertheless, the building committee plodded on, and in April 1933 the Bishop of St. Albans performed the opening ceremony and enjoyed the hall-warming party.

A few weeks later the chairman of the building committee died, and a "Frederick Hawdon Memorial Fund" was inaugurated to liquidate the debt still remaining on the hall.

Despite the great use that was made of the Town Hall, Sessions Hall, Queen's Hall, King's Hall and Progress Hall, not to mention the large Court Theatre for amateur operatic and dramatic performances, St. Peter's Hall was very popular. It was a hive of activity throughout the war and for many years afterwards. In more recent times a dramatic fall in the number of lettings may have been due in part to the popularity of Television.

Goodness knows how many pleasant evenings I have spent in the 43 years old hall. In particular I recall boisterous meetings when Council candidates faced the electors. Our late and very popular vergger, Bill Brooks, did his best to keep the hall spic and span, and its increasingly run-down and bleak appearance in recent times is best forgotten.

### In Low Water

Now that the canal is literally in low water and not disturbed very much by large craft, the water is remarkably clear. One young unsuccessful angler complained that the fish could see him "a mile off".

### Dwight's Pheasantries

A photograph of a local scene, showing a carter with a load of wicker baskets, started some interesting correspondence in *Hertfordshire Countryside*. In the August number, Mr. W. A. White, of Hemel Hempstead, explained that each basket held 20 young pheasants that were being taken to have one wing strapped before being put in open fields for the winter.

M. Dwight's Pheasantries at Berkhamsted, Mr. White added, were the oldest and largest in England. One does not have to be very old to remember this once famous local industry, and in a later issue I hope to say more about it. As for the wicker baskets, I imagine that they were made by the Richardson family, who for generations obtained supplies from osier beds beside the canal. This is another old craft to which I must return when space permits.

### Prominent Site

"It must be rare to see a large, ancient church that occupies such a prominent site beside a main road," remarked a much-travelled visitor. He was referring, of course, to St. Peter's.

And I was interested to hear a distinguished architect say that it would be a tragedy if we ever lost our famous yew tree. "It is a perfect complement to the church," he added.

### Bricks and Iron

I wonder how many people know that a certain church in Berkhamsted was originally erected in Hemel Hempstead? I refer to the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Cowper Road, now used by the Christian Science Society.

Like so many small Victorian churches and mission rooms, it was of galvanised iron construction. In 1887 it was dismantled and the walls, roof and contents were brought to Berkhamsted on the farm wagons of David Ginger, of Castle Hill Farm. Re-erected in Cowper Road, the church stood near another corrugated iron building—the Gem, our first cinema.

In 1923 the Methodist Church was provided with brick walls, and a vestry and new front

porch were added. Otherwise the interior was much the same as it was before the new outer shell was provided.

### Corrections

A reader points out that the bus fare to Chesham is not 26p, as stated last month, but 29p. That's inflation!

Another correction: I miscalculated a date and should have said that Berkhamsted School for Girls was founded in 1888—thirteen, not eighteen years after the Bourne School was closed in 1875. That's deflation!

### Christian Aid

The Mile of Pennies held at All Saints Church on 10th July raised £30.

The Autumn Fair is to be held this year in St. Peter's Hall on the 16th October, 1976. Please make a note of the date now and give it your usual generous support.



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