

How the Town was Governed—7

THE COUNCIL'S EARLY DAYS

By 'BEORCHAM'

ONE OF THE GRIEVANCES of the seventeenth century Corporation of Berkhamsted was its small area and limited resources. Similarly, the Urban Council was starved of space when it was formed in 1898. Even now, despite two enlargements, it has the smallest area, with three exceptions, of the twenty-nine urban and rural districts in Hertfordshire.

It was sheer madness to exclude the whole of Sunnyside from the urban district. The people living in that area were Berkhamstedians; their streets were as much a part of the town as the central area or Kitsbury. But heed was still taken of ancient ecclesiastical boundaries which caused little inconvenience so long as the large, detached portion of Northchurch parish on the east side of the town remained truly rural. By late Victorian times hundreds of people were living in George Street, Ellesmere Road and some smaller roads, but because

Gravel Path formed part of the parish boundary they were governed by Northchurch Parish Council.

IN THE DARK

One hardship was lack of street lighting; Sunnyside, like the village of Northchurch, stayed in the dark while the streets of the parish of St. Peter were reasonably well lighted.

Sunnyside had to wait until 1909 to be transferred to the urban district, which increased its acreage from 1,035 to 1,208. The number of councillors was raised from twelve to fifteen, and three more were added when a large part of Northchurch was transferred to the urban district in 1935, increasing the acreage to 1,982.

To return to the Council's early days, the first election was held on April 15th, 1898. Sixteen candidates contested the twelve seats. Mr. David Osborn headed

the poll with 346 votes; 169 were sufficient to elect the twelfth man, Mr. William Chilton.

NO FULL-TIME OFFICIALS

Having no civic centre, no full-time officials, not even an office to call its own, the Council met fortnightly at the workhouse. Right from the start there were frequent meetings of the finance, highways, works and improvements, and allotments committees. Sewerage and fire brigade matters were dealt with by joint committees on which Northchurch Parish Council was represented.

Mr. Thomas Penny, solicitor, was appointed clerk at £50 per annum. Dr. William Gruggen, medical officer of health for a large district, received £40 from Berkhamsted. Mr. E. H. Adey, who also worked for other local authorities, received £75 from Berkhamsted as inspector of nuisances, £2 as inspector of dairies and cowsheds, £3 as inspector of canal boats, and £20 as surveyor. Eleven men applied for the post of rate collector, and Mr. O. P. Timson was chosen at £50 per annum. The general district rate was 3s. 6d. in the £.

RATEPAYERS' ASSOCIATION

The Council inherited a defective sewerage system which called for very heavy expenditure, part of which was spent on making good roads and paths that had been ruined by the laying of new pipes. Complaints of extravagant spending led to the formation of a Ratepayers' Association, and one of its

first grouses concerned the bad state of the High Street. The Urban Council promptly told the Ratepayers' Association to tackle the County Council. It was not long before the Urban Council was itself sending a protest to Hertford about the County Council's 'enormous and ever increasing expenditure'—the first of many such complaints.

In the early days of motoring, Colonel Foster, of the Swan Brewery, and Mr. Joseph North, auctioneer, proposed and seconded the following resolution: 'That as cyclists and others now have the great advantage of improved highways, this Council is of the opinion that . . . a tax should be imposed on cycles, motor-cars and motor-cycles, such tax to be applied to the repair and improvements of highways, and that a copy of this resolution be sent to the Local Government Board and to the M.P. for this division, with a request that he will support the same.'

Every motorist knows the sequel, but the idea of a Road Tax did not come from Berkhamsted alone. Many other authorities joined in the campaign to reduce local spending on highways.

THE FEVER CART

The Council granted a licence to Mr. W. Cheeld, grocer, to sell petroleum—a sure sign that the motoring age had arrived. Although it was far too early for a motor ambulance, the Council had rubber tyres fitted to the 'fever cart', a frequent and much-dreaded sight in the town. The Council minutes refer to a case of typhoid in Happy Valley, a group of cottages off Castle Street, and to a recommendation that £2 be paid to a Chesham Road resident who had been off work for a fortnight on account of a scarlet fever outbreak at home. Aldbury isolation hospital was full of diphtheria cases at that time.

The Council accepted the Cyclists' Touring Club's offer to erect a danger board at the top of Gravel Path and Whitehill, but no action was taken when the railway company offered to widen the bridge near the 'Crystal Palace', provided that the estimated cost of £1,700 was borne by local authorities.

THE BUSY CANAL

While the National Telephone Company was going ahead with the construction of 'telegraphic works' in the district, the Council turned down the North British Electricity Company's application to supply electric light in the district. It was intended to retain the right in the Council's own hands, but private enterprise eventually triumphed: a Chesham company supplied electricity to the town.

