

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By "Beorcham"

SHOPS AND HOUSES

Like many other towns, Berhamsted has lost a number of small shops and public houses which were a feature of certain side streets in years gone by. I was reminded of this trend a short time ago when a shop at the corner of Gravel Path and Ellesmere Road was converted into a private house. The shop windows have gone, and newcomers would never guess that for generations it was a busy corner shop.

There was a similar conversion in Charles Street some time ago; the house facing Kitsbury Post Office was formerly a thriving shop. Then there has been a change in Victoria Road; no one can recollect when the house with a shop window really was a shop, and recently a smaller and more elegant window was installed.

Today there are no traces of former shops in George Street, Ellesmere Road and Chapel Street. As for Castle Street, once a very varied shopping centre, it now has only five shops. In late Victorian times there were two watchmakers, two grocers, two confectioners, a fishmonger, a corn chandler, a stationer, a baker, a picture frame maker, a pawnbroker, two dressmakers, a dairy, a coffee tavern, and four public houses.

Cowper Road was busy when the Co-operative Society had grocery, drapery and men's wear shops in the tall building which now has a very seedy look. At the top of this building was the Progress Hall, popular for meetings, dances and concerts. Cowper Road was sometimes as busy at night as it was during shopping hours, especially when the town's first cinema, the Gem, was on the opposite side of the road.

DOCTORS COMMON

Four local doctors are to have their surgery in Doctors Commons Road, an apt address if they do not mind the Common name. It is interesting to recall that Milton House, which is to be converted into a surgery, was a school sanatorium for many years. And the house next door was formerly the home of a surgeon who achieved world-wide fame.

Geoffrey M. Huggins, who lived here over 70 years ago, went to Rhodesia in 1911 and continued in practice long after he was elected an M.P. in 1923. For 25 years he was Prime Minister of Rhodesia, having been knighted in 1941 and created Viscount Malvern in 1956. He died ten years ago.

Doctors Commons was the name of a field on the south side of a track which was named Charles Street, part of which was to be called Doctors Commons Road. But the name was given to the road which connects Charles Street with Graemesdyke Road.

EDDY STREET

Talking of street names, a reader asks if I know how Eddy Street received its name. This short side street at Gossoms End takes the name of John Turpin Eddy, who lived at Gossoms Lodge. He was one of two partners in a small local banking firm, Eddy and Squire. The name of this firm appears for the first time in the Banking Almanac of 1852, and in the following year it was taken over by the London and County Bank, which in turn was absorbed by the Westminster Bank.

Little is known about Eddy beyond the fact that he gave an exhibition of 'dissolving views,' a sort of magic lantern show, to the Berkhamsted Mechanics' Institute in 1853. Originally there were ten houses in Eddy Street; today there are only two.

Thomas Squire, Eddy's partner, was a well known Quaker who experimented with seeds and cuttings and propagated the Berkhamsted-born apple which was afterwards marketed by Henry Lane, the local nurseryman, as 'Lane's Prince Edward.' The original tree was in Mr Squire's garden behind his house, The Homestead, which, with an adjoining house, was pulled down and replaced by shops opposite the Outspan building.

THE TOWN HALL

The Berkhamsted Music Society, which holds its recitals at Ashlyns School, is looking ahead to the time when we have a refurbished Town Hall. For the benefit of the Town Hall Trust the Society has invited the Tring

Orchestra to give an informal concert in the Civic Centre in January.

To quote the current programme, 'we feel that it is proper to join in the fund raising activities for the Town Hall both for the general good and, perhaps more selfishly, for the Society itself in that it would be of enormous value to have a second hall available for our recitals in the future.'

A POPULAR TRADESMAN

The closing of Leatherdale's shop at Gossoms End will remind many people of the founder of a business which for many years was in the town centre. Basil Leatherdale was totally blind, and like so many blind people he was usually cheerful and always alert. He had what seemed an uncanny knowledge of his varied stocks of books, stationery, pictures and artists' materials.

Basil's shop, a very old building, was between Barclays Bank and the Eastern Electric showroom. Impossible, you may say, there is nothing between the bank and the showroom. But before 1961 Barclays Bank had a narrow frontage, and it was extended by demolishing Leatherdale's shop. So successful was the extension that it is impossible to tell the new from the old brickwork facing the High Street.

ON THE LEVEL

At last we have lost that frightful gutter which caused many a tumble outside Sharland's store. Here, and elsewhere on the north side of the High Street, we have new pavements and a new system to deal with heavy rains, and by the time these words are printed we may no longer be deafened by drips and squirm our way past excavations and mounds.

I hope that you will second my vote of thanks to the hard-working gang who lent many

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a helping hand to pedestrians.

Incidentally, a visitor has just remarked that Berkhamsted is fortunate to have such wide pavements. Not everywhere, of course, and we may not count our blessings on market day!

THE BOXWELL ESTATE

I have had the good fortune to see a copy of the particulars and conditions of sale of 'a very valuable freehold residential or building estate . . . comprising Boxwell House . . . and two closes of very productive meadow land.'

The sale took place at the King's Arms Hotel on June 25th, 1879, and the large corner house, with entrance hall, library, dining room,

drawing room, five good bedrooms and attic was sold for £1,050.

Boxwell Road did not exist at that time, and 28 plots of building ground between the High Street and Charles Street were sold at prices varying from £80 to £130.

Even so, there was not a rush to build houses; a map of 1898 shows houses only in the upper half of Boxwell Road.

TAILPIECE

A local tradesman tells me that he recently received a parcel addressed to Berkenhead. He should thank his lucky stars that it wasn't sent to Birkenhead, at the top of the A41.