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*A pamphleteer wanted the Market House next to the  
Kings Arms . . .*

## A "Skeleton" in the Town Hall Cupboard!

A SCATHING CRITICISM of the Town Hall, printed as a pamphlet shortly after the official opening in 1860, throws considerable new light on an enterprise which, it was hitherto believed, commanded the unanimous support of the townspeople.

Through the kindness of Mr. Edward Popple, I have had an opportunity of inspecting what is probably the only copy of the pamphlet still in existence. It is unsigned and does not bear the printer's name. Perhaps the author or authors went to the expense of having the criticism printed after failing to secure a "platform" in the local Press. First, let us set the scene for our story.

### The Old Market House

Berkhamsted's ancient Market House, which stood a few feet west of the One Bell public-house, and was generally considered an eyesore and an obstruction, was burnt down in the autumn of 1854. The debris had scarcely been cleared away when a public meeting was held at the King's Arms Hotel on October 20, 1854. At that meeting it was agreed to ask the concurrence of Trustees of Ashridge Property\* in the construction of a Market House suitable to the increasing prosperity of the town."

To quote Henry Nash (*Reminiscences of Berkhamsted*, 1890): "The unanimous voice of the town was opposed to rebuilding on the old site; the inhabitants had too lively a recollection of the unsightly obstruction. . . A committee was appointed, with General Finch at the head. . . Lord Brownlow and his

\* The original Market House was part of the possessions of the Duchy of Cornwall, held by the Trustees of the Earl of Bridgewater under a lease. These Trustees were bound by covenants to reinstate the Market House.

advisers were conferred with on the subject, and it was ultimately arranged that in lieu of rebuilding the Market House, his Lordship would subscribe to any larger scheme that might be agreed upon."

At a further meeting (on February 26, 1856) the following resolution was carried unanimously:

That it is the opinion of this meeting that a sum of money would be subscribed by the Inhabitants of this Town, etc., towards making, over the Market House, Rooms for Magistrates' Meetings, Lectures, Mechanics' Institute, etc., provided that the owners and lessees would furnish a convenient plan and give them pecuniary assistance guaranteeing the use thereof to the Town for a period of 99 years at a Peppercorn Rent to be vested in the Churchwardens and Overseers for the time being. Proposed and carried that General Finch, Mr. Moore and the Rector be appointed a Committee to convey the above resolutions to the Duchy of Cornwall and the Guardians of Earl Brownlow."

### Kind Hearts and Debentures

William Hazell, a grocer, secured the present site for £825; subscriptions were invited, and the response was generous. Lord Brownlow gave £500, Lady Alford £200, General Finch £400, Colonel and Mrs. Smith-Dorrien £150, Mr. Joseph Robinson £150, Messrs. Thomas Curtis, Frank John Moore and Thomas Wheatey £100 each. There were also 147 persons whose subscriptions ranged from £1 to £50, bringing the total to £2,610. This amount was increased by £575 as the result of a bazaar in the Castle grounds. By the time the building was furnished, there was a deficit of several hundred pounds. Debentures were issued, repayment being made as profits permitted, and the last of the bonds was redeemed in 1887, shortly before fresh debentures for the "New Sites" were issued.

That, in brief, is the story of the building of the Town Hall, which was opened in August, 1860. From Nash and other sources the impression is gained that everyone pulled together and worked in perfect harmony.

### Which Site?

But the anonymous pamphlet denies that the townspeople were unanimously opposed to building on the site of the old Market House near the One Bell. The interesting statement is made that some people considered it undesirable to have the new building next to a public-house—but in 1861 the White Hart was built next door to the new Town Hall.

We also learn that consideration was given to a site on the opposite side of the High-street—at the corner of "Snob's Alley," now Prince Edward-street. Here the "next door neighbour" would have been the King's Arms.

—THE PAMPHLET IN FULL—

### Great Berkhamsted Market House & Town Hall

In reference to this Building, the preliminary opening of which was noticed in the papers of last week, it appears the cost has considerably exceeded the sum originally intended, and has compelled the Managing Committee to resort to a system of begging, toy-selling, and Aunt-Sallying, until their patience and the pockets of the public are nearly exhausted.

Why a Committee of gentlemen should have been led on to exceed the limit they originally pledged themselves to is surprising, particularly as they well knew the building is placed on a site that was strongly objected to by so many of the old residents of the town, 32 of whom sent a Memorial to Ashridge (who by lease from the Crown are owners), praying the Market House might be re-erected on the old site, in the best business part of the town, and not where it now stands.

★

But the Memorial was not attended to, and one or two individuals, who were determined to carry the Market away from those persons' property, made excuse that they did so "to get it away from the Public-House" (these being the words of the principal mover); but this proved to have been only a ruse, for it appears that now, before the Market House is open for business, the Committee, or a portion of them, are making arrangements to turn out an old Tenant from the School Property adjoining, of which they are Trustees, the value of which is about £30 per annum, for the purpose of building a Public-House, and it is presumed they have promised a Licence, as they have it in their power to do so.

This is sailing a little under false colors, and to all honest-minded men must seem unneighbourly to those, whose Property in the locality of the old Market House must be depreciated.

★

With respect to the appearance and position of the new Building, it looks more like a Chapel for any professor of the High Church fraternity, and to have sunk already, like such professors, a foot or two in the ground.

The cellar dug out for stowing away corn, like the W.C.s in the centre, is rather out of order. The entrance is very much too far from the road for loading or unloading Corn, or for carriages to draw up, and persons to alight, without being exposed on the pathway; on the night of opening, ladies left a hot gas-lighted room to run about a cold pavement to get to their carriages.

Had a suitable building been put on the old site, or over the one proposed, adjoining the King's Arms Hotel, carriages could have drawn up to the very door. At the latter place is also a public road, or thoroughfare, leading to meadows, suitable for market purposes.

★

Altogether, the new Building is placed in the worst position for business or convenience; and it is much to be regretted that a few influential people should have succeeded, against the wishes of a large body of inhabitants, in draining their pockets to help them to erect a building quite out of character for the legitimate requirements of a *Market House*, which, belonging to the "Duchy," would have been more satisfactory had it been kept free of Reading Rooms, Police Rooms, and all the other little Rooms that are now attached, and which could have been placed independently, as the property of the Town, where the whole now stands, or on some other convenient situation where it would be useful and a credit to the inhabitants of GREAT BERKHAMSTED.—August 29th, 1860.

A few more facts may be of interest.

Originally the Town Hall Committee consisted of all subscribers of £100 and upwards, and, in addition, twelve members (elected by subscribers), being inhabitants of Berkhamsted or North-church, and being subscribers of not less than £1. The present electors are inhabitants of Berkhamsted and North-church who are rated at £10 and upwards. These ratepayers are the only possessors of "Town Hall rights," which are limited to the power to appoint, from among themselves, a committee of twelve to administer the Town Hall for the benefit of the inhabitants of Berkhamsted St. Peter.

### The Sessions Hall

In 1888, by means of debentures, so-called "new sites" were purchased, consisting of the ground where the Sessions Hall and rooms below now stand, with two adjoining shops on the west side of the Town Hall. In 1890 the Sessions Hall was built by the issue of further debentures.

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