



# BERKHAMSTED REVIEW

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## In and around Berkhamsted by 'BEORCHAM'

### Lower King's Road

A friend tells me that in Lower King's Road he was stopped by a man who wished to know whether a certain building was formerly a bank. He was referring to the old Post Office, which was closed 19 years and umpteen postal increases ago.

The enquirer said he was interested in early 20th century architecture and was surprised to see so many different styles in so short a road. This prompted me to take a closer look and certainly there is great variety.

If you look up you will see some very interesting windows and several sign brackets. One bracket (over Balfour's shop) features crossed swords and an axe, and I have a hunch that it dates from the 1914-18 War. Over Roberts' shop there is another sign bracket, a simple one featuring an arrow.

Although Lower King's Road was made in 1885 and immediately became a busy way to the railway station, it did not attract builders for many years. First came some stables for Mr. A. C. Meek and barracks for the Salvation Army. Then, at the turn of the century, a house was built for Mr. J. F. King, the printer. The family link with this house ended only a few weeks ago; it is now to be used as offices. The first shops were built in Edwardian times, and with the opening of the Post Office, Lower King's Road became a busy secondary shopping centre.

Incidentally, two small shops were partially reconstructed a few weeks ago, temporarily exposing what to most of us was a new view of the Town Hall. I forget how many people called to say that it was worth a photograph!

### What's in a Nickname?

A reader asks if I know how, when and why Berkhamsted was given the nickname Berko. All I can say that it was quite common fifty years or so ago. Bus conductors called out "Berko!" and Euston porters were familiar with the unauthorised version. In everyday conversation, however, the nickname is seldom heard nowadays. I should add that the posh form was "Berk-ho"!

Berko may be all right for Berkovitz, a town in Bulgaria, but it lacks the charm of Ricky for Rickmansworth, Hemel for you-know-where, and Little Berks for Little Berkhamsted, near Hatfield.

### One Side or Another

I have been asked if there is a reason for the towpath changing from one side of the canal to the other. Yes! Right from the start it was realised that a continuous path on one side only would be bad for the horses, which would over-exercise one set of muscles. A switch-from one side of the canal to the other would balance the exertion.

As readers of the *Review* are sure to know, we have a very interesting relic of the days when all canal boats were horse-drawn. I refer to the horse-bridge in Castle Street. The horses plodded up the cobbled slope, over the bridge and down the other side to resume their work without the ropes being detached.

More and more towpath walkers, I note, are now using this horse-bridge instead of leaving the canal by the Crystal Palace and rejoining the towpath near the Moor. This takes extra time, but is preferable to crossing the road bridge where one has a very limited view of oncoming traffic.

The thought occurred to me that the horse-bridge should be scheduled as an ancient monument. It is a very rare relic of the past.

### American Visitors

Every summer I have the pleasure of meeting American tourists who have family links with our town. A recent caller was Mrs. E. Pruess, of Forsyth, Missouri, who told me that she was related to the late Mr. R. A. Norris, who lived in Boxwell Road and was one of the last members of a well known local family. In 1923 he wrote a history of St. Peter's Church, and I was pleased to find a copy of this book (now very rare) for Mrs. Pruess to take home.

As usual, some American members of the Axtell family (descended from William Axtell, town clerk of Berkhamsted in 1639) have been looking round the town. Over the years I must have met dozens of American Axtells.

By the way, some time ago a Berkhamsted resident was flying from Bangkok to Kathmandu, and in conversation with some American passengers he learnt that they had been to Berkhamsted and taken brass-rubbings in St. Peter's Church

### The Shepherd Boy

I have spent some very pleasant hours reading a book of outstanding local and general interest. The author, David A. Nixon, started work as a shepherd boy in the second World War. That was in the last years before farming became highly mechanised, and an account of those hard but often exhilarating times at Northchurch Farm and Coldharbour Farm occupies half of a beautifully written book, entitled "Walk Soft in the Fold."

David recalls the old farm hands from whom

he learnt so much, and every page reveals his love of the countryside and alert interest in wildlife. He takes us from Tunnel Field to Coldharbour, from Stony Bottom to the Common, and passing by Dan East's Wood he recalls a sad, sad story of poverty and crime long, long ago.

Now a Methodist minister in the North of England, the Rev. David A. Nixon has written three booklets of poetry and is now working on a sequel to his autobiography. He is married to Anna Williams, of Berkhamsted. His sister-in-law, Mary Williams, who lives at Northchurch, contributed some excellent line drawings to "Walk Soft in the Fold." The book is published by Chatto and Windus at £3.95.



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