

# IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham'

## KITSBURY AND SUNNYSIDE

A reader tells me that when she came to Berkhamsted several years ago, her children thought it rather strange that Kitsbury Church was not in Kitsbury Road. 'They should call it Cross Oak Church,' one of the young hopefuls remarked.

The children were not to know that in Victorian and later times the western end of the town was popularly known as Kitsbury. R. A. Norris, in his history of St Peter's Church, says that 'the growing population in the Kitsbury area led to the starting of mission services in a coach house in Kitsbury Road.' The next step was the erection of the temporary church of All Saints', known as the Iron Room after it was partnered by a new and very large brick church. The site in Cross Road did not warrant dropping the familiar name of Kitsbury Church.

At the opposite end of the town one hears more references to Sunnyside Church than to St Michael and All Angels'. No one knows when the name Sunnyside was first used; probably in mid-Victorian times, when the first houses in George Street and Ellesmere Road were built. It wasn't long before Sunnyside Football Club was the best for miles around; in fact, it was the

forerunner of Berkhamsted Town F.C. Of course, there are Sunnysides in many other towns; there is one at Chesham, for instance.

## LADY SPENCER'S HOUSE

*The forthcoming marriage of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer reminds me that Lady Sarah Spencer, aunt of a former Lord Spencer, resided for some years at Berkhamsted Place, the Elizabethan mansion at the top of Castle Hill, which was demolished in 1967. Lady Sarah's many distinguished guests at Berkhamsted included George V when Duke of York, and Rt. Hon. W. E. Gladstone, the famous Victorian Prime Minister.*

## MONK'S HOUSE

The owners of Flambards restaurant fully deserved the Citizen's Association's first Environment Award. The fact that the picturesque premises were formerly known as Monk's House and Monk's Cottage continues to arouse interest, and a reader wonders whether it was the home of monks who came to Berkhamsted when Ashridge Monastery was closed.

At least we know that the Post Office next door occupies the site of a leper hospital dedicated to St John the Evangelist. The name

survives in St John's Well Lane, and I am often asked when the well ceased to send a stream of water down a narrow ditch on the east side of the lane. To the best of my knowledge it was during the second World War.

The water was believed to cure sore eyes, and until Victorian times many people regularly bathed their eyes at the well, sometimes filling bottles for home treatment. My grandmother often spoke of an occasion when a lady from a neighbouring town proudly sat in her carriage at the top of the lane while her coachman walked to the well, bottle in hand, to bring back a supply of the magic water. Berkhamsted almost became a spa!

## A VERY GOOD SHOW

Congratulations to the Berkhamsted Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society on a splendid 'Mikado'. It was one of their very best productions and deserved a week of full houses. But how many people constituted a full house at the Civic Centre? At a rough estimate, 140 after room was found for a seven-piece orchestra. With a cast of eleven and a chorus of 23 there wasn't much room on the stage, either, and I could not help wondering how long we have to wait for the suggested enlargement of the hall.

I am old enough to remember most of the Operatic Society's productions at the Court Theatre, on the Tesco site. There was a large stage, and after the enlargement of the theatre in the early 1930s the seating capacity was not far short of 1,000. Sometimes there wasn't an empty seat - but that was before television encouraged people to stay at home.

## WATFORD'S NEW MUSEUM

By the time these words are printed I hope to have been among the first to visit the new local museum at Watford. Already the Berkhamsted Local History Society has been given a very

good description of the museum by the archivist, Mrs Helen Poole, who lives in Berkhamsted. It could not have a more appropriate home than the 18th century mansion formerly owned by Benskins, the brewers, though I understand that there is a shortage of exhibits concerning the temperance movement in Watford.

Here, in Berkhamsted, we now hear very little about Watford, though in years gone by it was regarded as a sort of Mecca by many Berkhamstedians. Every Saturday the buses were full of people who were attracted by Watford's market, shops and stores, numerous cinemas and restaurants. A favourite treat was a bus ride to Watford via Chesham, Chorley Wood and Rickmansworth, and home by the direct route along the A41. The rapid growth of Hemel Hempstead reduced local interest in Watford, and as an infrequent visitor I find it bewildering after so many changes in or near the town centre.

## NOT ON THE LEVEL

'Our footpaths are worse than ever before' was the comment of a friend who had a nasty trip in the shopping centre.

It is no consolation to know that in 1756 the 'principal inhabitants' of Berkhamsted complained that the High Street was out of repair and so dirty that they could not walk along the road without great discomfort.

William Bates was appointed scavenger for the year, but he could not do his duty until the parish levied a special rate of sixpence in the £ to 'repair and cleanse the High Street from the parish of Northchurch eastward to the parish of Northchurch westward'.

Stonewards were appointed to maintain the footpaths, and in the words of a Victorian writer, 'totally neglected their duty. If attention

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*Consult a*

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was bestowed upon any favoured spot, such as the front of their own doorways, it was to pave them with small round pebbles. A more exquisite system of torture for people with tender feet to walk upon could scarcely be invented. The more neglected parts were in many respects preferable.'

## NEWS FROM FIJI

The following recently appeared in *The Fiji Times*: Does anyone know how a plaque inscribed 'Berkhamsted Parish Church' came to be placed on a wall of the Anglican Church in Suva?

Mrs Nancy Wright of Aldbury noticed the plaque when on a visit here and told the local historians of Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire about it.

She's back in Suva for a short while and says there is intense interest in the town about the plaque.

Inquiries with the cathedral and the archives have not revealed anything of the mysterious plaque, and she hopes that anyone reading this column might know how it got there.

She can be contacted by phone at (31) 3202 or through her son-in-law, Suva magistrate Gordon Ward.