

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham'

A LOCAL MUSEUM

In recent months a Berkhamsted museum has been in the minds of many townspeople. The Town Hall Trust favours a museum in the former reading room above the Market House, and there could be no more central place than that. At the same time a number of people take the view that Dean Incent's House would be an admirable home for a Berkhamsted museum.

Certainly there would be no shortage of objects of local interest. Seven years ago St Peter's Hall was scarcely large enough for an exhibition of local bygones. In many respects it was as good as a museum, and attracted many hundreds of townspeople. Since that time the Local History Society has accumulated many more museum pieces, while the Local Archaeological Society's finds from the very distant past are of outstanding interest.

THE FIVE BELLS

At the time of writing there are empty buildings on both sides of the Civic Centre. On our left, a former post office (1891-1909) which later was used as a shop and office and then abandoned to become the town's major eyesore. On our right, a large shop which was vacated in November and may be reoccupied by the time these words are printed.

This ancient building has features which still suggest that once upon a time it was a

picturesque inn. In fact, it was the Five Bells Inn until the 1860s. Thereafter the building and an adjoining cottage were used for a variety of purposes.

First, a word about the inn. In early Victorian times it was the headquarters of the town band. According to Henry Nash, 'all the most respectable portion of society made a point of attending the weekly practices, which formed the basis of a social club.' Nash goes on to say that each public house had one night in the week for these social meetings, where most of the parish business was discussed and matured ready for approval at Vestry.

A LOST LICENCE

Alas, the Five Bells was in disgrace when the innkeeper 'did not know how to do his duty and assist the police on the occasion of a lot of navvies making a disturbance'. The licence was withdrawn, and some ten years later John Loader unsuccessfully applied for a new licence. The *Berkhamsted Times* reported that 'the rector, headmaster and other leading residents expressed their decided conviction that a diminution rather than an extension of public houses is most desirable'.

Eventually the Five Bells and an adjoining cottage were used for various purposes. Knowles & Son, corn merchants, were there for a time, and so were J. Stupples, dairyman, and

W. Lockhart, coal merchant. During and for some time after the first World War, Miss Stephenson and later Miss Miles ran a popular restaurant called The Old Tea House. In 1923 the main part of the shop was used by H. Truman, electrician, and the western end by J. P. Taylor, the aptly named Watford tailors. Norman Clarke succeeded Truman in 1935, to be followed many years later by Weatherheads, who recently moved to a shop opposite the Co-operative Stores.

ON THE TRAIL

Following a reference in the *Review* to the cathedral of Suva, capital of the Fiji Islands, which contains a plaque inscribed 'Berkhamsted Parish Church', a reader suggests that it may have been provided by the Ross family. He recalls seeing many articles from Fiji in the home of the late Mr John Stenhouse Ross, a chairman of the Urban District Council who, in 1887, was born at Suva, where his father was Collector of Customs.

A very promising clue, but not an easy one to follow up at a distance of 12,000 miles.

Talking of faraway places, my recent interview with Mr George Lyth, Berkhamsted's 92-years-old hairdresser, has been followed by a special article in the *Sunday Times of Ceylon*, with emphasis on the famous men whose locks were shorn by Mr Lyth.

A BEAUTIFUL BOOK

I imagine that at Christmas many Berkhamsted people gave or received a very handsome new book by a local author. I refer to 'The Flowering of Britain', by Richard Mabey. It is beautifully written and splendidly illustrated by Tony Evans.

Wild plants, Richard says, have been our partners in the shaping of the countryside, and

it is pleasant to think that his interest was first aroused in and around Berkhamsted. Last Spring he gave a series of four talks in the Civic Centre - the hall was crowded every night - and a couple of years back he told the Local History Society of his discoveries in the hedges of ancient Shootersway and its continuation, Sugar Lane. But much more frequently he has a truly huge audience - on Television!

ASHLYNS HALL

Thanks to Miss Sybil Delderfield, of Victoria Road, the Local History Society has acquired a photograph of the staff at Ashlyns Hall in 1887 or thereabouts. Demurely seated on the front door steps are the cook and eight housemaids. Standing behind the women and girls are the butler and three other menservants. On both sides of the group are seven men and boys of the outdoor staff, including Mr Higgins, the head gardener.

Thus one well-to-do family had an indoor and outdoor staff of twenty. The weekly wages probably totalled less than £20 a week.

The group includes Miss Delderfield's father, James, who was born in 1869, left school at the age of 13, and was a gardener at Pendley before going to Ashlyns, where he stayed for some years. Then, after eight years in London, he returned to Berkhamsted and was head gardener at local schools.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A reference in last month's *Review* to a war-time order to obliterate all place-names reminded a reader of a very long wait at Berkhamsted railway station in 1943. When the train arrived, a Canadian soldier called out: 'Say! What's the name of this dump?'

Another war-time story concerns a young evacuee who concluded a letter to his parents with the words, 'Hope you are well except

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Grandma'. 'That's not a nice thing to say,' said the lady of the house. 'But Granny is *always* ill,' the boy replied.

GREEN LANE

I am sometimes asked if there is a right of way for pedestrians from Chesham Road to the top of Rectory Lane and the cemetery. For generations this has been known as Green Lane, though in recent times there has been much housing development in the neighbourhood.

I understand that the owner of Red House also owned Green Lane, but, according to the deeds, was required to grant a right of way to the Rector of Berkhamsted.

Still in existence is an engraved stone with the words, 'The Rectory has ancient right of way through Green Lane to Grubbs Lane. J. H., Rector, 1861.'

The initials are those of James Hutchinson, and Grubbs Lane is one of two ancient names of Chesham Road, the other being Elvyne Lane.