

# IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham'

## LITTLE AND GREAT

One of the summer outings of the Local History Society was specially routed to give the members a glimpse of Little Berkhamsted, our namesake on a hiltop a mile or so south of the road from Hatfield to Hertford.

Inevitably there were questions why two places with similar names are so far apart. Most of the Greats and Littles, such as the Gaddesdens and Missendens, are near neighbours, but the two Berkhamsteds are twenty miles apart.

Both are mentioned in the Domesday Book, and most of us are aware of a claim (by no means substantiated) that Little Berkhamsted, not the Great one, was the scene of the historic meeting between Saxons and Normans in 1066. But we need not go into battle on this issue, neither need we be pompous because we can afford to drop the 'Great' while Little Berkhamstedians have long postal delays if anyone omits the prefix.

Unlike our ever-growing valley town, the village stays small on high ground with fine views over a very rural part of Hertfordshire. Little Berkhamsted adds to its stature by sprouting a very tall, round tower, a landmark for miles around. It was an observatory built for John Stratton two centuries ago, and is often referred to as Stratton's Folly.

An interesting point is that long before William Cowper and Henry Twells, of Great Berkhamsted, were writing hymns, Little Berkhamsted was the birthplace of Thomas Ken, a beloved bishop and hymn writer. One of his nephews was Izaak Walton, to whom the altar table in St Andrew's church is dedicated. A few feet away, a stone in the chancel floor recalls another 17th century Little Berkhamstedian, Cromwell Fleetwood, grandson of the Protector.

## A HUT WITH A HISTORY

The Auction Room in Middle Road merited two mentions in last month's *Review*, but no reference was made to its military history.

It is the sole survivor of five huge wooden huts which were erected for the Inns of Court Officers' Training Corps in the 1914-18 War. The cost was met from the Corps' savings, and each hut was capable of holding 400 men for lectures and recreation. One of the huts was burnt down in the Armistice Day (1918) celebrations; another survived as a garage and workshop at Gossoms End until a dozen or so years ago.

Middle Road (originally called Kitsbury Middle Road) was created almost as soon as the Kitsbury Estate was developed in mid-Victorian times. Seven houses in Middle Road

are shown on a map of 1879, when there were only ten houses in Charles Street and slightly more in Kitsbury Road and Gilhams Lane (Cross Oak Road). Boxwell Road, Park View Road, Cowper Road and all the roads south of Charles Street did not exist at that time.

## 431 YEARS ON

This is a great year for new books of local interest. Three months after *A Prospect of Ashridge* we have *A History of Berkhamsted School, 1541-1972*.

More than 400 years of school history deserve 400 pages when we have such a splendid writer as Mr B. H. Garnons Williams. After reading the book from cover to cover I have the continuing pleasure of turning back the pages to savour once more the triumphs, failures and occasional scandals of old.

I especially enjoyed the chapter headed 'The Real Second Founder'. No, not 'Fry the Magnificent' but his predecessor, Edward Bartrum, whose achievement as an administrator 'was so spectacular that it would be easy to do less than justice to his merits as a day-to-day schoolmaster.'

But Bartrum did not please everybody; certain townsmen wanted to limit the number of boarders, and one critic suggested that people with respectable daughters would not want to live in a town filled with young men and boys!

Mr Garnons Williams's excellent book is dedicated to Colonel Alan Wilson, whose intensive research provided much material for what will be a standard work for many, many years to come.

## THE MIGHTY ORGAN

As many radio listeners are aware, much interest is still taken in cinema organs, many of which were discarded just before, during or

after the last War.

Some of the organs were transferred elsewhere, and an enthusiast for this type of music has asked if I know what happened to the Court Theatre organ, which was removed long before the cinema (on the Tesco site) was closed over 20 years ago.

I was once told that the organ was transferred to Rugby, but this was mere hearsay and a reader may be able to supply more information.

There must still be many residents who recall Vincent Collier's nightly appearance 'at the mighty organ'. All cinema organs were called mighty, and every organist had a signature tune which was accompanied by flashing lights as the console rose from the bowels of the cinema. Those were the days!

## TOWPATH WALKS

The Dacorum Teachers' Centre at Hemel Hempstead has produced a series of small booklets about the canal between Kings Langley and Tring. Philip Kingsbury and Jane Baldwin describe two nature walks along the towpath in Berkhamsted and Northchurch, and Wendy Richards illustrates some of the plants seen en route.

There are also booklets entitled 'History Walks', one of which starts at Winkwell and ends at the Cow Roast.

A reference to the former boat-building yard between Raven's Lane and Castle Street tells us that when wide boats (approximately 14 ft. wide) were launched, the water washed over the banks, and nearby residents were warned to block up their doors with sand-bags.

## NORTHCHURCH 'TECH'

A 'change of use to residential' notice reminds me that the Northchurch Evening  
(continued p. 7)

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