

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By "Beorcham"

Visitors from Abroad

No doubt you have read that foreign tourists are by-passing Britain because they are not getting so many pounds and pence for their dollars, francs and yen. We have no means of checking numbers, but it seems that fewer visitors from abroad have been looking round St. Peter's Church this year.

I was beginning to think that, for the first time for many years, no American member of the Axtell family would call to see the town of his ancestors. Then, on recent morning, a man from Seattle called for a chat. Gee, was he pleased to see the Court House where William Axtell, town clerk in 1639, attended manorial and other meetings.

On the very same day I had two more American callers: Mr. and Mrs. Carl A. Minor, of Mayville, Missouri. They have a family link with Tom Stevens, who was born in Castle Street in 1854, attended the Bourne Charity School, emigrated to the United States, and was the first man to ride round the world on a bicycle.

Carl and his wife enjoyed their short stay in Berkhamsted, especially a guided tour of St. Peter's Church. Their biggest surprise was the sight of a totem pole in the street where Stevens spent his early years.

This Month's Grumbles

If anything suggests neglect it is a stopped public clock. Whenever there is a power cut, the Town Hall clock is idle for several days. Recently, a whole week elapsed before the clock was restarted. Doesn't this deserve a ticking off?

At the crossroads there is a tall post topped by a traffic sign. For weeks and weeks it has been leaning like the tower of Pisa. Are we waiting for another clout from a lorry or car to restore the post to its upright position?

Beside the bus shelter outside the National Westminster Bank are two posts, about a foot high, painted white in the hope that no one will trip over them. Formerly these posts supported a large notice board which was taken down weeks and weeks ago. Perhaps it will be replaced by the time these words are printed. If not, those dangerous stumps should be removed.

Signs of the Times

No doubt you have seen the large signs at the entrance to the town with the words:

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Ja, ja. But Berkhamsted also has a special relationship with Beaune, the Burgundy wine town. In fact, we have a Beaune Society. As for Neu-Isenburg, Berkhamsted may learn more about this connection next summer, when the Dacorum District Council hopes to hold a German week.

Forgotten Street Names

A reader asks if it is true that Berkhamsted once had a Hampton Court Road. He had heard his grandfather speak of it and wondered whether he was joking. No! It was the name of a little turning off George Street, east of the recreation ground (formerly a sawmill). The name was dropped when this little road was linked with Londrina Terrace by the footbridge over the canal.

On the west side of the recreation ground was another little turning, called Smith Street. This name appeared on a map of 1866, when the land was offered for sale, and also in some later documents.

The rather sharp bend of George Street, 150 yards or so from Gravel Path, was called The Circus, and the footpath from George Street to New Street was called The Spinney, which consisted of two rows of fir trees. Children living thereabout were known as the "Spinney Spitefals" - but that was a long time ago.

End of an Era

The Clunbury Cottrell Press, due to close shortly, had a long if broken association with this magazine.

William Cooper, founder of the chemical works, decided to have his own printing department in the early 1860's. At first all the work was produced on a hand-press by one man (who wore a wig) and a boy. A few years later Mr. Cooper installed a printing machine, invented by a man named Conisbee, who was born at Potten End: this machine was driven by a steam engine. Then a lithographic department was opened, and Mr. Cooper was so proud of the first coloured poster that he straddled round the works with a copy pinned to his waistcoat.

The first number of the Berkhamsted Parish Magazine was printed at Cooper's in 1872, as were many subsequent issues. But at various times the printing contract was given to T.W. Bailey or A.E. Lookey, two rival local stationers and printers. Some 40 years ago, the magazine returned to Cooper's works in Manor Street. The title was changed to Berkhamsted Review, and under the late Mr. S.H. Smith's vigorous editorship it became a very popular magazine. Then, almost exactly 100 years after the first issue appeared, the contract was given to the present printers.

The familiar name, Clunbury Press, is so called because William Cooper's early years were spent at Clunbury, Shropshire.

By the way, the "Beorcham" articles have been appearing regularly for 38 years.

64 Years On

A recent visitor to Berkhamsted was a man who trained with the lions of Court Regiment in the first World War. He was among the communicants at St. Peter's Church on September 2nd, and remarked that the previous time he had worshipped at Berkhamsted was in 1915.

Clunbury Road Malthouse

Shortly after writing a brief note about the town's old malthouses, I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Fred Smith, whose father kept the Swan Hotel from 1900 to 1911. He pointed out that the purchase of the Swan Brewery by Clunbury Brewery in 1897 did not involve the immediate closure of the malthouse behind the one; it was used for several more years, and Mr. Smith showed me a photograph of the building.

Fair Warning

Translation of a German car-sticker seen in Berkhamsted: "Children have no brakes."

(FOOT NOTE: as "Beorcham" enters his thirty-sixth year, the new Editor wishes to thank him for his past labours and constancy and hopes that his ancient quill will continue to delight the Review's readers for many more years.)

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