

# IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By "Beorcham"

## FORTY YEARS ON

I wonder how many of the hundreds of children who were evacuated to Berkhamsted in the 1939-45 War are still in touch with their hosts? A trio of middle-aged ladies from London recently paid a visit to the town they knew and loved forty years ago, and another war-time evacuee (horrid word!) called to give me a printed programme of the festivities for evacuated and local children from Christmas Day to January 6, 1940.

It was a truly remarkable programme, starting with Christmas Day and Boxing Day dinners in Deans' Hall, followed by variety entertainments. On other days there were free film shows at the Rex Cinema, free entertainments by the Berkhamsted Repertory Company at the Court Theatre, and lots of indoor games, dances and film shows in local schools. Evacuated scouts were entertained by local scouts, and sporting events ended with a Grand Football Match (Berkhamsted v. London) on the Town Ground.

The evacuated children came from several London schools (Willesden, Chiswick, Paddington, etc.), and 40 years later one hopes that they still have happy memories of their childhood in Berkhamsted.

## THE MILKY WAY

According to the *Berkhamsted Gazette*, the stopping of milk deliveries on Sunday has turned housewives sour. In some areas they have deliveries only three times a week.

How times have changed! Many readers will recall the time when roundsmen called three times daily - early in the morning, in the middle of the morning (this was known as the milk-pudding round), and in the afternoon. The roundsmen started work at 05.00 and worked seven days a week, with one week's holiday a year.

The floats, as the milkmen's carts were called, carried large brass-topped churns from which the roundsman's pail were filled. Housewives stood at the back door, arms akimbo, watching closely to ensure that full measures of milk were transferred from pail to jug.

If you were out when the milkman called, there were several shops (called dairies or creameries) where you could buy as little as a gill (a quarter of a pint). J. Stupples had a creamery in Castle Street and another in King's Road, and employed as many as ten roundsmen.

I recall Gibbs' dairy at Gossoms End. On the spotless marble-topped counter stood a large

china bowl of milk, covered with muslin and accompanied by pint, half pint and gill measures on hooked handles.

Many parents sent their children to farms as far away a Little Heath and Bottom farm to buy skim-milk at almost give-away prices. The rich, however, could order a daily supply of milk from one particular cow, and have it delivered by a particular milkman!

## A GLUM HUMORIST

The recent death of Alec Waugh, the novelist, recalls his marriage during the first World War to Barbara, daughter of W. W. Jacobs, the famous humorist who for many years lived at Beechcroft, Chesham Road.

Waugh first met Barbara when he was posted to Berkhamsted as a private in the Inns of Court Regiment, and was billeted with families in Cowper Road and the High Street. He went to parties at Jacobs' home, and in one of his books said that the humorist 'had wit but was disgruntled about the state of the world'. Nevertheless there was a jolly reception at Beechcroft after the marriage ceremony at St Peter's Church.

Nowadays few people have ever heard of W.W. Jacobs, though Sir Hugh Greene has done his best to rekindle interest by publishing a selection of the humorist's short stories.

I often saw the great man on his way to the Court Theatre every Monday and Thursday, and on his more frequent visits to W. H. Smith's bookshop. He always looked glum! As a boy I was proud to sit a few rows away from Jacobs when a film version of his story, 'A Will and a Way', was screened. But it was dreadfully dull!

## EARLY ALLOTMENTS

I have been asked if I know when allotment gardens were first provided in this district. Sorry, I cannot give a firm date. However, in my

Northchurch files I find that Sir John Hobart Culme-Seymour, rector of Northchurch from 1830 to 1880, provided a 'garden ground' for poor parishioners, and drew up the following rules:

The Land to be cultivated by the Spade.  
Not more than two-thirds of the Garden to be sown yearly with Potatoes.

No Tenant is to work on his land on Sundays, or at hours belonging to his Master without his leave.

Every Tenant is expected to attend Divine Service regularly.

The Land will be forfeited if any of these Rules be broken, if a Tenant be guilty of Drunkenness, Dishonesty or other misconduct, or if he offend against the Laws.

Accompanying these Rules is the following note: 'On 1st April, 1847, poor parishioners were given an opportunity of buying seed potatoes at the cut price of 2s 6d. a bushel. The rector paid £3 15s. for 15 bushels, which were all immediately sold at half price to the needy poor'.

## CARVING A NAME

Professor Sir Colin Buchanan, who was educated at Berkhamsted School (where he was thrashed by Charles Greene, the headmaster, for carving his name on a window-sill at the school), recently published a book on the Stanstead airport controversy, 'No Way to the Airport: The Stanstead Controversy'.

On revisiting the school, Sir Colin found that the carving had weathered away. Much more enduring is his love of the countryside he knew when he cycled to Ivinghoe, the Vale of Aylesbury, Aklbury and Ashridge Park. His successful defence of Cublington (Wing) in the airport commission inquiry from being turned into an airport saved much of the countryside he and we cherish.

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## A LOCAL MUSEUM

For the second year running the Dacorum Museum Advisory Committee has staged an exhibition in the Civic Centre following a preview at Hemel Hempstead's Old Town Hall. This time the accent was on the 19th century, and once again we had reminders of the need for museums for permanent displays of local bygones.

Now that the Town Hall Trust favours a museum in the former reading room over the market house, it is likely that Berkhamsted will be the first town in the Dacorum district to have a museum. In that case Hemel Hempstead will be an 'also-ran'!

Readers who recall the 'Bygone

Berkhamsted' exhibition which filled St Peter's Hall in 1972 will not need reminding that hundreds of interesting relics and documents are available for permanent display. And we can be sure that many additional items will be forthcoming as soon as we have a museum. This has happened at Watford, when the first museum in West Herts was opened a few months ago.

## SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Signposts at Newground within 300 yards of each other give the distance to Wigginton as 3 miles, 1 mile, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile. Needless to say, some misguided humorist with a screwdriver has switched the 3 for a 1.