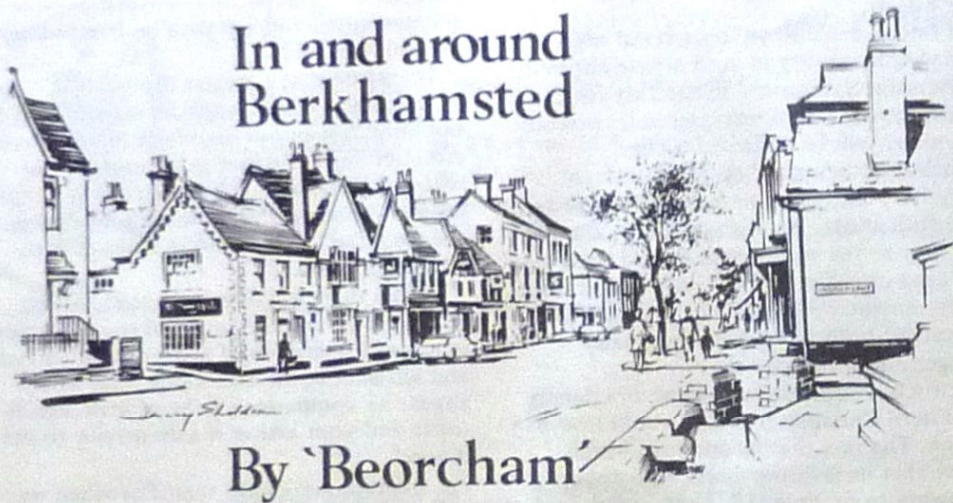


In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

ON THE WARPATH

An old friend has been bewailing what he describes as a great slump in the townspeople's interest in local affairs. When we had an Urban District Council, he said, we knew what was happening or was likely to happen. The councillors were known to everybody, and the monthly meetings of the Council were fully reported, creating a sort of serial story which maintained constant interest in the town's affairs. The only thing people get heated about nowadays is the swimming pool.

My friend went on to say that in years gone by, if anything went wrong, remedies were quickly forthcoming. Now we have street drains which are silted up for months on end, and instead of having workmen on the spot to repair potholes, someone is sent to squirt white paint to mark the spot for future action, if any. To quote just one example, on the footpath opposite the County Library there is a crater which gets worse month after month. Talk about a deep depression . . .

THE RED HOUSE

'The Red House in the High Street has always attracted me, and I wonder if you can tell me something about its history,' writes a correspondent. Of course! Pevsner's Hertfordshire volume in the 'Buildings of England'

series describes it as the most ambitious 18th century house in the town, but some ancient beams suggest a much earlier origin.

It seems that the first occupant was the Rev. George Nugent, who was rector of Bygrave, a tiny parish near Baldock, from 1791 to 1830. He never resided at Bygrave and made Berkhamsted his home town. Here he was parish clerk, presided at the select vestry, and was one of the first supporters of the infirmary at Hemel Hempstead. A rich man, he contributed £1,000 to the cost of building a workhouse which formerly stood at Kitsbury Road corner.

RED AND WHITE

The tithe map of 1841 tells us that the Red House was owned by James Field, a Quaker. It was occupied by Sarah Cutforth, a widow, who kept an academy for girls and had the misfortune to marry John Tawell, who murdered a former lover and was hanged at Aylesbury in 1845. But I have written enough about that bad lad!

The next owner of the Red House was another Quaker, Joseph Robinson, a wealthy ironfounder from the Midlands. He married Hannah Graham in 1843 and in 17 years they had 13 children. Joseph pulled down an

adjoining baker's shop and built the White House at the corner of Rectory Lane. The girls lived in the Red House and the boys in the White House.

Joseph Robinson eventually moved to London and the two houses were separated. The Red House was then owned or tenanted by William Paxton, Lord Brownlow's land agent at the time of the Common enclosure in 1866; he was a brother of Sir Joseph Paxton, who designed the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park for the Great Exhibition of 1851. Paxton Road, the little road between George Street and Ellesmere Road, is named after William.

