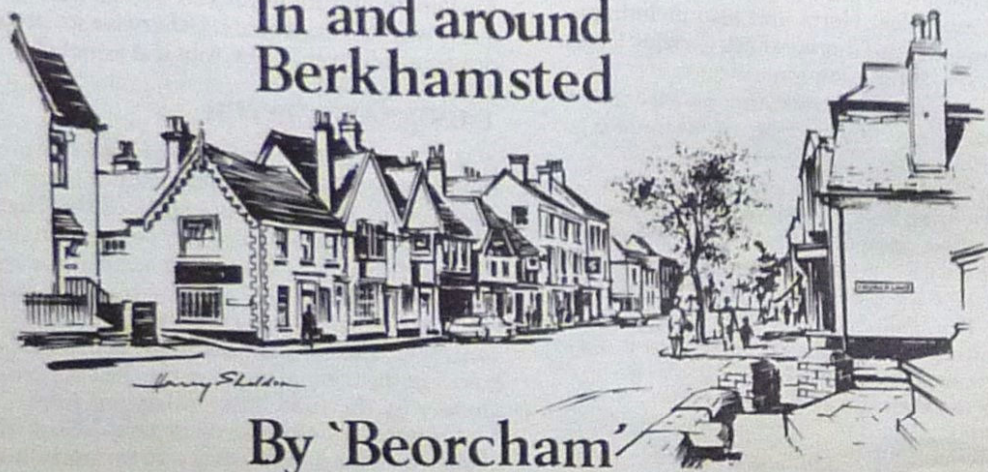


In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

A SPOILT WALK?

"What a shame the hedges and trees have been cut down beside the canal towpath west of Lower Kings Road," a keen naturalist remarked the other day. "Previously we were screened off from the town and felt that we were already in the country. Now we see a swamp at the start of the walk, and very soon there's a ghastly view of the town's rubbish dump and a car park. A nice walk has been spoilt."

There are towpath puddles, too, but at least we have good views of the accompanying Bulbourne, now in full spate. And beyond the St. John's Well Lane footbridge the former watercress bed is now a lake which will be all the more pleasing when the newly-planted trees are in leaf. As for the swamp on the west side of Lower King's Road, I find it rather interesting. I wish it could be converted into a small public garden.

Anyway, after a very rainy season we may understand why an 18th century writer described Berkhamsted as a town which stretched along the south side of a swamp. There was then no canal, and meadows adjoining the Bulbourne were often under water.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Hats off to the Post Office for delivering a letter, postmarked Kendal, to a house in Boxwell Road, Bokhuched, Herts. This must be the 101st spelling of our town's name.

ON THE WALL

Hertfordshire Countryside recently published a letter seeking information about a large plaque on No. 152 George Street. It commemorates Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and I can only conclude that the builder or owner of the house was a great patriot.

The inscription is headed by the date 1897, and a portrait of the Queen is encircled by the words "Victoria 60 years Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Burmah, W. Indies, Africa, Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, Egypt".

It is known that in Victorian times commemorative plaques of this type were mass produced. In our own county an artificial stone and terracotta factory flourished at Broxbourne. I have been told that a house in Chesham has a similar plaque to the one in Berkhamsted, but have so far failed to locate it.

A bust high up in the east wall of the shop which faces Swing Gate Lane is another

curiosity which arouses much interest. A friend thinks it is a bust of Julius Caesar. If this is so, Julius must wonder what has happened to the Roman highway which is now the A41.

THE 'GAMMA' AIRSHIP

A reader recently brought along a photograph of the "Gamma" airship which landed in the Castle grounds in 1913 and is still remembered by scores of senior citizens, myself included.

It was not a surprise landing. Much publicity preceded a tour which started at Farnborough, and Berkhamsted was the last port of call on May 23, 1913.

Nearly everybody for miles around rose early to see the landing soon after 6 a.m. Over Northchurch the engines were shut off prior to a graceful glide over Berkhamsted Park. As the Castle grounds were surrounded by many more trees than there are today, it was a tricky descent; the "Gamma" passed closely to the caretaker's cottage, but the landing was perfect, and two officers and five mechanics stepped out of the car.

One of the officers was Lieutenant J. N. Fletcher, an old boy of Berkhamsted School, who had previously given a talk on airships and aeroplanes to the scholars. Many boys and girls were allowed into the car. Nearly 200 ft. long with a diameter of 30 ft., the orange coloured airship was driven by two 40 h.p. engines.

Twenty four hours after its arrival, the airship left at 6.15 a.m. Huge crowds witnessed the ascent and the "Gamma" passed over the High Street in the direction of Chesham.

J. T. Newman and G. Sills must have sold hundreds, if not thousands, of photographs of the "Gamma".

MUSEUM ENTHUSIASTS

A number of news items and readers' letters in local newspapers show that Hemel Hempstead is as keen to have a local museum as Berkhamsted. An old, disused school in a side street of the old town of Hemel Hempstead has been suggested for a museum, whereas we hope the Berkhamsted museum will be right in the town centre, occupying the large room above the market hall.

For several years the Dacorum Museum Advisory Committee has organised exhibitions in Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring, and in October it is hoped to have another exhibition on the theme of railways in Dacorum, with talks in the three towns. A walk along the "Nicky Line" (the former branch line from Hemel Hempstead to Harpenden) is also proposed.

"RURAL RIDES"

Have you ever read William Cobbett's "Rural Rides"? It was first published in 1830.

Dear Editor,

Yours sincerely

PLEASE RETURN YOUR LETTER BY FEB. 4th TO THE GARDENER'S ARMS

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham' *(continued)*

and the news that it has again been reprinted prompted me to re-read a much-thumbed edition which I acquired for two shillings many years ago.

Cobbett's rides on horseback took him to many counties, and twice he came very near Berkhamsted without actually entering the town. In June, 1822, he set out from St. Albans at 4 a.m. for Redbourn and through Hemel Hempstead ("a very pretty town, with beautiful environs") to Chesham. What, he asked, that man ever invented, under the name of pleasure grounds, could equal the fields in Hertfordshire? He never saw the country children better clad, or look cleaner and fatter. In all the houses he visited roasted rye was used instead of coffee or tea, and he met a gentleman who had sown a piece of rye for the express purpose. It cost about three farthings a pound, roasted and ground into powder.

The pay of the labourers varied from eight to twelve shillings a week. Grass mowers got two shillings a day, two quarts of what they called strong beer, and as much small beer as they could drink.

A FEAST AT TRING

In 1829 William Cobbett visited Tring, "a very pretty and respectable place". He was the guest of honour at a dinner at the Rose and Crown Inn. About 40 persons, agriculturists and tradesmen of Tring and neighbouring towns, sat down to a dinner which was "the best that I ever saw called a public dinner, and certainly unreasonably cheap. There were excellent joints of meat of the finest description, fowls and geese in abundance, and finally a very fine haunch of venison, with a bottle of wine for each person. Good waiting upon; civil landord and landlady, and in short every thing at this very pretty town pleased me exceedingly."

The party dined at 2 o'clock and separated at 9, "and, as I declared at parting, for many, many years, I had not spent a happier day".

A pity he did not come to Berkhamsted, but I fancy that some of our farmers were among the guests. I strongly recommend you to read (or re-read) a unique source of information on the country towns and countryside in the 1820s.