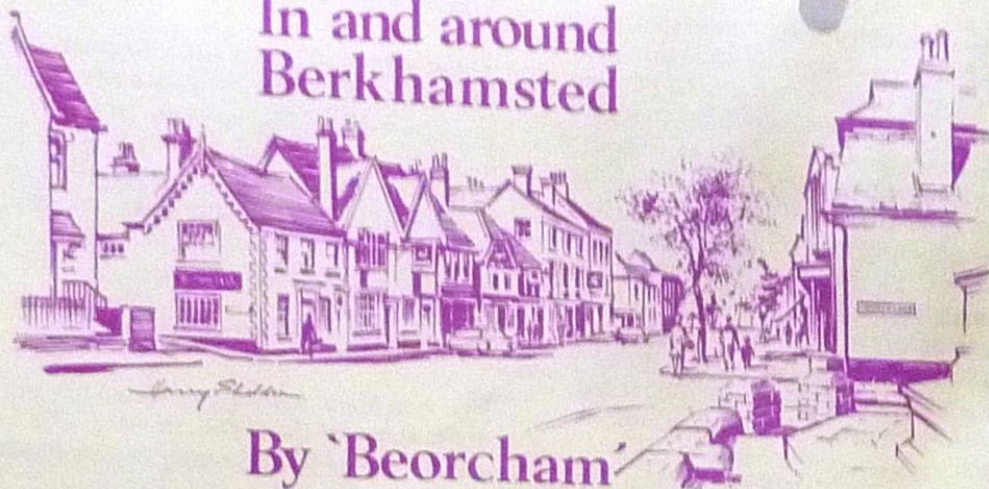


# In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

## THE SPORTS GROUND

I wonder how many readers know that the Sports Ground, a portion of which is being prepared for the building of flats, once had many soggy, boggy patches as well as osier beds near the canal? For the present fine, level grassland we have to thank the railway; soil and chalk excavated from Northchurch tunnel and the cutting beyond Billet Lane were transported to the meadow near the station.

The Town Ground or Sports Ground — call it what you will — first came into prominence when Berkhamsted Town Cricket Club played there in 1875. Berkhamsted School first XI also played there until the playing fields at the top of Chesham Road were available. With cricket, hockey, tennis and football the Sports Ground was aptly named, but there was nothing for swimmers until the early 1920s.

Older readers may remember the Y.M.C.A. huts which lined Lower Kings Road between the canal and the station-

master's house. These huts were very popular in the 1914-18 War and were re-opened as a social centre in 1920 by the Marchioness of Carisbrooke, wife of the Marquis, who was also Earl of Berkhamsted.

Incidentally, recent comments of mine on Lower King's Road prompted a reader, now living in Scotland, to say he was sorry I did not mention what he knew as Knowles' flour mill, which stands high beside the canal bridge. "I thought it was the last word in modern architecture and always admired it," he said. The building is certainly different from anything else in the town. It is now used as offices.

## ON THE LEVEL

Unlike some of our roads, the canal is receiving more care than I can recall for many a year. For several miles much attention has been given to the towpath, and if it is still a little gritty here and there we can at least enjoy the district's most level walks without being plastered with mud.

And how timely was the strengthening of the canal bank between Lower King's Road and the Park Street footbridge. Without this work, the children's playground and much of the meadow would have been a quagmire.

## ON THE RIGHT LINES

The Dacorum Museum Advisory Committee is preparing an autumn exhibition which is bound to attract very large audiences. The subject is the Railways of Dacorum, and after a few days at Hemel Hempstead the exhibition will come to Berkhamsted and then move on to Tring.

Among the original plans, numerous photographs, models, scrapbooks and early time tables will be reminders of an early scheme which would have by-passed Berkhamsted if the London and Birmingham Railway had followed the Gade instead of the Bulbourne valley. From Two Waters the line would have headed for the old town of Hemel Hempstead and on to Water End, Great Gaddesden and Dagnall, a fairly easy gradient for most of the way.

It was the opposition of the Brownlows and certain other rich landowners which forced the Stephensons to choose the Bulbourne valley route. I have often wondered how our town would have fared had it been by-passed; by the 1850s almost certainly there would have been a demand for a branch line from Two Waters to Boxmoor, Berkhamsted, Tring and Aylesbury.

However, the only branch line in Dacorum was the one from Hemel Hempstead to Harpenden, popularly known

as the Nicky Line. I doubt whether it was ever profitable. Certainly not one afternoon when I was the only passenger all the way from Heath Park Halt to Harpenden, with five stops on the way.

## IRON AGE FORT

Forty members of the Berkhamsted Local History Society recently spent an interesting evening at Hawridge and Cholesbury, two villages just over the Buckinghamshire border.

Of especial interest was a walk round the Iron Age fort behind Cholesbury church. In some respects it resembles the Berkhamsted Castle moats, with steep sides and many fine old trees. But the earthworks are much, much older than the Norman ones at Berkhamsted.

Well worth a visit. Try it!

## 1984 AND ALL THAT

Although I seldom read fiction, I thought it was high time I read George Orwell's novel, "Nineteen Eighty Four", now that we are now only a few months short of that ominous year.

To my surprise there is a reference to our district. I quote: "D'you know what that little girl of mine did last Saturday, when her troop was on a hike out Berkhamsted way? She got two other girls to go with her, slipped off from the hike, and spent the whole afternoon following a strange man. They kept on his tail for two hours, right through the woods, and then, when they got into Amersham, handed him over to the patrols."

## 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 AUG 5

## IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham' *(continued)*

Another book I saw recently was entitled "The World's Greatest Cranks and Crackpots." No personal comments, please! A couple of pages are devoted to Francis Henry Egerton, eighth Earl of Bridgewater, who wore a new pair of shoes or boots every day and had his favourite dogs dressed as human beings and waited upon by powdered flunkeys as they sat at table with him. What a blessing this happened in Paris and not at Ashridge!

Still talking of books, I recommend "The Autobiography of an English Gamekeeper," by John Wilkins. Following in the footsteps of his father, he had many encounters with poachers in and around Chesham and Amersham. For a period he came to Berkhamsted and worked at Key's (now Alsford's) timber yard and wharf in Castle Street. The book, published in 1892, was reprinted in 1976.

## LITTLE GADDESSEN

In next month's issue I hope to review a book of outstanding local interest and importance. "Little Gaddesden and Ashridge" is the title of Canon H. Senar's history of the village he knew so well prior to his move to Devon a year ago.

With many centuries of history and 78 plates, the book should be in great demand. It is published by Phillimore, of Chichester, specialists in local history books.

## HAPPY VALLEY

A reader asks if there was ever a place called Happy Valley in Berkhamsted.

Yes, but it was only a nickname for a little group of cottages off Castle Street.