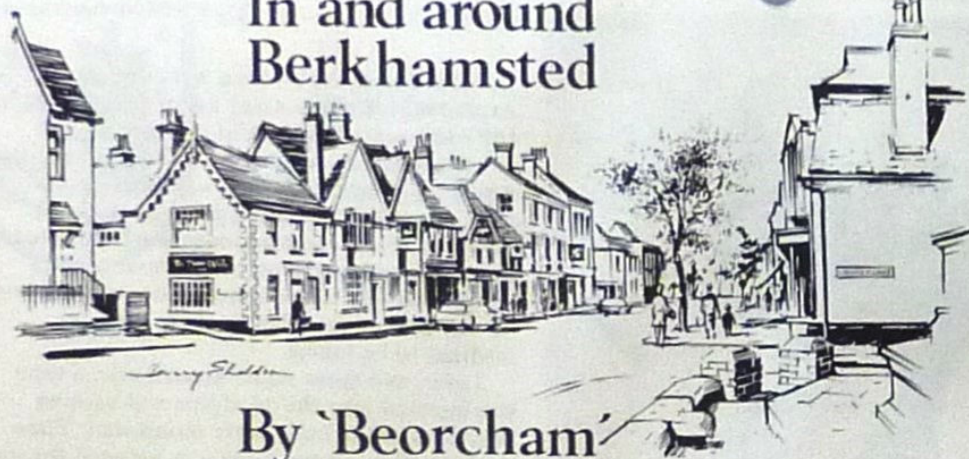


# In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

## SHOPPING LIST

'Which is the oldest shop in the town?' I was recently asked. If one is talking about the building, it must be Kennett & Fox's shop opposite St Peter's Church. Though much altered and modernised, it has features which pre-date Dean Incent's, which is popularly thought to be the town's oldest house.

One has only to look above the plate-glass windows to know that many shops occupy the ground floor of quite old houses. None so old, of course, as two shops in Le Shopperowe mentioned in the Black Prince's Register dated November 3, 1357; those shops almost certainly faced the market place before another row of shops was built in front of Church Lane, which I still call Back Lane.

Many shops are short-lived and new owners introduce an entirely different trade. However, there are still several shops which have remained faithful to the same trade since Victorian days. Bailey's shop near the top of Castle Street at once comes to mind. Freeman Hardy and Willis have had the same shop for nearly a century, and Foster's next door, has been a men's wear shop for the same period but with several changes of owner. The same story may be told of Godden's shop and the fruiterer's shop at the corner of Lower Kings Road, still called Pike's by the older generation.

Part of Sharlands' store is believed to have been a draper's shop as long ago as 1790 and

two doors away we have Dickman's shop, which has a long and continuing family ownership, though not on the same site; the business was transferred in the first World War from what is now Potter's Pride. Over the years a large number of tradesmen have moved from one shop to another, usually to a larger one.

Nowadays few shops stay in the same ownership for more than a generation, and it is now rare to see '& Son' on the fascia. And anyone who has a shop in or near the Town Centre is regularly bombarded with tempting offers to sell the building for conversion into what would probably be a building society's office.

## THE GENERAL'S HOUSE

A war-time secret is recalled by the news that Rodinghead, General de Gaulle's home in exile, is up for sale. The house, standing near the Berkhamsted Lodge at the entrance to Ashridge Park, has for some time been the home of Professor Gerald Manners, who holds the chair in Geography at University College, London.

French tourists occasionally ask to see and photograph the house, which figures on a medal in the Paris Mint's series showing de Gaulle's residences.

During the war few Berkhamstedians knew that the leader of the Free French was a near neighbour. Some members of the congregation at the Roman Catholic Church in Park

View Road did not know the identity of the tall soldier. However, he took the salute at a Home Guard parade at Potten End in November 1941, and was angry because no French flag could be provided. He was obliged to stand under the Union Jack. Surprisingly, the official history of the 7th Hertfordshire Battalion Home Guard does not mention the parade at Potten End.

It is nice to know that Mme Yvonne de Gaulle described Rodinghead as 'an attractive modern villa' and recalled 'marvellous memories of her year there' with her two daughters, one of whom was handicapped.

## ON THE WING

Occasionally a bird flies into St Peter's Church and is soon scared by its inability to find a way out. This happened at evensong a few Sundays ago; a blackbird flew high and low, but stayed obediently on the floor throughout the sermon. Eventually he (or she) escaped, but all too often birds fly into closed windows and stun themselves. Sometimes they die of thirst.

As long ago as 1639 the Berkhamsted church wardens spent fourpence on 'one nett to catch the bird in church'. And every parish was required by law to provide itself with a net for catching rooks, crows and choughs. Many were the Berkhamsted men, boys and girls who earned extra coppers by catching and producing the heads of certain creatures. For example, in 1735 several payments were made for sparrows (one farthing each) and fourpence for a 'whezell' (weasel) or polecat. The sexton must have caught 294 sparrows to receive 6s. 1½d. in 1767.

Here, as in other parishes, a minor functionary was the dog-whipper, employed to preserve order among the canine attendants at church. The dog-whipper's business was not to expel all dogs from the church, but to

remove those who did not behave well. In some parishes sheepdogs and turnspits accompanied their masters and mistresses to church. Wooden tongs for gripping offenders by the neck may still be seen in some churches.

The Berkhamsted churchwardens' accounts show that in 1601 Thomas Fletcher was paid four shillings for whipping the dogs out of church and sweeping the market house, where rabbits were a pest.

## SERIAL STORY

The district's longest serial story of the century again aroused much interest when we were invited to the Civic Centre to study proposals for the Berkhamsted by-pass. There were numerous fine maps and lots of officials to answer our queries, and one of these years words may be followed by action.

As long ago as 1927 a Hertfordshire Regional Planning Report envisaged a by-pass for Tring and an improved Shootersway as a supplementary road to the highway. I forget how many times the subject has been raised in the intervening 55 years, but it is interesting to recall that at one period the local Chamber of Trade was greatly concerned at the prospect of traffic being diverted from the town. 'By-passed towns are always passed by' was the comment of one of the town's leading tradesmen.

Turning to present traffic problems, I am astonished by the great increase in heavy traffic using Kings Road. Some of the long, huge vehicles have only inches to spare when they turn into the High Street, but it is the ordinary motorist who sometimes receives shouts of 'Go on!' when, on entering the High Street, he sees red and stops.

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## IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham' *(continued)*

### LIFELONG CHORISTERS

Many townspeople will wish to join me in sending best wishes to Sidney Chappell, who will shortly celebrate his 90th birthday. As a schoolboy he participated in Berkhamsted's last beating of the bounds ceremony. He was a choirboy at the original Kitsbury Church in Cross Oak Road and helped to dig the foundations for All Saints' Church, where he was a member of the choir for many years. He was also a bellringer and chorister at St Peter's, where his father, Frederick

William Chappell, was in the choir for over 70 years. Sidney's grandfather, a gardener at Berkhamsted Place, brought up a family on 16s. (80p) a week.

Many readers will remember meeting Sidney at Saltmarsh's shop in Prince Edward Street, later transferred to Lower Kings Road. He married Mr Saltmarsh's daughter, who died last year. The couple left their home in Greenway a few years ago, and the latest news is that Sidney is fit and very active in his garden at Merryn, Padstow, Cornwall.