

# IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham'

## THE TOWN'S OLDEST SOCIETY

Eight years ago a once-flourishing society, the Berkhamsted Institute, was forced to vacate the reading room above the Market House and the recreation room below the Sessions Hall.

Since that time the rooms, like the rest of the Town Hall complex (the Market House excepted) have not been used, and the Institute ceased to exist apart from the chess club, which meets at Lagley.

For several generations the Institute, founded in 1845, was a power in the town, providing a reading room and library, games room, evening classes, lectures, entertainments, exhibitions and sometimes fielding its own football and cricket teams. One of the town's greatest honours was to be president of the Mechanics' Institute, as it was originally called.

After the 1939-45 War, the membership declined for a variety of reasons, such as competition from the County Library and Television. For some time the trustees have felt that the Institute should be dissolved, and on legal advice a meeting will be held to discuss how the remaining assets should be used. The date of this meeting will be advertised in the Press.

Incidentally, it is widely thought that the old reading room and the adjoining committee room, which overlook the High Street, would be the ideal home for a local museum.

## THE CLOWN AND SAUSAGES

Last month's comments on the declining number of licensed houses in the town prompted a reader to question the name of one of the two former public-houses in Mill Street. He thought the King Edward VI was also known as the King Henry VIII. Yes, but not at the same time! Early editions of Loosely's Directory show that the name was changed in the late 1880s.

The public-house was also jokingly known as the Clown and Sausages. When it was being demolished twenty years ago, I interviewed Mr George Nash, who had spent all of his 78 years in Mill Street. He remembered seeing, in the loft, a colourful signboard depicting a clown with strings of sausages dangling from his pockets. This design may have been suggested by the circuses which were formerly held on the Moor.

Mr Nash recalled the time when the public-house was open from 6 a.m. until 11 p.m. It also provided some of the services of a general shop, and as a boy he was sometimes called out of bed to serve customers on their way to work early in the morning.

The loft, Mr Nash added, was often used for threshing corn by Tom George, of Sunnyside, who used a flail in the time-honoured way. Tom

kept a donkey and cart and at harvest time he collected and threshed the gleaners' corn, which was then ground into flour by Mr Cook, at the watermill next door.

The public-house was declared redundant in 1922, but until its demolition in 1960 the words 'Amersham Fine Ales' were still faintly visible.

## TWO-IN-ONE PUDDINGS

My thanks to Mr John Bolton King for saying that a note in last month's *Review* reminded him of the 19th century traveller who came across the unusual all-in-one meal known as a Tring Dumpling. The traveller described it as 'a pudden; not a meat pudden nor a jam pudden but a bit of both with a little bittie in the middle which is pudden.'

## COMPARE THESE PRICES!

Did you see the recent display of old local newspapers at the County Library? Many people were surprised to learn that Berkhamsted had a *Recorder*, a *Times*, an *Express* and an *Independent* in years gone by.

Some of the advertisements are as interesting as the news items. For instance, in 1868 a local chemist, W. D. Meikle, advertised 'Berkhamsted Bouquet, a new, choice and invaluable perfume for the toilet or handkerchief.' Unfortunately, we can no longer pick up the scent.

In 1875 the *Berkhamsted Times* advertised the sale of five brick and tiled cottages yielding a total rental of £29 5s. per annum, or 11p per tenant per week. In 1887 a clergyman advertised for resident pupils, a fee of 21 guineas a year covering board, residence, laundry and education, including French, German, book-keeping and shorthand.

In 1896 Edward Platt advertised whisky at 42s. (£2.10) per dozen bottles. H. Lee's brewed

ginger beer was sold in stone bottles at one shilling (5p) a dozen. David Pike sold 50 oranges for one shilling, and J. Verney's cut currant cake was 4d. per lb.

On to 1934, when the *Berkhamsted Gazette* advertised a choice country residence, in very attractive grounds of two acres, with four bedrooms, garage, etc., for £120 per annum. And if you went to the Court Theatre in 1934, you had a choice of seats at six different prices, from 7d. to 2s. 5d., including entertainment tax.

## CAST IRON COMPLIMENT

I was pleased to find a complimentary reference to the handsome cast iron lamp-posts near the west door of St Peter's Church in a book entitled 'Country Curiosities', by Raymond Lea. He remarks that Victorian cast iron street lamps have gained considerable value as collectors' items, though they may still occasionally be seen serving their original purpose.

With their intricate design and fine workmanship, the Berkhamsted specimens deserve close inspection. Not so artistic but an interesting relic of the past is the old gas lamp above the Court House porch; it always reminds me of the time when the lamplighter made his rounds at dusk with a long pole to turn on the gas. A similar relic projects from attractive old cottages in Castle Street, though the illumination now comes from an electric lamp on the opposite side of the street.

## GEORGE MACAULAY TREVELYAN

A famous former Berkhamsted is the subject of a newly published book 'George Macaulay Trevelyan: a Memoir' is Mary Moorman's tribute to her father, who died 18 years ago.

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Berkhamsted soon after the First World War and changed the name of his house in King's Road from Hillcroome to Penrose, his wife's second name. A keen walker and lover of the countryside, he was largely responsible for the National Trust's acquisition of large tracts of Berkhamsted Common and Ashridge Park. He was President of the local Liberal Association and wrote several episodes for the Pageant of 1922, in which he made a personal appearance.

Professor Trevelyan moved to Cambridge, where he was Regius Professor of Modern History from 1927-40, and then Master of Trinity, Cambridge, until his retirement in 1951. He never lost interest in Berkhamsted, and was invited to be the first President of the Local History Society, but was unable to accept owing to his many commitments and failing eyesight. A local street, Trevelyan Way, is named after him.