

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham'

OUR GROWING TOWN

The recent census, it is thought, may show that the population of Berkhamsted is now around the 18,000 mark. This would be a fairly substantial increase on the 1974 estimate of 15,940 and the 1977 estimate of 16,750. These figures, of course, are for the area of the former urban district.

Few reliable statistics are available before the census of 1801, but Lionel Munby's booklet, 'Hertfordshire Population Statistics', provides some interesting if incomplete figures. For instance, in 1653 there were 135 families in the parish of Berkhamsted St Peter, and 48 in the parish of Northchurch. In 1676 there were 550 inhabitants over 16 years of age in Berkhamsted and 281 in Northchurch.

The 19th century figures for Berkhamsted are especially interesting. In 1801 the population was 1,690, rising to 5,600 in 1901. For Northchurch the increase was from 735 to 2,455.

Not that there was a steady increase. From 1821 to 1831 the increase was only 59 in Berkhamsted, but this was followed by an increase of 610 in the next ten years. No doubt the coming of the railway was responsible for part of this substantial spurt.

Taking the two parishes together, there was an increase from 2,523 to 8,055 from 1801 to 1901. In the present century the population increased slowly until after the first World War, and it is only in fairly recent times that we have had substantial increases.

THE ASHRIDGE ORGAN

Did you hear the broadcast from Ashridge Management College on April 1st? Radio 3 devoted half an hour to a recital by Richard Coulson on the Ashridge Chapel organ, and mention was made of its historic importance.

In his book, 'A Prospect of Ashridge', the late Col. Douglas Coult tells us that the organ was built and installed in 1818 by Thomas Elliott, of Tottenham Court, London. It is a rare example of the period but for many years was in a rather poor condition. Some eight years ago, however, the Bank of England, after sending a number of its staff to attend courses at Ashridge, contributed towards the cost of restoring the organ.

THE TOWN'S ARMS

I am pleased to know that once again we can look up to the town's coat of arms outside the Civic Centre. It was presented by the Citizens'

Association many years ago, and this information was inscribed on a brass plate which was wrenched off long ago, never to be replaced.

The coat of arms was granted to the short-lived Corporation of Berkhamsted in 1619, the castle design being chosen because 'the glory of that place hath proceeded from the ancient castle there'.

In years gone by the coat of arms was much more familiar to the townspeople than it is today; it often appeared in newspapers and programmes, and rightly or wrongly a few local societies thought that they were entitled to use the arms.

You have probably noticed that two flags are flying in opposite directions. Sometimes, however, there are variations on the old theme. The middle coat of arms on the old Bourne School (now the Britannia Building Society office) shows three flags, all flying in the same direction. The accompanying panels bear the arms of Thomas Bourne, founder of the charity school (left), and General Finch, who paid for the rebuilding in 1854 (right).

We must not forget the town's coat of arms on the Market House, now somewhat weatherworn; but then, so is the Castle!

A BOOK ABOUT TREES

This must be one of the most popular districts for writers and artists with great knowledge of the countryside. I have just seen a new book by two Berkhamsted writers, Esmond and Jeanette Harris, who live in Frithsden Copse. Their Guinness Book of Trees is full of interesting information, supplemented by excellent illustrations in colour. Mr Harris, by the way, is director of the Royal Forestry Society of England, Wales and Ireland, which has its headquarters in Tring.

GRAHAM GREENE

I have just learnt that the Paris Mint has struck a medal with a profile of Graham Greene, who was born in Berkhamsted. On the reverse side there is a quotation not from one of Greene's own best-sellers but, at his own request, from Robert Browning.

The medal is the first of a series of eminent contemporary Britons, and costs £8.35 in bronze and £164.40 in silver.

Mr Greene, by the way, has for many years lived at Antibes, and in 1967 he was made a Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur.

VEERING NORTH

A recent report from the National Trust caused a slight shiver. It is headed 'News from the Northern Home Counties', and I almost expected to see references to the Chiltern Hills, spelt that way. I am familiar with the old joke that the North starts at Watford, but never expected the Home Counties to have a compass point to the names.

I recall hearing a resident of North Road complain that it is a chilly name for a road on the town's southern slopes. The name, however, is not due to a faulty compass reading; it was chosen because Joseph North was largely responsible for the birth and development of the road.

Joseph was a remarkable man. After completing his apprenticeship to a wheelwright at Aylesbury in 1870 or thereabouts, he came to Berkhamsted with all his belongings in a large red handkerchief. For some time he worked for East & Son, the timber merchants, and as a sideline he had a market stall where he took orders for picture frames.

The turning point of his career came when a Nonconformist minister told Joseph that he was

(cont. p.7)

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cut out to be an auctioneer. He began dealing in furniture, opened a shop in two old cottages opposite the George public-house, and held furniture sales at the Market House which became famous locally. Later on he dealt in property, and much of the development of North Road and several other roads was due to his enterprise. He became a councillor, justice of the peace, school manager and governor, and was a very active worker for the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Cowper Road. An outstanding example of the self-made man,

Joseph North died in 1936, in his 85th year.

WHERE WAS IT?

A reader tells me that he was very interested to learn that the first mission services in the Kitsbury district were held in a coach house. But where? R. A. Norris, in his *History of St Peter's Church*, says that it was in Kitsbury Road, but I have not been able to identify the exact site. Please let me know if you have any information about the original missing room.