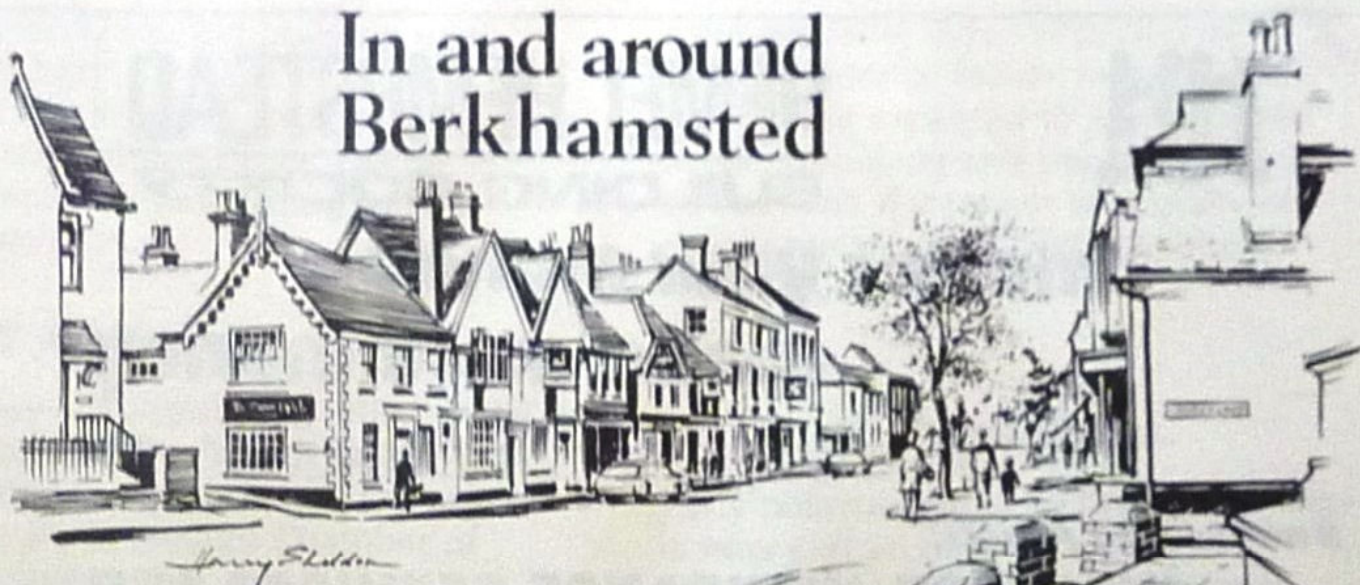


# In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

## OUR CHANGING TOWN

At the time of writing there is much activity at the bottom of Park View Road. Workmen are demolishing a corner shop which, in years gone by, was owned and used by a famous firm of nurserymen, H. Lane and Son. On a hot day their patent manure, called "Phedall", could be smelt fifty or more yards away!

The business, started in 1777, had several nurseries in Berkhamsted and Potten End, one of which was on the west side of Park View Road as far as Charles Street. All the houses on the west side of the road stand on the former nursery.

Periodically an old nursery would be abandoned and a new one started elsewhere, but for generations the family owned land on the opposite side of the High Street, with massive glass-houses lining St. John's Well Lane.

In the late 19th century the Lane family employed nearly 100 men, plus 100 fruit-pickers in summer. "One strong, straight Lane for 200 years and still going strong" was a once-familiar but exaggerated claim, for the firm barely outlived the second World War.

In Victorian and later times Lane's Prince Albert apples were famous, but it was another Berkhamstedian, Thomas Squire, whose experiments produced the new apple. He called it "Victoria and Albert" because the seedling was planted out on the day the Queen and Prince Consort called at the King's Arms for a change of horses in 1841. But it was a member of the Lane family who saw the commercial possibilities and called the new apple "Lane's Prince Albert".

## THE WOOLWORTH BUILDING

Now that Waitrose have taken over the Woolworth building next door, residents with long memories may recall the Urban District Council's dislike of the standard Woolworth fascia, which was considered too garish for Berkhamsted.

Our councillors had the last word. A modified design was adopted.

It was a long time before Woolworths started business in Berkhamsted the existing property (a ladies' wear shop owned by W.F. Matchett) was purchased shortly before the 1939-45 War, and almost



immediately the old building was demolished. Throughout the war the empty site was boarded up, and it was some time after the war before Woolworths were trading in Berkhamsted.

### WHAT A CARD!

Geoffrey Lancashire's gentle rebuke for a misprint in the *March Review* reminded me of a menu card printed for the Berkhamsted Chamber of Trade many years ago.

The first item was Tomato Soap!

The following morning the type-setters at the now defunct Clunbury Press were well and truly in the soup.

### DIG FOR VICTORY

My thanks to a reader for bringing along a leaflet issued by our Urban District Council in the 1939-45 War. The title? Berkhamsted's Push in the Grow More Food Campaign.

In Berkhamsted and Northchurch there were 850 occupied allotments, and the "Dig for Victory" committee hoped to see the number increased to over 1,000. In addition it was hoped that householders would grow vegetables on a good part of the land devoted to lawns and flower borders.

The Council promised to provide land for all applicants. War-time plots of five poles, at an annual rental of only 2s. 6d. (12½p) were available at Hall Park, Meadway, Greenway, and on the Castle Hill estate.

At the present time there are 532 allotments in Berkhamsted and Northchurch. Some of the plots have not been used for a long time, but sometimes there is a waiting list for the Butts Meadow and Dell Field allotments.

The oldest allotments in the district

were probably those provided by a former rector of Northchurch. Every tenant was expected to attend divine service regularly and the land was to be forfeited if a tenant was guilty of drunkenness, dishonesty or other misconduct.

### MAY DAYS OF LONG AGO

Party politics apart, the first day of May is now just an ordinary date in the calendar. In years gone by it almost rivalled Christmas as a day for merrymaking. In almost every town and village there was dancing around the maypole, and it is interesting to find in the Berkhamsted churchwardens' accounts that in 1617 eightpence was paid "for taking down of the pole by John Dunn, who sawed it into short lengths for mending the church rails and repairing the gutter of the market house." He was paid 2s. 6d. for this work.

In years gone by, I interviewed several people who recalled excursions into the woods and meadows to collect flowers and greenery. With elaborate garlands they paraded from door to door for the less romantic purpose of soliciting alms. The parades varied from the picturesque to the comical. Local children sang a May Day carol which included the verse:

We've been rambling all this night  
And some time of this day,  
And now, returning back again,  
We bring a garland gay.

Children were not alone in making May Day a pretext for collecting alms. Jacks-in-the-Green made annual appearances. Jack was usually a chimney-sweep; he donned an elaborate hooped framework decorated with evergreens and flowers, blackened his face, and danced in and out of the crowds, singing lustily and ringing



bells to supplement his vocal efforts.  
This was part of the song of the  
Berkhamsted Jacks:

The May, the May, the very first of May

The springtime of the year.

We come round to your door today

To taste of your strong beer,

And if you haven't got any strong beer

We'll be content with small,

So give us a sup, and we'll drink it all up,

And thank the Lord for all.

The doggerel varied from place to  
place, and so did the music. Little

Gaddesden had a particularly tuneful  
May song, and Dorothy Erhart rescued  
it from oblivion by having it published.

#### **POSTSCRIPT**

A Trevelyan Way reader recently  
received a letter posted in Paddington  
and addressed to Birkcombstead.

I doubt whether the letter would  
have been delivered promptly without  
the town's postal signature tune, HP4.