The canal was a busy and prosperous trade route, and Mr. Adey reported that 103 boats had been inspected. These boats were the homes of 160 men, 47 women, and 91 children under twelve years of age. Twenty-eight boats had one or more infringements of the Canal Boats Act, eleven having illegible lettering and numbering.

The Council complained that the Grand Junction Canal Company was

taking the water of this district and 'sending it into another county', with serious consequences to wells in the neighbourhood. But swimming in the canal was encouraged. Mr. R. Sear asked for a bathing place for boys to be provided near Costin's boatyard, between Gravel Path and Castle Street, and for changing rooms the surveyor was directed to obtain a three years' tenancy, at £15 a year, of Mr. Costin's stables in Station Road.

THREE MONTHS' RUBBISH!

For some time the removal of house refuse was let out to private contractors. At a meeting in January, 1899, Dr. Bontor said that the ashes had not been collected from his house for three weeks; he had to store them in his bath and in an old silk hat. The surveyor admitted that at Highfield Road nothing had been collected for three months, and eventually it took two days to deal with the refuse from that road alone.

The Ratepayers' Association complained of the 'exorbitant' price the Council proposed to spend on horses for scavenging, etc. The clerk to the Council reported that a horse was to be purchased from Mr. Potter, of Jason's Hill, at £35, and another from Mr. Bedford, of Dudswell, at £40. The horses were to be kept for a week's trial; if satisfactory, to be purchased, otherwise to be returned to the owners with a sovereign for the use of each horse.

RESIGNED AND RE-ELECTED

Two dustcarts were bought from East and Son at £16 16s. each, and two sets of harness from Walklate, the saddler, at £7 15s. per set. Mr. William Nash, the farrier, was paid 4s. per horse per calendar month for shoeing the horses. Then there were purchases of oats, wheat straw, and best meadow hay.

Of course, the councillors did not always agree. Dr. Bontor was so angered by the Council's reluctance to enforce a certain byelaw that he resigned his seat as a protest. At the next meeting the Council repented and Dr. Bontor was elected to fill the vacancy caused by his own resignation!

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN

At the October meeting Mrs. L. W. Inkpen described the vicissitudes of a singer who becomes a member of the Covent Garden company. She remembers conductors who made one feel they enjoyed one's singing and brought out the best in everyone, others who evoked a hostile feeling, yet some of these, surprisingly, had a wonderful response.

Amongst the amusing reminiscences with which she enthralled members, was that of the varied positions from which Boris Godunov has to sing according to the reaction of his horse to the sounds of the orchestra and to the conductor's

baton. Throughout the talk, but especially at this point, her delightful miming and mimicry added to the enjoyment of her audience.

Mrs. E. M. Deighton thanked Mrs. Inkpen for a wonderful talk.

At the Sectional Reports meeting on 11th November, Mrs. R. C. Wiltshire spoke of a feeling of optimism inspired by the various sections of the United Nations Organisation. She mentioned especially the World Youth Association in its voluntary service scheme, sends out, not young untrained students as we do, but experienced helpers to the developing countries.

A speaker from the European Forum reported Mrs. J. Sherwood from the Home Economics Committee, stated that seventy-five per cent of British women are against our entry into the Common Market because they fear rising prices. He pointed out that after entry we should enjoy a higher standard of living, our economic basis would be strengthened, security increased and we should have greater influence in European affairs.

PARISH REGISTER

BAPTISMS

October 25—Louise Vanderkar, 15 Murray Road.
October 25—Richard Colin Wyborn, 4 Upper Hall Park.

WEDDING

November 14—David Kenneth Donovan, of Hendon, and Pauline Angelia Flint, of 6 Middle Road.

FUNERALS

November 3—Arthur Bernard Flint, 19 Castle Street, aged 79 years. Interred in St. Peter's Cemetery. Service at St. Peter's.
November 17—Henry Foster Furniss, 20 Douglas Gardens, aged 85 years. Interred in Kingshill Cemetery. Service at St. Peter's.

BAPTISMS (ALL SAINTS)

22nd September—Nicola Joy Davies, 14 Gaveston Drive.
11th October—Julia Dawn Herridge, 66 Victoria Road.
11th October—Helen Mary Loten, 78 Grandfield Avenue, Watford.
11th October—Andrew James Shepherd, 6 Greenway.

COLLECTIONS & STEWARDSHIP FUND

	£	s.	d.
Stewardship Fund (October)	610	4	10
Collections (October)	66	8	8
St. Peter's	34	16	6
All Saints			
	£711	10	0

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