

BERKHAMSTED REVIEW

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In and around Berkhamsted by 'BEORCHAM'

Twenty-five Years Ago

"As this is the year of the Queen's silver jubilee, can you please tell me what Berkhamsted was like in 1952, the first year of Her Majesty's reign?"

A tall order! Briefly, 1952 was a bitter-sweet year; the war was still a fairly recent memory, scores of local young men were away on National Service, volunteers were still sought for Civil Defence duties, and the town still had a Food Control Office. It was not until July 1954 that all food rationing ceased.

The population was 11,590 (now it is around the 16,000 mark) and there were many cases of overcrowding in small cottages. By 1952 nearly 200 Council houses had been built on the Durrants Estate, and 70 more were under construction, but over 400 families were still on the waiting list. Building costs may be judged from the Ministry of Housing's approval of a tender for £50,800 for 42 Council houses.

It is still possible to buy High Street shops for what now seems a ludicrously small sum. In 1952 the Town Hall Committee decided to raise money for essential repairs to the hall by selling two adjacent shops. The highest bid was £4,525 for the two shops!

Incidentally, the Berkhamsted Building Society offered "an attractive rate of interest" for shares of £20 each at 2½ per cent interest, or 2 per cent for deposits up to £500.

Moving a Memorial

Now for some parochial news of 1952. The Rev. Horace Spence and his wife found the Rectory far too large and expensive to maintain; as a result a new, smaller Rectory was eventually built.

Then, as now, parishioners were generous and gave nearly £6,000 to modernise St. Peter's Church organ, the price having gone up nearly £1,000 since the original estimate. Yes, there was inflation all those years ago! At the same time All Saints' Church acquired a new organ at a cost of £1,650.

Other events of 1952 were the transfer of the war memorial from the top of Water Lane to the churchyard, and at the same time the maintenance of the churchyard was taken over by the local authority.

In the same year the children of Chapel Street Infants' School were transferred to the Victoria School.

At the Play

The Operatic and Dramatic Society, in 1952, staged "The Bartered Bride" in the Court Theatre with a chorus of 50 and a very large orchestra. What a contrast between this former cinema, with nearly 1,000 seats, and the tiny hall in the Civic Centre, which was less than half-filled when I attended a performance of "Epitaph for George Dillon" a few weeks ago. I wonder if the title was a little off-putting?

The cast was excellent—and what a superb set! I hope the Society will have capacity audiences for "No, No Nanette"—but what a shame that Berkhamsted cannot provide an auditorium at least as large as many a village hall I could name.

The Oaks

One of the last of the large houses built in Berkhamsted (The Oaks, in Cross Oak Road) is to be sold. It dates from the early years of this century, and anyone who ever saw the late Dr. Esme Wingfield-Stratford's library must have marvelled at the huge number of books this distinguished historian had collected. According to the *Gazette*, the figure was around the 10,000 mark.

Turning to a non-literary subject, I wonder if we can now look forward to the widening of a notoriously narrow part of Cross Oak Road?

Monk's House

A reader asks if part of Monk's House. (the shabby building near the Post Office) was once a shop? Yes. Throughout the 'nineties and until 1950 or thereabouts it was a fish shop owned by Griffin & Son. The business was then transferred to the opposite side of the High Street by Mr. W. J. Griffin, and a year or so later the shop was taken over by Mr. "Billy" Roberts who is remembered by many old residents for both his wit and the high quality of his fish.

At one time we had several fresh fish shops in the town: Roberts', on what is now the Outspan site, A. C. Neville's, which occupied half of the Civic Centre site, and "Dicky" Ward's in Castle Street, which was afterwards transferred to the Market House. Later on we had other fresh fish shops, but they had a relatively short life.

Child Labour

The other day I came across a note from an old friend who recalled the time when, as a small boy, he worked for Lane's Nurseries, receiving sixpence for a day's work which started at 6 a.m. and ended at 6 p.m. His tasks included groundsel pulling, rhododendron pod picking, "o-gee-ing" the horses at harvest-time, and "hog-poking"—in other words, escorting the pigs round the lanes in search of acorns.

For gathering acorns there was a fixed reward of one shilling a bushel.

Not a handsome reward for a growing lad, but sixpence was worth something in Victorian times!

Tailpiece

Back to 1952 for an extract from the *Berkhamsted Review* (April issue):

"Overheard when the new rate was announced: "I live within a stone's throw of two or three councillors, but so far I have resisted the temptation!"

BELFRY NEWS

On March 27th the St. Peter's ringers rang a quarter peal of Grandsire Triples before Evensong. This was Rosemary Deal's first quarter and the others taking part were Mrs. Sennitt, Mrs. Chamberlain, R. Turner, Sarah Hutchinson, R. Casserley, J. Chamberlain and D. Brush.

Our congratulations go to Malcolm Thurling who rang his first full peal at Hemel Hempstead on 26th March. This was three hours of ringing without a mistake.



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