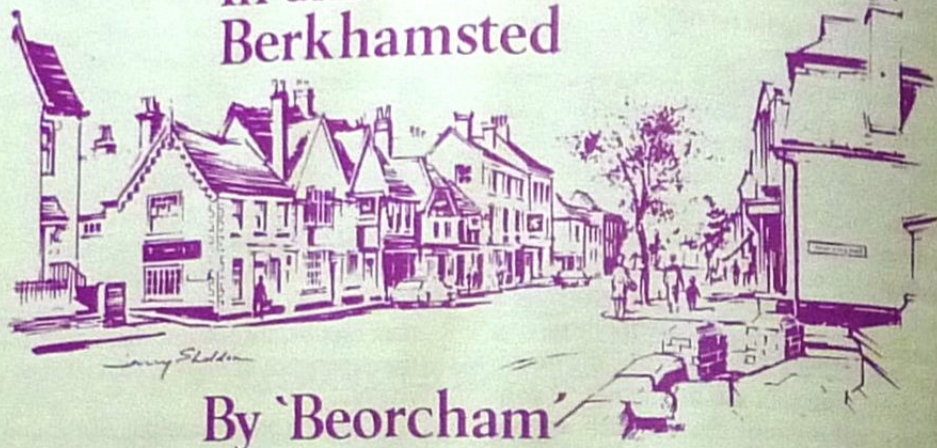


# In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

## TRAVELLING TALESMAN

In the streets of Berkhamsted we often see a writer whose books and talks are enjoyed all over the world. I refer, of course, to H. E. Todd, whose Bobby Brewster stories and other tales for children are not confined to the printed page; the author tells his stories in schools and libraries, on radio and television, and in our Court House at the Petertide Fair.

In recent times he had collaborated with a very fine artist, Val Biro, who lives in Amersham. Their latest book, "The Scruffy Scuffy Dog", is of great local interest. Aldbury is there in glorious colour with lots of dogs near the stocks; later on we go to Berkhamsted Castle, again in colour, with Scruffy getting up to mischief, always wagging his tail and not understanding a word.

Bertie Todd has told his stories in 5,000 schools at home and abroad, and the latest book is his 37th.

## MIDNIGHT MARCH

Christmas is coming, so I have been looking through some early parish magazines to see what festivities were enjoyed a century or so ago.

St. Peter's Drum and Fife Band saluted the happy morn by playing a selection of music as they marched through the town between midnight and 1 a.m., varying the programme from time to time by stopping to sing carols. The band visited most of the town's many mansions, and on at least one occasion the lads spent Boxing Day at Cheddington, playing at farmhouses and enjoying roast beef and plum pudding in the village schoolroom. They returned by train and then "enlivened the town for several hours."

Not that Christmas was a happy time in every home. In 1887 nearly 500 people were in receipt of out-relief, and there were 50 grown-ups and 21 children in the workhouse.

However, people with shillings to spare could afford luxuries which today cost many pounds. One could buy a quart bottle of champagne for 2s. 1d. (11p), and the two Berkhamsted breweries sold pale ale at 1s. 4d. (7p). David Pike sold 40 Lisbon oranges for a shilling (5p), and at the close of the street market 10 lb. of beef was reduced to 3s. (15p).

## BOURNE'S DAY

December 16th was a great day for children who were known as Bourne scholars, benefiting from an 18th century charity. In 1886 the parish magazine reported the annual service at St. Peter's Church, followed by a dinner at the King's Arms and a pilgrimage to the top of the church tower. Here is the report:

"From the church the managers of the Trust, the clergy and the children walked in procession to the King's Arms, where they were met by some of the ladies who take an interest in the charity, and all sat down to a good old-fashioned Christmas dinner.

"Whilst the managers were transacting their business, the children went up the church tower, and derived great amusement from watching the Christmas market, especially the wilfulness of some of the sheep and pigs, which seemed to have a kind of presentiment of their purchasers' intention of turning them into Christmas dinners for the people."

## A CHRISTMAS TALE

And now for a sad but true story told by one of my numerous aunts many years ago.

In the 'nineties a neighbour at Gossoms End expected a second child, and on Christmas Eve the husband called a doctor just in time for the birth. The doctor was appalled to find that there was no food in the house, the father having been out of work in a very hard winter.

The doctor gave him half a crown (12½p) which he immediately spent at the grocer's and butcher's. At night he and his wife prayed for more snow, and there was another heavy fall.

The prayer was not for a white Christmas but for the opportunity of earning a penny or two by sweeping snow from the doorways of better-off people.

## ON THE RIGHT LINES

As was expected, the recent Railways of Dacorum exhibition at the Civic Centre attracted more men and boys than women and girls. At an evening lecture 95 per cent of the audience was male! Anyway, it was a popular exhibition despite the off-putting approach to the large hall above the one now being extended. There is not a direct staircase, and you have to go this way and that in what, for most people, is unknown territory.

Several visitors were surprised that certain relics of the early days of the railway still survive in the district. Thousands of expensive stone blocks had to be replaced by timber sleepers, and the blocks were used to repair roads and other purposes. Two fine specimens stand in front of a flint wall near the top of Whitehill.

A recent newsletter of the Grand Union Canal Society states that the stone blocks, 2-ft. square and 1-ft. thick, had to be dressed by hand. Each block was then drilled with

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FRIDAY DEC 2

## IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham' *(continued)*

two holes and plugged with timber, into which the securing spikes for rail chairs could be hammered.

A ride on the railway was terrible until Robert Stephenson discovered that the best way to run a railway was on a resilient track. The familiar pattern of cross timbers on a gravel base soon emerged.

### A NORTHCHURCH WEDDING

The Berkhamsted Times must have had a bright reporter in 1887. Under a very ordinary heading, "Interesting Wedding", one can almost picture a village scene 96 years ago:

"The quiet village of Northchurch was astir early on Monday morning, and almost as soon as it was light the Rev. H. Mansell (curate) was in request to marry an aged and well-known couple. The bridegroom was some six dozen years of age, and the bride somewhere about five dozen, making 130 years or so between them, and both had had previous experience in married life.

"The inhabitants had got wind of the event, and from shortly after seven till half-past eight a.m., not only young, but middle-aged and elderly people showed

their interest in the occasion by congregating in the street and around the church gates and porch. The children had time to participate in the proceedings before school time, and their elders found time also.

"Women were to be seen with shawls over their heads, standing in groups with others, all compelled to notice the joyous occasion. Some ventured to say that 'the old uns are wus nor the young uns'; and others cherished the idea of 'old Dan'el Winter, the roadman, getting spliced to Sally Johnson.'

"The bridegroom is about as well known as anybody in the village, and as to the lady, we can say nothing against her. They got to the church some time before it was opened, and had to wait, but in due time proceedings were commenced and the knot was tied.

"The happy couple were saluted with the customary showers of rice and emerging from the church, and again at the gates, and they took in good part the general demonstration. Mr George Pocock was best man, and Mrs Daniel Brackley accompanied him. As the party traversed the street from the church to their residence, near the Post Office, they were the observed of all observers."

Oh, for a photograph and a recording of the old Northchurch dialect!