



# BERKHAMSTED REVIEW

EDITORIAL  
9 Shrublands Road

Mr. H. D. Woodward  
Tel. 2723

ADVERTISEMENTS  
23 North Road

Mr. Neil Cowan  
Tel. 4916

CIRCULATION and  
MAGAZINE COMMITTEE  
20 Murray Road

Mr. A. C. Conway  
Tel. 5796

TREASURER  
36 Trevelyan Way

Mr. M. J. Robinson  
Tel. 3559

## In and around Berkhamsted

by 'BEORCHAM'

### 1066 and All That

Many members of the local Archaeological Society were surprised when a visiting lecturer said that the Saxons surrendered to William the Conqueror at Little Berkhamsted, our much smaller namesake near Hatfield. This claim is largely based on attempts to trace the route or routes taken by the Normans on their way from Wallingford to London. Much damage was caused by the invaders, and the substantial depreciation of manorial values in certain places, including Little Berkhamsted, has caused some historians to say that the village, not the town of Berkhamsted, was the scene of the historic hand-over in 1066.

Whether one should be proud or ashamed of this event is a matter of taste; lots of people still wish that Harold had been the victor in 1066. We shall never know for certain where the meeting of the Saxons and William took place, but when our memorable Pageant of 1966 was planned, one of the greatest authorities on Domesday Book and the Norman period assured us that *our* Berkhamsted had a very strong claim.

Unfortunately, in Norman times both town and village were called Berkhamsted; the distinctive Great and Little came later. Long ago we ceased to be Great in name — but not in quality!

### Going the Wrong Way

Speaking of places with similar or almost

similar names, I recently heard of a motorist who went to Ashridge in mistake for Asheridge, the Buckinghamshire village halfway between Bellingdon and Chartridge. I was asked if there was any historical connection between the two places; not to my knowledge, but it is certainly annoying to go miles out of one's way.

Asheridge, by the way, was for some years the home of Aneurin Bevan; he lived at Asheridge Farm. His widow, Jennie Lee, stayed on for a short time after Mr. Bevan's death in 1960; she is now Baroness Lee of Asheridge.

### "Polly Page"

Congratulations to Olive Walker and everybody who made "Polly Page" such a great success. I enjoyed every minute of this sparkling musical play, and hope that our friends at Hemel Hempstead now realise that Berkhamsted, with French as well as British royal associations, is the gem of Dacorum.

But what a disgrace that we have no hall in Berkhamsted adequate for a large-scale production of this kind. As in many other towns, however, more and more use is being made of the parish church — and ours is a particularly large one. In recent weeks we have had some splendid evenings in a splendid setting. The Herts Chamber Orchestra must come again; so must the B.B.C. Welsh Choir, preferably with a slightly lighter programme.

As for "Could these Stones Speak . . .", this deserved a dozen instead of two performances. I

hope this sentimental history, as it was called, will be revived long before St. Peter's Church celebrates its 800th anniversary in 2022. It was by far the best production of its kind since the Pageant of 1966.

### On the Stage

Several readers have told me that my recent reference to the Berkhamsted Repertory Company, which gave so much pleasure in 1939-40, revived happy memories. This company was brought to the Court Theatre by Mr. John Whitmore Humphreys, who is still a regular visitor to Berkhamsted despite his removal from Potten End to Boxmoor.

Among many stage-struck young people who tried to join the Berkhamsted Repertory Company was a youth who called one Saturday morning in 1939. There was no vacancy for anyone, young or old. A pity, for it would be nice to know that a man who for long has been a world-famous actor, playwright and film director had started his career at Berkhamsted.

Incidentally, a reader has just brought along an interesting reminder of the Picture Playhouse (now the King's Hall) which flourished for several years until the Court Theatre was opened in 1917. A large folder advertised "Quo Vadis?", a film which was booked for the whole week commencing January 5th, 1914, with performances at 3, 6 and 8.45 p.m., all seats being bookable in advance. Showbiz was much the same in 1914 as it is today. "We find language almost fails us to convey anything like the beauty, fascination, magnificence and power to enthral the production possesses" — so begins a 1,500 word description of the masterpiece. But who were the stars? Not one actor or actress is named.

### A Man's Job

Looking through some Parish Magazines of the 1914-18 period, I was particularly interested in the long list of district visitors. Thirty-two ladies regularly visited this street or that, but there was only one male visitor. Thomas Ellens stepped in where ladies feared to tread; he called on the people who lived in the Red Lion Yard and Canal Side, two slum areas which were swept away long ago.

Some very worthy people lived in those old, dilapidated cottages, but street lighting was minimal and children were forbidden to go to those areas. Tales were also told about bogeymen in the Wilderness and Water Lane, but it was always too dark to see them.

### Attention, please!

There isn't space to list the many improvements I would like to see in 1978, but before the year is out I hope that something will be done to provide decent drainage of the pavement outside what, at the time of writing, is still Sharland's store. The squalid gutter, the cause of many a tumble, collects water instead of taking it away. It is an insult to the town and a disgrace to the Hertfordshire County Council.

A Happy New Year, all the same!

### THE REVIEW

Not even the Berkhamsted Review can escape the ravages of inflation. Rising costs have forced us to increase the price of the magazine to 10p per issue (annual subscriptions £1.10). We naturally regret this but hope our readers will agree that at 10p the Review is still excellent value for money.



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