

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By "Beorcham"

LOCAL PRIDE

A short time ago I gave a talk on Berkhamsted to a Hemel Hempstead audience. After answering several questions, I was buttonholed by a lady who said that she had always felt that the people of Berkhamsted thought that their town was superior to other places.

This revived the old, old belief that Berkhamsted was, and may still be, a rather snobbish town. The subject is worth pursuing.

When I was young we really did think that Berkhamsted was a cut above neighbouring towns, which some of us had never visited. For one thing, none of the other towns had a grammar school. Tring was sleepy, old-fashioned and a long way from a railway station. Chesham was an industrial town in a foreign county, full of people with countrified accents. Hemel Hempstead wasn't quite in our class, either; for instance, the Princess and Aero cinemas were not so grand as our Court Theatre. And there were murmurs in the borough that too many Berkhamsted men had the best jobs at Apsley Mills.

We were full of local pride, fully aware that Berkhamsted was surrounded by mansions and that many people belonged to the gentry, or thought that they did. When the season ticket era arrived, more top hats and bowlers were

seen at Berkhamsted station than anywhere else along the line. Moreover, Lord Brownlow had his own private entrance to Berkhamsted station, just like Royalty. At Tring, the Rothschilds used the common entrance and walked down numerous steps to the platform. Here, in Berkhamsted, we are all above our station!

Now, of course, we are ruled from Hemel Hempstead. But there is no need to bow your head when walking along Marlowes. You do not have to look out for a miniature canal in the middle of the pavement, neither are you scared by tall lampposts leaning like the Tower of Pisa.

ALL STEAMED UP

The naming of locomotive No. 47172 "County of Hertfordshire" has raised a lot of steam in the "Railway Magazine". A correspondent slates the County Council for not knowing that shire is another word for county. In other words, the inscription should be "County of Hertford." The duplication is on a par with "Mr Smith, Esquire."

Incidentally, you may or may not have noticed that in St Peter's Church there is a memorial to "Mrs Frances Hawes, Spinster." In the eighteenth century, however, many a Miss was called Mrs.

I wonder if I am alone in disliking the modern use of "Ms"? Why not "Esquires"?

THE DROVERS' WAY

Last month I quoted a few lines from "A Tour of the Grand Junction Canal in 1818", by John Hassell. Here is another extract: "The town of Berkhamsted has a very picturesque appearance, viewed from near the entrance of the castle where the navigation and the Bulbourne, traversing the valley, add considerable interest to the scene."

This, of course, was written nearly 20 years before the railway was built, and we now have no view of the town from the entrance to the castle.

Farther up the valley, Hassell saw canal-side meadows which were "luxuriant in the extreme. During the dreadful drought the whole of the Cow Roast valley was in a state of the most fertile vegetation. Here we saw herds of cows grazing, and observed a fresh drove of sucklers with their calves coming up to remain for the night, and we found, upon enquiry, that this inn (the Cow Roast) was one of the most regular stations for the drovers halting their cattle for refreshment; hence, I should suppose, the proper name is the Cow Rest, or resting place for those animals, for along the road there is a perpetual supply of cows passing to the capital, which forms a profitable trade to the farmers and graziers."

This confirms our belief that Cow Roast is a corruption of Cow Rest. Another popular overnight halt was the Goat Inn, Berkhamsted, which offered rest and refreshment to drovers who penned their sheep and cattle in one or other of the Three Closes which gave a familiar lane its name.

NAME AND NUMBER

If you ever use the telephone kiosk outside Berkhamsted Station, you may be as surprised as I am to read the following notice: "Emergency calls. This telephone is Berkhamsted 3196, on Station Forecourt, London and North Western Railway, Berkhamsted."

It is nearly 60 years since the famous old L.N.W.R. became part of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway - and there have been other changes since then. All the same, I hope that the "emergency" notice will not be changed. It is nice to be reminded of the time when you could telephone for a cab and perhaps go home in one drawn by a horse.

FIRESIDE STORIES

I cannot be sure whether I have mentioned a trifling story told many years ago by two of my aunts. At a very young age they saved a few ha'pence for their first railway ride. Setting off from their home at Gossoms End, they walked all the way to Boxmoor and were about to ask for two tickets when one of the girls wondered whether they would be able to open the door when the train stopped at Berkhamsted. Suppose they were carried on to Tring or Bletchley? What a predicament!

They decided to walk all the way back, spending their precious coppers on peppermints to sweeten the four miles' walk home.

I recollect another story told by my grandmother - a tale she had heard from her mother. The old Baptist Chapel in Water Lane, demolished in 1864, was always crowded, and the sermons were always very long. The congregation usually included an odd sort of chap named Abraham, who sat in the gallery and often took something to eat during the service. On one occasion the preacher raised his voice and said: "Abraham, Abraham, what hast thou in thy bosom?" Promptly came the answer from the gallery: "A meat dumplin', sir."

A NEGLECTED MEMORIAL

I have reason to believe that action will be taken following Mr C. H. C. Kingham's comments, at a recent meeting, on the neglected state of the Inns of Court Regiment war memorial on Berkhamsted Common.

(Continued)

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Near the top of New Road, it could not be in a more prominent position. For most of its 60 years it was kept in splendid condition, and some rebuilding was necessary when the memorial was struck by lightning. In recent times, however, it has had an increasingly neglected appearance, and it will be Berkhamsted's shame if we forget the 2,000 men

who trained here during the 1914-18 War and never returned from the battlefields.

BRIDLE OR BRIDAL?

"No official bridal path" proclaims two notices near the entrance to Hockeridge Wood. Well, the path certainly heads in the direction of Ashley Green church!

A BOURNE INDEED

Why is there a Thomas Bourne birthday service at St Peter's Church every year?

The short answer: because he directed in his Will that a sermon should be preached in the Parish Church. His Charities to the Town were to be mentioned and the preacher to receive one guinea. Thomas Bourne was also a very practical friend to Berkhamsted.

Born on 16th December, 1656, possibly in our Town, for he certainly had family connections here, he became Master of the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters in London. Bourne died in 1729 at the age of 73 and was buried in the family tomb of St Giles's Church, Camberwell. Although his Will, dated 4th August, 1724, was not disputed, it had to go to the Court of Chancery before his executors acted. The Court ordered the executors to build a school, appoint a Master and Mistress, and elect Scholars. The school was opened in 1737 to provide free education, free uniforms and payment to parents (for at that time 80% of children received no schooling) for 20 boys and 10 girls. The boys were to be taught English and Accounting, the girls just English. Money was also provided for boys to be apprenticed on leaving school (an early form of higher education.)

The School site at 222, High Street, was later to house the Berkhamsted School for Girls, then the offices of the National Westminster Bank, and now the offices of the Britannia Building Society. Three crests over the main entrance - the coat of arms of Thomas Bourne, Berkhamsted Town, and of General Finch (who paid for the re-building of the school in 1854) - testify to its history.

Bourne's name lives on at the Church of England Middle School in Durrants Lane, and his portrait hangs near the entrance hall: it was transferred there from Victoria School in 1971 where a duplicate replaced the original. His intention of providing money for the education of children has survived 250 years after his death, if not entirely in the form he directed, then surely in the spirit of his giving. A remarkable record, worthy of commemoration.

Joan Calnan



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