

BERKHAMSTED REVIEW



In and around Berkhamsted

by 'BEORCHAM'

Brighter Outlook

Things are looking up in the High Street. A certain large store has not closed down (I never imagined that it would), Prince Edward Street has a new corner shop, and the number of empty shops in Berkhamsted is smaller than in many other towns.

A few months ago pessimists were talking of Berkhamsted becoming a "ghost" town, and much was said about people shopping in larger centres. No publicity, however, is ever given to the fact that there is also a steady influx of people from other towns and villages who like to shop in Berkhamsted. The grass is always greener . . .

Another point. In recent months I have met a large number of people who have moved to Berkhamsted. Without exception they are very pleased to be here. If they can say that during a wet and windy winter, I wonder how enthusiastic they will be in the spring and summer?

Found and Lost

Local historians receive some unusual requests. For instance, a professor at a German university asked Mrs. V. J. M. Bryant, the Local History Society's archivist, for information about the Rev. George Spencer Cautley, vicar of Nettleden from 1857 to 1880. After obtaining a great deal of information, however, the professor lost all his clothes, books and papers on the return to Germany. Despite this setback, he is sufficiently interested

in the subject to start all over again.

Cautley, a very short and deformed man, stood on a stool in the pulpit, and on one occasion the stool collapsed beneath him. He was a poet of no mean ability, and this, I suppose, accounts for the German professor's interest in a man who wrote his own epitaph, describing himself as "a little harmless rhyming priest . . . so strangely made."

Cautley was a great friend of John Cobb, our Victorian rector and historian, a contributed verses to our Parish Magazine in 1874. He also wrote some lines which were inscribed on a marble slab affixed to Cowper's well in the Rectory garden. This slab, like the well, has vanished.

Unlucky Dip?

One of the High Street's worst eyesores, an empty house opposite the Outspan building, is to be modernised for use as offices. It was vacated some years ago, and vandalism and deterioration do not help one to assess the age of a house which has been much altered at one time or another. Old directories show that it was called Yew Tree Cottage and then Rosedale. For many years it was occupied by veterinary surgeons, one of whom, the late Captain A. C. Wilson, will be remembered by old residents.

The Captain followed in the footsteps of his father, William Wilson, who turned down an offer which could have made him a partner in

the famous local chemical business (Cooper's), now part of the Wellcome Foundation. In the 1840s, William Cooper came to Berkhamsted as an impecunious veterinary surgeon and engaged a youth, William Wilson, as his assistant. Later, when Cooper was devoting more and more time to the manufacture and marketing of sheep dip, he invited Wilson to co-operate with him in the enterprise, but the young man preferred to continue as a veterinary surgeon and took over the whole of the practice.

But for this decision—an unlucky dip?—the firm of William Cooper & Nephews might have traded under the name of Cooper & Wilson. However, the two Wilsons, father and son, had no regrets; they were both very good veterinary surgeons, and I am sure that if the Captain had published his stories he would have been the James Herriot of the 1930s!

A Local Branch Line

Many readers have nostalgic memories of the Hemel Hempstead and Harpenden Railway, which was proposed in 1863, opened in 1877, and ceased to carry passengers in 1947.

Oh, the thrill of climbing the steps at Heath Park Halt and riding all the way to Harpenden, the train stopping at Hemel Hempstead, Godwin's Halt, Beaumont's Halt, Redbourn, and Roundwood Halt. From a high, handsome bridge one had almost an aerial view of Marlowes. How the locomotive strained and grunted up the steep gradient beyond Hemel Hempstead station. Then there were fair meadows and a fine view of Redbourn before the last lap to Harpenden.

But it was never a profitable line. On my last trip I was the only passenger—and that was on a Saturday afternoon in 1937. If the line had started at Boxmoor, linking two main line stations, the closure might have been delayed until more recent times. But all is not lost, for part of the line is still used as a private mineral railway.

What has all this to do with Berkhamsted? Not very much, I fear, but when the railway was opened in 1877 the Berkhamsted Rifle Corps Band was there to play jolly tunes, and two old boys of Berkhamsted School (H. J. Cannon and his son J. A. Cannon) have just written a history of the railway. Their book, entitled "The Nicky Line" (a nickname that is new to me), is published by Barracuda Books, of Chesham, at £5.95.

Happy Valley

I have been asked for information about an iron plate inscribed "39 to 44 Castle Street." It is affixed to the wall of the house adjoining the former public house, The Boote.

The addresses were those of a cluster of six cottages popularly known as Happy Valley. They were swept away long ago, and the empty site made one wonder how so many people were able to live in such cramped quarters.

Incidentally, when walking from Cross Oak Road to Queen's Road I find it hard to believe that formerly there were so many properties on the south side of the highway. One passed by Brinkman's nurseries, Goss Brothers' brushworks, a school and schoolhouse, a dairy, thirty cottages and two shops. For its size, Gossoms End had a very large population!



**HEMEL HEMPSTEAD
BUILDING SOCIETY**

**makes
your money
make
more money**

43 Marlowes

Hemel Hempstead

Berkhamsted Agents:

**WESTERN INSURANCE
SERVICES LTD.**

No. 1 LOWER KINGS ROAD,
BERKHAMSTED HP4 2AE
TEL: 5877