

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham'

SERVANT PROBLEMS

Looking through a local directory published by Loosley & Sons in 1920, I was reminded of the time when scores of girls and women were employed as domestic servants, some in quite small houses. Locally there were at least two registry offices where, for a fee, one could interview and engage a housemaid, nanny or cook. For maids seeking employment there was no fee.

A speciality, according to an advertisement in the directory, was 'maids from country districts', who were often preferred to sophisticated town and city girls.

For many years - certainly in Victorian times - the gentry sought servants from distant parts. Having no relations or friends in the town, they were less likely to gossip about the goings-on at the big house.

A few nasty householders would leave coins in odd corners to see if the new servant would pocket the money, an unpleasant ruse which caused one young woman to tell her employer that there was no need to test her honesty by placing a ten shilling note under the carpet. She packed her belongings and walked out, leaving the householder to try again at the registry office.

ROYAL REQUESTS

The recent closing of the ladies' hat shop facing Cowper Road recalls an earlier use of Heath House, one of the High Street's most attractive buildings. For many years it was the home and shop of George Sills, a very competent photographer whose late Victorian and early 20th century prints of local scenes supplement the work of his more famous contemporary, J.T. Newman.

In my younger days I had an interesting chat with George Sills, who was especially proud to have supplied prints to Queen Victoria, Edward VII and George V.

During the Boer War, Queen Victoria sent boxes of chocolates to British soldiers serving in South Africa, and one of the boxes was so highly treasured by a Berkhamsted man that he sent it home to be kept as a souvenir. Wrapping paper was scarce, so he slit away the pocket of an old tunic, placed the box of chocolates inside, stitched up the pocket and posted it to Berkhamsted. The soldier's father asked George Sills to photograph the curious packet, and a print was sent to the Queen, who ordered extra prints and asked for the box of chocolates to be sent to her so that she could judge the condition of the contents after so many months' travelling. Eventually the box was returned with a letter of thanks from the Queen.

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Some years later, Edward VII ordered an enlargement of a photograph of the tree planted by Queen Victoria as a girl at Ashridge. The print caught the eyes of Earl and Lady Brownlow when they attended a royal reception.

Then, in 1913, George V requested George Sills to send a complete set of photographs of the Gamma airship which landed in the Castle grounds.

Yet another but very distant royal connection: Lady Sarah Spencer, a keen amateur photographer, regularly received tuition from George Sills at Berkhamsted Place.

THE CARRIAGE DAYS

Many older readers will remember E. King & Sons, the coachbuilders, whose business flourished for several generations until 1937. Since that time the High Street premises have been occupied by Donald Lockhart Ltd.

Thanks to Mr. Harold King, who lives at Boxmoor, a large number of the firm's account books have been passed on to the Local History Society. The books date from the middle of the 19th century and it will take a very long time to do justice to this windfall. The King family built and repaired a great variety of horse-drawn vehicles for the gentry and tradesmen, not only in Berkhamsted but over a very wide area.

The customers included the Rev. Dr. T.C. Fry, headmaster of Berkhamsted School, who afterwards became Dean of Lincoln. He often hired a coach and coachman, and here are some of the payments recorded in the account book for 1888-89:

Taking children to Haresfoot and back, 3s.
To Aston Clinton to Ball, 12s. (Pair horses; paid 1s. 6d. for putting up).
To Ashlyns and back, 1s.
Taking to Apsley End Mills to dinner, 7s. 6d.
To Ashridge at night, 1 o'clock, 7s. 6d.
To Town Hall and back, 1s.
Taking two young gents to Sunnyside, 2s.
Double Station job, 3s.
Taking to Mr. Halsey's to dine, and back, 7s. 6d.

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THE COUNTY BOUNDARY

In last month's *Review* I mentioned that little is heard about Ashley Green because it is in another county, another diocese and another news-gathering area. This comment prompted a reader to ask if it is true that some years ago there was much talk about transferring Berkhamsted and Tring to Buckinghamshire.

I recall a public meeting in St. Peter's Hall shortly after the last War at which this subject was hotly debated, a number of people, including some councillors, favouring the transfer because Aylesbury was much nearer than our county town, Hertford. To my relief no action was taken.

On another occasion (in 1947) the Urban District Council compiled a case to put before the Boundary Commission for the transfer of Hockeridge Wood from Buckinghamshire to Hertfordshire. The Commissioners' report was eventually pigeon-holed in Whitehall, so children still have only a short walk to stand with one foot in Hertfordshire and the other in Buckinghamshire. Unlike some other counties, we still have our ancient boundaries.

SIR HUGH GREENE

It is likely that Berkhamsted will figure as prominently in a forthcoming biography of Sir Hugh Greene, the former BBC Director-General, as in his brother's autobiography, Graham Greene's 'A Sort of Life'.

Sir Hugh, who lives near Bury St. Edmunds, is chairman of Greene, King & Sons, the family brewery firm founded by his great-grandfather in 1799. He is also chairman of the Bodley Head, which is publishing the biography written by Dr. Michael Tracey, who says that there will be much about Hugh's childhood at Berkhamsted. The book will be published in the near future.

We shall have to wait perhaps two years for the authorised biography of Graham Greene, now being written by Professor Norman Sherry, head of

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the English Department at Lancaster University. It will be published by Jonathan Cape, whose managing director and joint chairman is Sir Hugh's son, Graham C. Greene,

A CURE FOR CHILBLAINS!

My thanks to Mrs. T. Freeman, of Northchurch, for the following letter:

In your article in the December *Review* you asked for information regarding Seal Products of Berkhamsted. 'Dryfoot' was made by P.D. Millen at the shop with the grapevine next to what was Brandon's (now Neil's). My father, Mr. Puddephatt,

of Aldbury, worked there for over 50 years, first for Mr. Loader.

'Dryfoot' was made soon after the first World War in the back rooms facing Back Lane by a Mr. Kendal, of Tring, the main ingredient coming in very large wooden barrels, looking like a thick, dark vaseline. It was boiled up, but I don't know what was added. I was told it caught fire once, a bit dangerous in such an old building. As children our chilblains got a rubbing with 'Dryfoot'. I don't remember if it cured chilblains, but it did waterproof heavy, hard working boots. Mr. Millen sold it in America, going over to promote it himself.