

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham'

AS OTHERS SEE US

In a recently published book, 'View of the Chilterns', Brian J. Bailey says that Berkhamsted 'sits pulverized, modernized and commuterized astride the frantic A41 of Roman origin'.

I do not care for his choice of words, but 'frantic' isn't an inappropriate description of our ever-worsening traffic problems. However, Mr Bailey goes on to say that Berkhamsted Castle, 'associated with Becket and Chaucer, Piers Gaveston and the Black Prince, is an unpicturesque and barely existent ruin'.

I am fully aware of the disappointment expressed by visitors who expect to see massive remains of a flint castle, but it is the earthworks which make the site interesting, important, and attractive. Happily, more and more people are visiting the Castle after months when the gates were locked, and 'unpicturesque' is the last word I would use after walking round the moats and enjoying the spectacular view from the top of Tower Hill.

Pay another visit, Mr Bailey, and I am sure that you will have second thoughts.

BERKHAMSTED MEAN TIME

I have often wondered how we checked our clocks and watches before the BBC gave us the pips. But I never knew that St Peter's Church

clock was always three minutes fast until I spotted the following item in the Parish Magazine for January, 1920:

'The church clock has been carefully checked for six months, and has kept very accurate time. In future, beginning January 1st, it will be set at Greenwich time twice a week and not three minutes fast as hitherto. Those who have to catch trains will be careful to note this; and those who find difficulty in arriving at the beginning of the services will not be able to blame the clock.'

BRICKHILL GREEN

Full marks to Mr John Bolton King for his excellent articles on Hockeridge Wood. Goodness knows how many times I have enjoyed walking through what was once a magnificent beechwood and is now a forest of astonishing variety, interest and beauty. It is splendid at any time of the year.

But now I would like to say something in praise of a small and much neglected woodland - Brickhill Green. Here again we have infinite variety, but very few people now use its many short footpaths. Here and there one finds some steep ups and downs, the result of excavations made centuries ago by brick-makers. In fact, Brickhill Green was originally called Brick-kiln Green.

Some of the paths are uninvitingly overgrown, and the large roadside pond, which once refreshed horses after their climb up Chesham Road, is smaller than it was in years gone by. But do include this acre or so in your walks; it is a very precious piece of common land, and I cannot help wondering what may happen to it if we ever have a by-pass.

For newcomers I should add that Brickhill Green faces the playing field at the top of Chesham Road.

THE FIRST TELEPHONES

A reader asks if I know when the first telephones were installed in Berkhamsted. To the best of my knowledge it was 80 years ago, and if this is the wrong number perhaps you will give me a ring.

I have a copy of the National Telephone Company's directory for 1906-7; 200 pages sufficed for most of the south of England, London excepted. Fifty subscribers, some of whom had two numbers, are listed under the heading 'Berkhamsted Exchange, including Tring', but the only Tring subscriber was Mr A. Marc, of Champneys, whose number was Berkhamsted 6.

The telephone exchange was in the front room of No 5 Chapel Street, and for many years this was the town's only public call office, the number being Berkhamsted 1. Like many other children who attended Chapel Street infants' school, I often gazed in wonder at the young lady who operated the switchboard.

If, in 1906, you wished to speak to the editor of the *Gazette*, you asked for Berkhamsted 28y5. Mr A. C. Meek, owner of livery stables, had two numbers, 28x2 and 28x3. William Cooper & Nephews, of sheep dip fame, also had two numbers, 3 and 3a; this must have been the firm's lucky number, for later on it was extended to 333 and today the Wellcome Foundation's number is 3333.

The Urban District Council did not have a telephone until 1909, when 'telephonic communication' was installed at a cost of £6 15s per annum for 700 calls. Those were the days!

THE VICAR OF BRAY

Congratulations to Wigginton on producing a handsome eight-page short history of the village, entitled 'Past, Present and Future'. At 682 feet above sea level, St Bartholomew's is the highest church in the diocese, and we are told that from 1829 to 1832 the parish had much cause to be indebted to a nephew of Jane Austen, the Rev. James Edward Austen, who subsequently was appointed Vicar of Bray.

The village, the publication states, has undergone a major transformation. A century ago almost all the men of Wigginton worked on the land, but a fast train service to Euston has put the village on the commuter map. This can be said of many other villages in West Herts, but in Wigginton 'several old village families are still very much in evidence.'

SUMMER OUTINGS

My reference to Sunday Schools in last month's *Review* reminded an elderly resident of the summer treats which the children enjoyed in years gone by. She was especially fond of the cruises by horse-drawn canal boat to Newground, followed by a walk to Aldbury and the Bridgewater monument. Boys were ticked off for trying to rock the boat, and if the return journey was later than expected, anxious mothers would stand on the canal bridge, awaiting the children's safe return.

My informant added that her mother often spoke of the time when the Rector, amid an awful silence, read out the 'black list' of children who had not made sufficient attendances to go on the Sunday School outing.

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In Victorian times, she added, the scholars marched through the town, each boy and girl having a mug threaded on a piece of tape hung around the neck. Then there would be tea on the lawn of Millfield or The Hall or some other large house, followed by games and races. Some of the boys brought old trays which they used as

sledges to slide down the sloping banks surrounding the lawns where the treats were held.

Incidentally, there was a rumpus in the 'nineties when the Temperance children were taken on their annual outing in brewers' drays!

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