

BERKHAMSTED REVIEW



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In and around Berkhamsted

by 'BEORCHAM'

Our Grand Canal

Full marks to the Dacorum District Council for calling a meeting to discuss the local section of the Grand Union Canal. Anglers, boating enthusiasts, naturalists, walkers and others came from far and near to air their views, and all agreed that the canal is one of our finest features.

As one speaker remarked, one can visit a Norman castle, walk under the world's first trunk railway and then see the beautiful curve of a historical canal before moving on to an old market town.

Mention was made of bridges, and there were criticisms of the new Billet Lane bridge and the new red-brick bridge at Broadway. But there are also ancient, handsome bridges which deserve to be scheduled as buildings of architectural or historic interest, and Mr. Kenneth Webb wisely asked for Castle Street bridge, with its special bridge for barge horses, to be included in this list.

Altogether, a very good meeting. But I hope that we shall also remember the Bulbourne, still a pleasant stream where it is not marred by ugly surroundings. In particular I deplore the short, overgrown, untidy section which runs parallel with the canal east of Lower King's Road bridge. That was a grand place for tiddlers in years gone by!

Incidentally, the Chiltern Society's journal says that the hamlet of Bulbourne, on the far

side of Tring Cutting, is pronounced "Boobun." I have never heard this pronunciation used for our river. Have you?

Crossing the Road

One of the town's eyesores will be removed when W. H. Smith & Son cross the High Street to occupy much larger premises which for years have been plastered with posters. The new shop is due to open in November, and a new use will then be found for the premises which Smith's have occupied for 70 years.

This famous firm had a bookstall at Berkhamsted station before opening a shop in half of what is now Birtchnell's shop, the other half being used as a showroom for C. E. Southey, who manufactured motor cycles in Elm Grove. Later, Smith's moved to their present premises, previously occupied by John Cousins, draper and outfitter, who always advertised himself as "the people's friend".

Incidentally, Mr. Harry Spackman has just retired after 27 years as manager of the Berkhamsted shop. Goodness knows how many copies of the *Review* he has sold! We therefore have a special reason for saying "thank you" to Harry and his wife, who, I hope, will enjoy a long and very happy retirement at Leighton Buzzard.

Civic Centre Changes

Loud bangs and thuds have greeted people paying rates and rents at the Civic Centre. The "noises off" are welcome, for once again the 40

years' old building is being altered to provide better facilities for people attending meetings and entertainments. Last year the top storey was adapted to provide a new, large but low-ceilinged hall; now we are to have more space for refreshments, etc., on the ground floor.

So far, so good, but I have yet to hear anything definite about the enlargement of the Civic Hall, over a quarter of which is occupied by the stage. There is ample room at the back for an extension, and the sooner we have a better proportioned and larger hall, the better.

Progress Hall

Occasionally I am asked what use was made of the tall building in Cowper Road which now has a very derelict appearance. Older town-folk will not need reminding that the ground floor was formerly occupied by shops and the second floor by offices of the local Co-operative Society. The top storey was called Progress Hall, and scores of people remember going to meetings and concerts in this surprisingly large room.

"Penny pops" in the Progress Hall regularly attracted capacity audiences, and many a lad and lass learnt to dance at lessons given by Mr. W. Pratt, a local watchmaker.

Cowper Road, in fact, became a minor entertainments centre, for almost opposite the Progress Hall was the town's first cinema, the Gem, a precious name for a corrugated iron building.

Despite its neglected appearance, the Co-op building (1889) merits close inspection. It may not be beautiful, but the bricklayers were required to provide many fancy touches, and there is a notable window above the main door.

A Bit Steep

A newcomer tells me that he likes the town but wishes there were not so many steep streets. "Your developers must have liked mountaineering," he said. "Why didn't they angle the streets instead of going straight up steep hills?"

Well, some streets are steeper than others! Kitsbury Road is almost a nursery slope compared with Park View Road. Cross Oak Road gets worse before you reach the tableland. Many people climb the heights the easy way, by using Angle Place.

I often think that the best planners of all were the folk who cut a way through thick scrub for the Romans to copy when they made what is now our High Street. They avoided the marsh on one side and hills on the other. Compare the fairly level High Street with Charles Street, which heads in the same direction.

Fishy Story

"An elderly neighbour tells me that Middle Road was once called Fish Street. Is this so?" This question was put to me recently, and I can only say that Fish Street was a nickname which arose from the fact that J. Griffin, who sold fish and greengrocery at Monk's House, had a smokehouse in Middle Road for curing fish. That was many years ago.

Middle Road, which runs from Charles Street to Cross Oak Road, was for many years known as Kitsbury Middle Road. It was one of the first roads to be made in the Kitsbury area, and to this day it has never been "adopted", hence the rough surface of the road.

Thanks!

At last the rough, neglected land in front of The Barn (formerly Park View School) has been levelled and generally tidied up. Thanks! This could become one of the town's finest front gardens.



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