

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By "Beorcham"

HUNTING DAYS

My thanks to Mrs Derek Webster, of Moor Cottage, for saying that a recent article reminded her of a very happy childhood. Jack Rawle was the nearest neighbour and his Berkhamsted Buckhounds meant so much to her family. The hounds were kennelled on one side of his house and the deer were kept in a paddock on the other side, in apparent good neighbourliness.

Mrs Webster's father, Charles Miles, was honorary secretary to the Berkhamsted Buckhounds, and well known for his regular weekly contributions to "Horse and Hound" under the pseudonym "Dragon"; he also wrote for "The Field" and county papers.

The pack was unique in that it did not hunt the wild deer as on Exmoor. On Wednesday mornings the quarry was put in the deer cart (a very special vehicle) and taken to the meet. At the appropriate time the deer would be released to speed away and give the hounds a good run. One of the longest runs ever reported ended on the Edgware road.

"I shall never forget Jack Rawle," Mrs Webster writes. "He always seemed a big man in every way, a great character and a very wonderful friend to old and young." She especially treasures Jack's hunting crop, which was given to her by Mrs Dixon, wife of a former local veterinary surgeon.

CHANGES IN THE VALLEY

If you haven't walked along Chapel Street recently you may be surprised to see a new building in a corner of the old Congregational churchyard. Standing a short distance from the road, between Fiske House and Castle Mews, the New United Reform Church Hall is a most attractive building.

There must be many children and new residents who do not know that a very large Congregational Church, with seats for 610 worshippers, stood at the corner of Castle Street and Chapel Street until a few years ago. It was the third church to occupy the same site.

At the start of this century there were four places of worship in Castle Street: St Peter's, the School chapel, the Congregational church and a cottage where services were held for Roman Catholics. At an earlier date Primitive Methodists worshipped in Castle Street, too.

PONDER THIS!

Have you a ponderous carriage? No, I am not suggesting that you have a heavy, lumbering gait. I merely wish to draw your attention to a notice (now very difficult to read) on the canal bridge near Newground, on the way to Aldbury.

The bridge is "sufficient for ordinary traffic of the district, but owners and all persons in charge of

locomotives and all other ponderous carriages are warned against attempting the passage of this bridge."

Unfortunately, the very rusty cast iron plaque is not dated, but I imagine that it is Victorian or at least Edwardian.

After inspecting the plaque, I walked home via the towpath and was intrigued by the names of some of the boats. "Slopalong Placidly" obviously isn't hoping to create a new speed record.

ON THE RIGHT LINES

I have been looking through the County Council's Survey and Development Plan of 1951 to see how many predictions for a Brave New Berkhamsted have come true. Quite a number, but the crystal ball was sometimes offside.

Here is one item: "It is possible that local trams from Berkhamsted will eventually run to Marylebone Station, if the proposals made by the London Plan Working Committee, set up to enquire into the effects of the Greater London Plan upon railways are carried out."

The report continues: "At the end of 1950 there were 260 season tickets in use for the journey between Berkhamsted and London, and an average of 84 daily journeys and 23 cheap early morning tickets for similar journeys."

Since 1950 the number of passengers has gone up by leaps and bounds. What no one anticipated 30 years ago was the drastic curtailment of Green Line and local bus services.

ON DRY LAND

Having complained about the frequent flooding of the towpath near Lower King's Road, I am pleased to see that a low brick wall has been built to keep the Bulbourne within its own bounds. This is one of the few places where the river runs beside the canal with only the towpath between them.

A dozen yards or so from the bridge are two stumps (one almost completely rotted away) of the very tall telegraph poles which formerly accompanied the canal. These posts were always in pairs and (like the very tall railway signal posts of years gone by) were a feature of the landscape all along the valley.

Two well preserved stumps, still linked by a metal brace, survive beside the canal bridge at Bourne End. This was one known as Battles Bridge, probably (to quote the History of Hemel Hempstead) because a fierce argument took place there when the railway was being constructed, and a labourer lost his life.

PILLARS OF THE CHURCH

A reader asks if there are any old pictures showing the eleven Apostles and St George and the Dragon which one decorated the nave pillars of St Peter's Church.

Unfortunately, no. It seems that the pillars were whitewashed in Cromwellian times, and in 1728 Nathaniel Salmon wrote that the paintings had been "recently brought to light by cleaning off the whitewash with which they had been covered."

Nearly a century later, John Hassell, in his "Tour of the Grand Junction Canal", wrote: "During the repairs of this building (St Peter's) in September, 1818, we visited it and found the remorseless hands of churchwardens and overseers stripping the walls of their relics, and causing a general mutilation of its antiquities. This abominable mania, called beautifying and repairing, may generally be considered as illustrative of the acts of the modern Goths and Vandals, destroying the richest works of past times, and substituting a daubing of whitewash to hide their barbarism."

According to R. A. Norris, the last traces of the paintings were cleaned off in the restoration of 1870.

TAILPIECE

Notice scrawled on a much-bashed car door: "Please ring, don't knock."

*Now that the time has come wherein
Our saviour Christ was born,
The larder's full of beef and pork,
The granary's full of corn,
As God hath plenty to thee sent,
Take comfort of thy labours,
And let it never thee repent
To feed thy needy neighbours.
Poor Robin's Almanack, 1700.*



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