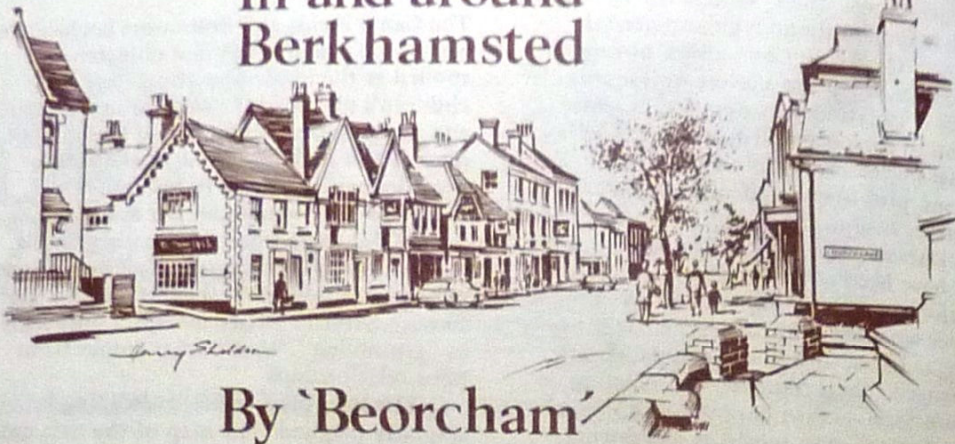


# In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

## OFF THE RAILS

So many changes are taking place along the Bulbourne valley that perhaps we should not be surprised that industrial buildings may soon occupy parts of the gasworks site between the railway and the canal.

Much of the site was cleared when Berkhamsted ceased to make its own gas, but sections of a narrow gauge railway are still visible, arousing much interest and curiosity.

When the gasworks moved from the Wilderness to Billet Lane in 1906, the London and North Western Railway provided an extra track, known as a shunting neck, for coal trains. It was impracticable for those trains to cross four main lines, so a new track was provided on the north side from the station to the more distant of the two tunnels through the embankment.

At the end of the new track the coal was transferred to the narrow gauge railway down below. Trains of steel tubs, each with a capacity of about 7 cwt., clattered through the subway and on to the gasworks. The trains were drawn by horses (a mare called Dolly had the job for many years), but later on a Lister diesel engine provided the horsepower.

The original rails of the 18-in. line came from Bochum, Germany, and were replaced in 1936 by British steel. The line ceased to be used in 1958. In the subways you can see obvious signs in the brickwork where an extra track was added.

## THE BROWNLOW ESTATES

The news that death duties and rising costs are causing Lord Brownlow to sell the ancestral home at Belton, near Grantham, Lincs., recalls the great shock to the whole district when a previous Lord Brownlow directed in his will that Ashridge was to be sold to pay off mortgages and expenses. That was in the early 1920s. Belton, however, was left to his lordship's successor.

Several years ago forty members of the Local History Society visited Belton House, and items of Berkhamsted and Ashridge interest were displayed for our party. Of special interest was the deed of release signed by 400 Berkhamsted men who were prepared to accept a central recreation ground in lieu of ancient rights on Berkhamsted Common.

But we all know what happened when a large part of the Common was enclosed in 1866. In a daring night raid the iron fences were destroyed, and no more was heard

about a recreation ground which would have stretched between the Bulbourne and the railway from Mill Street to Billet Lane.

Three years ago, when Douglas Coult's excellent book, "A Prospect of Ashridge", was launched, Lord Brownlow remarked that it was his first visit to Ashridge.

By the way, have you noticed how many Berkhamsted roads are named after Ashridge celebrities? Bridgewater, Brownlow, Belton, Egerton, Ellesmere — and of course, Ashridge Rise.

## IN GREENLAND

Recently I met a man who told me that in South America he and his wife had some pleasant reminders of Berkhamsted. In Venezuela they saw "The Human Factor", the film version of Graham Greene's book, parts of which were filmed in Berkhamsted a few years ago.

And now there are some recollections of Graham Greene's early years at Berkhamsted in "The Other Man", a newly published book based on conversations with the author by Marie-Francoise Allain.

At Berkhamsted, Graham recalls, the Greenes were very numerous. "We were self-sufficient — six brothers and sisters and six cousins who lived only a few hundred yards away; so there were twelve of us children of varying ages."

Graham's father, of course, was headmaster of Berkhamsted School, and his uncle, Edward Greene, lived at The Hall, a mansion at the east end of the High Street which was pulled down many years ago. "You had to allow not only for the dozen children and their four parents but also for several aunts. We didn't need anyone else."

## LOWER KINGS ROAD

Much interest was aroused by last month's cover picture, showing a very narrow entrance to Lower Kings Road from the High Street. The photograph was taken in the late 1890s, and for the story of a major change in the town centre we have to go back 100 years.

In 1883, at the Easter Vestry, a committee was formed to consider improvements to the Moor and the possibility of making a footpath to the railway station, with a footbridge over the canal. Ever since a new station was opened in 1875 there had been grumbles about the circuitous walk or ride to the station via Castle Street or the very narrow Water Lane.

But why not a new road instead of a footpath? This was suggested by the London and North Western Railway Company, with much support from the Smith-Dorrien family at Haresfoot.

The Vestry, which had wide powers before we had an Urban Council, sought financial support. Early in 1884 a public appeal stated that the road would be from 24-ft. to 36-ft. wide except at the entrance to the High Street, where only 20-ft. could be obtained.

The entrance would be made by the demolition of one house facing what was then a very narrow Kings Road. This was in the middle of a row of five tall houses, two of which survive with shops on the former front gardens.

The appeal for subscriptions stressed that the new road to the station would effect a saving of about one third of a mile to all living west of the proposed road, and a saving in gradient to the inhabitants of Chesham Road.

## COPY DATES FOR THE REVIEW

Your copy should reach the Gardener's Arms, Castle Street by the Friday night. Please TYPE or WRITE CLEARLY, preferably on large sheets of paper, leaving a wide margin round your copy.

FRIDAY, JUNE 3rd

## IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham' (continued)

### LOWERING THE NAME!

The cost of the work, exclusive of the earth which it was proposed to take from the widening of Kings Road, would be about £3,000. The committee had already received offers of subscriptions amounting to £2,120, including £500 from the Railway Company and £1,000 from the Smith-Dorrien family.

The house was demolished and work on the new road proceeded rapidly. But it wasn't long before there were complaints about the narrow entrance from the High

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Street. At the turn of the century another house was demolished.

The new road could have been straight, or almost straight, without the snaky course which raises the temperature of hurrying commuters. The acceptance of a very cheap contract resulted in very expensive repairs on several occasions. There was no rush to build shops until Edwardian times, when a new bridge was built over the canal.

Now it is the third busiest road in the town. But how I hate the name Lower Kings Road. Lower? It's downright lowering!

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