

BERKHAMSTED REVIEW



In and around Berkhamsted

by 'BEORCHAM'

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Anything to declare?

No doubt you have read about the Cornishmen who have revolted against the tax laws imposed by Westminster and claimed exemption under the terms of Royal Charters going back to the 12th century.

Do not imagine that Cornishmen have a monopoly of Royal favours. Berkhamsted received several ancient charters, too. Let us imagine that a local man (Mr. A) has just arrived at Newhaven after spending a holiday in Normandy.

Customs Officer: Have you anything to declare, sir?

Mr. A: I declare that I am a man and merchant of Berkhamsted.

Officer: So what?

Mr. A: Well, according to Henry II's charter of 1156, the men and merchants of Berkhamsted are to be free of all tolls and duties wherever they go in England, Normandy, Aquitaine and Anjou.

Officer: Tell me another! Come on, open your cases.

Mr. A: Steady! Henry II also said that anyone disquieting a man and merchant of Berkhamsted was to forfeit £10.

Officer: Are there any more like you at home?

Mr. A: Yes, my brother. He's busy closing down the markets at Tring and Hemel Hempstead. Edward IV, in 1477, said that no other market was to be held within eleven miles of Berkhamsted.

The County Boundary

Told that there was once a campaign to transfer Berkhamsted from Hertfordshire to Buckinghamshire, a reader asks if I can supply further information.

My knowledge is limited to a public meeting, held in St. Peter's Hall some 30 years ago, when opinions on the suggested transfer were invited. So far as I can remember, the chief reason for making a change was that Aylesbury would be a more accessible County Town than Hertford.

Nothing more was heard of the suggestion, and in more recent times, when many county boundary changes were made elsewhere, Hertfordshire remained intact.

Sunshine — sometimes

Weatherwise, this has not been a very good summer. But the roses in the churchyard have never stood higher, commuters have been able to pick blackberries in Lower King's Road, French tourists have asked Danish visitors the way to the station, inland navigators have had to queue for the locks, our two large gasholders have been painted green and brown, and fewer shops are empty.

If only the traffic lights in front of Coulter's shop hadn't been clouted, so that pedestrians at Barclays Bank corner have difficulty in seeing whether the light is red, green or amber. At the time of writing this frightful state of affairs has existed for five whole weeks.

Abraham of Berkhamsted

Among the many requests for information

received by the Local History Society was one from a student who is researching into the mediaeval Jewish communities of East Anglia. She mentioned Colchester, Sudbury, Ipswich, Bury St. Edmunds, King's Lynn, Stamford, Huntingdon, Cambridge — and Berkhamsted.

We must go back to the middle of the 13th century, when Richard, Earl of Cornwall and younger brother of Henry III, held Berkhamsted Castle. A man of great wealth, Richard was well acquainted with Abraham of Berkhamsted, another very wealthy man. In 1251, when Henry III ordered a levy of 10,000 marks on the Jews of England, the commissioners to whom the assessment was entrusted were accompanied by Abraham of Berkhamsted.

In the previous year, Abraham was arrested on a charge of strangling his wife, but was released on payment of a heavy fine. Next, he was accused of clipping the coinage. But he still enjoyed royal favours and lent money to barons and bishops. He died c. 1272.

Eating Scot Free

Several friends have drawn my attention to a letter in the *Daily Mirror* from Mr. H. Smith, of Wilmington, Dartford, Kent.

Sixty-five years ago he was "reared in a Scots colony at Bottom Farm, Berkhamsted. There were Campbells, Craigs, Hoys and McCoys... Their staple diet was porridge, but it was none of your oatmeal or rolled oats. It was made from the chaff blowings, or husks, steeped in huge coppers of water to ferment. In a few days there was a mass of stinking foam on top but when this had settled, the resultant gel was boiled for some hours. When cool it could be cut like sponge cake and was stored in drawers until needed. Then it was simply warmed up in a saucepan and salted — no sugar because it cost a penny a pound."

A friend has been in touch with Mr. Smith, who has very happy memories of attending the Victoria School.

That's the Ticket!

A new booklet entitled "Taking the Train" (H.M. Stationery Office, 95p) contains reproductions of old railway tickets.

One is of local interest: "London & North Western Railway. One Bicycle, accompanied by passenger, Berkhamsted to Dublin. Carriage paid 4s. 5d." The ticket, number 046, was issued on July 24th, 1894.

Charles Whybrow

Memories of a very active and popular former resident will be stirred by news of the death of Mr. Charles Whybrow, son of Mr. G. H. Whybrow, author of "The History of Berkhamsted Common."

Charles spent his early years in Berkhamsted and returned to the town after twenty years in East Africa. He was a very keen member of the Citizens' Association and a founder member of the Local History Society in 1950. A few years later he moved to Devonshire, where he achieved more than local fame as a naturalist, botanist and antiquary. A vice-president of the Exmoor Society, he wrote a much-praised book, "Antiquary's Exmoor".

Charles Whybrow's interest in Berkhamsted never waned; he was a regular reader of the *Review* and often contributed comments which appeared in this feature.



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