

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By "Beorcham"

A LOCAL MUSEUM?

A few months ago a study group produced a lengthy report on the museums (and lack of museums) in Hertfordshire. The Dacorum District Council was invited to 'proceed with developing a museum service based on the large existing collection from the district', and to my delight Berkhamsted was singled out as 'possibly the best site for a small museum, with small displays at Hemel Hempstead and Tring.'

No time has been lost in forming a Dacorum Museum Advisory Committee. Already several meetings have been held, and in May there will be an exhibition of local by-gones which will first be staged at Hemel Hempstead and then transferred to Berkhamsted and Tring.

Besides representatives from the Berkhamsted Local History and Archaeological Societies, the advisory committee includes a new resident of Berkhamsted, Mrs. Helen Poole, who is curator of a new museum which will open next year in Benskins' old offices at Watford.

Much thought and much money will be needed to start even a small museum, but the new committee has high hopes of success. Meanwhile, the local societies must guard and increase their already large collections of articles of local interest.

A MUCH-TRAVELLED CLOCK

A handsome clock presented to a former headmaster of Berkhamsted School is back in England after many years of telling the time in Bermuda.

It bears the following inscription: 'Presented to the Rev. E. Bartrum, D. D., by Governors, Masters, Boys and Friends of Berkhamsted School on his retirement after holding the Headmastership for 24 years. December 1887.'

On the death of the headmaster, his son, Major Jack Bartrum, took the clock to Bermuda, where he spent a long retirement. In due course the clock was inherited by the Major's daughter, Eva Bartrum, who thought that it should be returned to England. For this information I am indebted to Mr. P. C. Bartrum, a grand-nephew of the headmaster.

THE WILD MAN

Recently I was shown a cutting from a Norwich newspaper which reported the re-opening of a public-house in the city. It was named The Wild Man after our famous local oddity, Peter the Wild Boy, who roamed the countryside and on one occasion wandered as far as Norfolk, where, unable to speak, he was imprisoned as a sturdy vagrant.

His association with Norwich was short but sensational. According to an article in another Norfolk publication, in 1751 a fire raged for six hours through the thatched roofs of the parish of St Andrews. Prisoners in the Bridewell were set free, but 'one very hairy, wild-looking man was reluctant to leave and had to be forcibly removed. He was transferred to the City Gaol on Gaol Hill, where the canny gaoler realised that he might be the missing ward of King George I... who had committed him to the care of one Thomas Fenn, of Berkhamsted. It was from here where he escaped to turn up, so the legend says, at Rackheath, near Norwich.'

TWO NOTABLE BOOKS

This will be a notable year for the publication of books of local interest. Col. Douglas Coult, a former bursar of Ashridge Management College, has written 'A Prospect of Ashridge' which should be the standard work for many years to come. March 28th was the date chosen for launching the book at Ashridge.

Later this year the eagerly-awaited History of Berkhamsted School, by Mr B. Garnons Williams, will be published. I imagine that there will be orders from all over the world!

Incidentally, it is hoped that a book on Victorian Berkhamsted will appear next year, to be followed by a third and extended edition of the Short History of Berkhamsted.

BERKHAMSTED IS NOT SNOBBISH!

My somewhat playful comments on the alleged snobbishness of Berkhamsted provoked several comments. One resident, who came here many years ago, said that when he was about to move to Berkhamsted, a friend warned him that it was a very snooty place. On the contrary, he found it a very friendly town.

A woman reader (in years gone by I would have said a lady reader!) told me that she fell in love with Berkhamsted the moment she arrived here 30 years ago, and would be very sad if she ever had to live elsewhere.

A tradesman recalled pre-war times when certain customers would be reasonably friendly in his shop but would never give so much as a nod if they passed him in the street. The biggest snobs, he said, were the ones who ran up big bills and were very slow payers!

It is only fair to add that shyness is often mistaken for snobbishness.

OUR HIGHEST VILLAGE

Berkhamsted is not the only place which is spelt in various ways. Wigginton is often given a third g - Wigginton - and a signpost near the Newground crossroads proclaims two versions, Wigginton and Wigington!

Apart from having the distinction of being Hertfordshire's highest village, Wigginton is achieving more than local fame with frequent classical concerts in the parish church.

In years gone by the village kept an ancient custom known as Keeping Kattern. Parties were held in many of the cottages on St Katherine's Day, in honour of the patron saint of lace-makers. Many of the villagers, however, found it more profitable to change from lace-making to straw-plaiting, and, as in most other towns and villages, there were schools where boys and girls were taught to plait straw. At Wigginton, one hour was devoted each day to the 'three R's'.

The village Sunday School added to their knowledge, and children from distant parts of the parish brought scraps of food for their mid-day meal. To provide something hot, the schoolmistress organised 'penny dinners' - usually rice puddings and sometimes soup.

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After long, dry spells, Wigginton was often short of water. Sometimes the only functioning well was at Champneys, a long distance from many of the cottages. In a terrible drought in 1856, a donkey cart was sent to Tring to fetch water.

Now, of course, the people of Wigginton have all mod. cons., and we look up to them at their dizzy height 700-ft. above sea level.

BONE END

Turning from a high village to one in the valley, I was recently reminded that in years gone by Bourne End was often pronounced Bone End. A Victorian writer wondered whether the saying, as dry as a bone, was derived from the usually dry state of the Bourne Gutter which gave Bourne End its name!