In the late 1880's the Red House was bought by Mrs Elizabeth Proctor, and in 1897-8 it passed to Canon Norman, of Durham Cathedral, a noted marine biologist. Then came Lieut.-Col. F.H.L. Errington, followed by his son, Mr Ralph E. Errington.

In 1946 the Red House was converted into a private hotel; then, a few years later, it was converted into flats and offices.

HUBERT FIGG

Hubert B. Figg is still a familiar name in Berkhamsted, for it appears on the chemist's shop which he started shortly after the first World War and owned until about 20 years ago.

The son of Mr and Mrs George Figg, who kept a toy shop near Monk's House (now Flambards Restaurant), Hubert recently died at the age of 92. At one period he had four chemists' shops, and for some years he was a very active member of the Urban District Council.

At the age of 55 he qualified as a barrister, retiring from the Bar when he was 72. He

continued to take a keen interest in local affairs, and woe betide anyone who disagreed with him!

'Birdie' Figg, as he was sometimes called - his middle name was Burdett - was a man who, in old age, continued an interest in philately which relieved many lonely hours after his wife's death and he was no longer able to leave his home in North Road.

Truly, a remarkable Berkhamstedian.

FOUR RIVERS?

The Boundary Commissioners' proposal to transfer Berkhamsted from the Dacorum constituency to Three Rivers, which comprises Rickmansworth and neighbouring communities, is being strongly criticised and derided. The only light-hearted comment I have heard is that the Bulbourne would change the name to Four Rivers.

The last major change affecting our district were made under the Redistribution Act of 1918. Up to that time there were four constituencies in Hertfordshire, ours being known as the West Herts Division. Then a new division was formed comprising Berkhamsted, Kings Langley, Tring, Redbourn and a number of villages formerly included in the West Herts or Mid Herts divisions.

In 1917 our Urban District Council hoped that it would be called the Berkhamsted constituency, but the title was given to Hemel Hempstead. It was then the smallest of the five Hertfordshire divisions, with 25,732 electors. At the 1918 General Election G. A. Talbot (Coalition candidate in support of the Government) received 10,070 votes; the only other candidate, Jesse Hawkes (Labour), received 2,913 votes.

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IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham' *(continued)*

WHERE CAN YOU GO?

At a very late hour I received a telephone call from a resident who sought suggestions for visits to places of interest. 'We have some guests who have never been here before,' she said, 'and we have already been to Aldbury and the Gaddesdens. Now we would like to go to interesting places rather farther away.'

On the spur of the moment I suggested Tring Museum, Waddesden Manor, the Chiltern Open Air Museum near Chalfont St. Giles, and, of course, St. Albans for the Abbey and the Verulamium. We all have our preferences and yours are probably more interesting than mine, but people who wish to go farther afield may like to know that at Olney the Cowper and Newton Museum has been beautifully rearranged. I was there with several members of our Local History Society a few weeks ago, and we noted the prominence given to a picture of William Cowper's birthplace at Berkhamsted.

LITTLE BERKHAMSTED

I doubt whether one Berkhamstedian in

a hundred has ever been to our namesake in East Hertfordshire, Little Berkhamsted. A member of the Local History Group, Gerald Millington, has just written a history of the parish. 'Gentry and big houses' is the title of one of his chapters, and he recalls such famous people as Bishop Ken, who was born in the parish, and Izaak Walton, the son of Ken's step-sister. Like many other churches, including our own St. Peter's, Little Berkhamsted's parish church, St. Andrew's, housed captives in the Civil War.

Armed with Mr Millington's book, I must pay another visit (my fifth) to Little Berkhamsted.

NORTH BRIDGE ROAD

So many drivers of heavy vehicles ask the way to our industrial zone that I think it is time we had a signpost at the entrance to Billet Lane boldly indicating the way to North Bridge Road.

What do you think?