

BERKHAMSTED REVIEW



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In and around Berkhamsted

by 'BEORCHAM'

What's wrong with Berkhamsted?

As in many other towns, interest in local affairs has declined since the introduction of a new system of local government which is not nearly so local as it was a few years ago. This diminishing interest, amounting almost to apathy, worries the Citizens' Association, which, in its latest Newsletter, says that too many people complain that Berkhamsted is not the place it was.

Of course it isn't. People have been making similar comments as long as I can remember—not only in Berkhamsted but in hundreds of other towns. But in recent times there have been many upsets and disappointments to dent our civic pride. The closing of several shops, notably speciality shops such as a delikatessen, has caused much tut-tutting. Then there are such continuing eyesores as the derelict property next door to the Civic Centre and that wretched gutter in the middle of a busy pavement—the sort of thing one would not expect to see even in a derelict village. Above all, the Town Hall wrangle has marred if not shattered many old friendships. A large hall for popular events is sorely missed, and we really should not have to go out of town to enjoy plays, concerts and meetings that deserve the support of large audiences.

So far, so bad. But let us not be too gloomy. The Churches, as ever, are very active. Many

local societies are flourishing. Scores and scores of people promote events for good causes and raise very large sums of money. There's still a lot to see, a lot to do, and much to admire in Berkhamsted if we are not glued to our television sets.

Next year, perhaps, the town's celebration of the Queen's silver jubilee may recapture some of the local pride which reached new heights in the year of our great Pageant, 1966.

Roses all the way

It is high time someone said "thank you" for the splendid display of roses in St. Peter's churchyard. Throughout the long drought and the subsequent monsoon, the High Street was all the brighter for the efforts of a department of Dacorum District Council. I hope you will second my vote of thanks.

Printers to the fore

What a splendid exhibition was staged in the County Library by the Clunbury Cottrell Press to mark the 500th anniversary of William Caxton's earliest work in England.

Of all the trades and industries in and around Berkhamsted, the least publicised is probably the one which provides publicity for everybody else. Yet a large number of people in the district are printers, scores and scores working in local

printing offices and many others travelling each day to Apsley, Watford and London.

The town's first printer was probably William McDowall, who, towards the end of the 18th century, printed Hertfordshire's second oldest newspaper, the *Herald*. He also printed a number of books of very high quality.

Over the years various small printing works have come and gone, but the largest, the Clunbury Cottrell Press, is well over a century old and still going strong. Way back in the 1860s, William Cooper, of sheep dip fame, bought the hand-press and type of an unsuccessful printing works at Three Close Lane corner. It wasn't long before he added a lithograph department. So pleased was William with the first coloured poster that he strutted around the works with a copy pinned to his waistcoat!

Among the exhibits was a poster, printed by William Cooper, for a Mechanics' Institute exhibition in 1870. And what a lot of interest was aroused by the advertisements in some of our early local newspapers!

Cowper or Cooper?

The formation of the Cowper Society has again raised the question of the correct pronunciation of the poet's name. He was definitely known as William *Cooper*.

In Berkhamsted, however, we usually pronounce the name as it is spelt, if only to distinguish the poet from the inventor of the famous sheep dip. If anyone asks the way to Cooper Road he will probably be directed to Raven's Lane!

Cheap Labour

I have just been re-reading a booklet published for the Hertfordshire Local History Council by Phillimore; it is Mr. J. S. Hurt's "Bringing Literacy to Rural England", and contains a very interesting note on a straw-plaiting school at Northchurch.

Over 100 years ago, Mrs. Wimbush taught as many as sixty children in one small room, though she preferred to have only forty. Children aged from four to fourteen came at 9 a.m. and left at 8 p.m., going away for an hour for dinner at 1 p.m. and an hour for tea at 4 p.m.

Mrs. Wimbush said: "I keep them to work and have to learn them too when they first come. That is the hardest work that I have and almost wears my patience out. They have the stick at first. This little boy, now eight, who has

been here four years, is the worst, and wants the stick very often."

Those were *not* the days!

Peter the Wild Boy

In last month's *Review* I asked for a copy of a novel entitled "Peter the Wild Boy", by Miss C. M. Tennant. There was a very prompt response; a reader brought along a copy and I have enjoyed reading a fanciful but very well-written story about our local oddity of the 18th century. For good measure there are some splendid illustrations. But only 500 copies were sold, and forty years after publication I imagine that very few survive.

CHARITY CHRISTMAS CARDS

Another Charity Christmas Card sale is to be held on Friday and Saturday 19th and 20th November in the Court house, 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. each day.



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