

BERKHAMSTED REVIEW



In and around Berkhamsted

by 'BEORCHAM'

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Blood Relations!

In a newly published book, "Portrait of Hertfordshire", Mr. Brian J. Bailey makes what to me are surprising comparisons between the people of Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead. He writes: "The incidence of blood group O, which is said to be characteristic of the people of Celtic descent, is considerably higher in the Berkhamsted area than in Hemel Hempstead, where a large proportion of the population is imported. Similarly, Hitchin has a higher percentage of O group blood than the new towns of Letchworth and Stevenage."

Mr. Bailey suggests that a pocket of Celtic inhabitants, whose type and culture were driven west by successive invasions, remained in the county. But as names of Celtic origin are extremely rare, "the native population of Hertfordshire is just a little mysterious."

I always imagined that in the Dacorum district, which takes its name from the Danes, we had a preponderance of Nordic types, but this may not be a fair conclusion.

Anyway, Mr. Bailey has written a very interesting book, and many people will agree that "the wide main street of this old market town . . . has become a dreadful thoroughfare now, not only because of the continual traffic, but also because of the weird assortment of modern shopping parades which have gone up along it." The book is published by Robert Hale at £4.80.

Seeing Double

Under the heading, "Herts' Delight", a holiday brochure states: "The scenery of Barbados is something like a sub-tropical Hertfordshire", but goes on to say that our county "never had Barbados' year-round golden sunshine" nor "sweeping acres of rum-scented sugar-cane."

Quite. Another interesting comparison, not mentioned in the brochure, is that Potten End pond is like Lake Superior, only smaller.

The Axtell Family

Despite reports that fewer American tourists have visited Britain this year, more Axtells than ever before have called to see the home town of their ancestors, who took a prominent part in Berkhamsted affairs in the 17th century.

The most recent caller, who wore a bright red hat and lives in Oklahoma, told me that he has a bank account two states away — in a township called Axtell, Nebraska. How's that for family pride?

Incidentally, our namesake town in Connecticut, Barkhamsted, will celebrate next year the 200th anniversary of its incorporation as a township in 1779.

Victorian Values

Among the Local History Society's recent acquisitions is a "Valuation of the household furniture, stock in trade and landlord's

fixtures" of a Berkhamsted ironmonger who died in 1870.

The stock was large and varied, including iron boilers, lanterns, clogs, pots, pans, spittoons, shaving pots, milk skimmers, tools and paints, as well as larger items stored in the yard and workshop. The entire stock was valued at £80 12s.

The contents of the obviously well-fitted parlour, kitchen, three bedrooms and attic were valued at £33 18s. 6d.

How times — and values — have changed!

In Darkest Berkhamsted

Commenting on my "Brighter Berkhamsted" headline in last month's *Review*, a reader says that at night the town is anything but bright. The High Street is usually deserted, the street lighting is indifferent, and most of the stores and shops switch off the window lights as soon as the doors are locked.

It is true that one can sometimes walk the whole length of the High Street and see very few other pedestrians. This is the reason why many shopkeepers consider window lighting a waste of money. Even in the centre of the town there are some very black, bleak spots, but now that Christmas is coming perhaps shopkeepers will keep the lights on to create a more cheerful atmosphere.

Over to Beaune

As you probably know, we picked Beaune to be Berkhamsted's twin town in France. A short time ago I spent a few days in and around this famous centre of the Burgundy wine trade. The town, like Berkhamsted, has a very long history. Otherwise there are many differences. Beaune is a very compact town, and you can easily lose your way in the short, narrow streets of old houses and shops, some with garrets and roofs which could have been designed by Walt Disney's ancestors.

Everybody rushes to see the famous Hotel-Dieu and the Hospices de Beaune, but so many ancient buildings have been preserved that the keen photographer can spend a small fortune on films.

My praise of Beaune is limited to the town centre. Some of the new streets behind the railway station have wretched unpaved footpaths, and one vineyard after another creates a very monotonous landscape. Returning home, I was more thankful than ever that we have such a splendid and varied countryside.

Shorter Hours, Higher Output!

There was a little tut-tutting in the spring when it was known that the local branch of the County Library was to close at 5.30 instead of 8 p.m. on Mondays and Fridays. Despite this restriction, the number of books issued between April and September rose to 173,657, 4 per cent more than in the comparable period last year.

As a fairly regular borrower of books, I know that the busy staff cannot have much time for reading! The latest report states that over 37,000 books are on the shelves, and the average number of special requests is 130 per week.

The River Bulbourne

Referring to a recent note of mine on the pronunciation of the name of our river, the Bulbourne, a reader tells me that he has just seen a Berkhamsted deed of 1818 with the spelling "Boobun".



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