

In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

Recently I had the pleasure of meeting Charlie Pendleton, of Los Angeles, who was paying his first visit to Berkhamsted since 1944. We tried without success to find the house where he was billeted for some weeks before D-Day.

However, he was armed with an American book which contained a photograph of Rothesay, the large house at the corner of Cross Oak Road and Charles Street, now a school. "This house," said the caption, "is one of the billets occupied by members of the First Battalion at Berkhamsted, England. At first residents were alarmed at the 'invasion' of their town, but soon warmed up to the GIs. Note typical garden wall, abundant shrubbery, and thick ivy." But Rothesay wasn't Charlie's Billet.

The book states that the GIs immediately tried to understand the British accent, accustom themselves to left-side driving, and figure out the complicated £ s. d. money system. "On 6 April the battalion moved from Petworth to Berkhamsted, where local houses and buildings were occupied as billets. Somewhat annoyed at the 'invasion' of their town, residents at first were standoffish, and little scared. The GIs adapted themselves quickly, however, and soon were sipping tea, drinking bitters, and singing 'Roll Me Over' in the best British manner. Berkhamsteders eventually became close friends of the Americans.

"Frequent inspections were held by higher commanders to test the combat fitness of the outfit. One was made by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Forces. Soon after D-Day, 6 June 1944, the battalion was alerted and sent to a staging area near Southampton."

If anyone remembers Charlie Pendleton, his address is 6142 Dennison Street, Los Angeles, Ca. 90022.

OVER THERE

The recent death of Major General George R. Pearkes, V.C. in his beloved Canada recalls a period when several old boys of Berkhamsted School were encouraged to study agriculture at Berkhamsted School Farm, near the town of Red Deer, halfway between Calgary and Edmonton in Alberta in

Dr. T.C. Fry, headmaster of Berkhamsted School from 1888-1910 and Dean of Lincoln from 1910-1930, visited Canada in 1902 and bought a farm where old Berkhamsted would study agriculture. On leaving school George Pearkes was one of several boys who took advantage of Dr Fry's offer. I recollect seeing a long article entitled "A Berkhamsted Boy in the Foothills" in the Alberta Historical Review.

It was not long before George Pearkes, a Watford boy, joined the Royal North-West Mounted Police and had a distinguished

career in the two World Wars. From 1960-68 he was Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, and several Berkhamstedians visited him at his home in Victoria, B.C. He died at the age of 96.

FOUND IN THE DEBRIS

During the recent demolition of Progress Hall, a cheque was found under the floorboards: London and County Banking Company Ltd., Great Berkhamsted, August 7, 1889. Pay/Nock Investment Trust, eighteen shillings and 10d. (Signed) J. Edwin.

The Progress Hall, built in 1888, was only one year older than the cheque. J. Edwin was the Co-operative Society's secretary.

Another discovery was a letter applying for a job in the meat and fish departments at thirty shillings (£1.50) a week.

ROUND THE VILLAGES

A few months ago I recommended readers to visit three very attractive villages in the far West of Berkhamsted Deanery: Wilstone, Long Marston and Puttenham.

One evening in July, fifty member of the Local History Society spent a very pleasant evening visiting the three villages, with talks by Dick Gomm (a former Berkhamstedian) and Mrs M.C. Vincent.

At Long Marston we made the acquaintance of two owls who gazed down on us from the top of a tower which is all that remains of the ancient church. Then, after visiting the more modern church, we moved on to Puttenham, still a tiny village. We were treated to strawberries and cream before entering the ancient church, still in the throes of costly restoration and one of Hertfordshire's gems.

Mrs Vincent, who could fill a hefty tome with her knowledge of Puttenham's long history,

told us that Edward Norfolk was a priest at Puttenham in the 16th century, over 400 years before Berkhamsted had a rector of the same name.

Altogether a very pleasant evening and many were the comments on the wide views of a flat countryside which has a very special charm of its own.

A SONG OF BERKHAMSTED

My thanks to a reader for giving me a copy of "A Song of Berkhamsted", specially composed for the Berkhamsted Pageant of July 1922, music by Stanley Wilson, words by Gilbert Hudson. Here is the final verse:

So both to church and castle
The birth and growth we trace
Of Berk-ham-sted whose name is read
"A fortified home-place."
O make this our heritage
With heart and hand and tongue,
A stronghold of kind neighbourship
And theme of thankful song.
It is now thought that the first element of the town's name is either birch or hill, but maybe the Cowper Society will revive if not fortify the Song of Berkhamsted.

RENTS AND SCENTS

A Potten End reader has drawn my attention to "My Garden's Bedside Book", compiled by T.A. Stephens. A chapter is devoted to gillyflowers, and here is an extract of local interest:

It was a pretty compliment for a stock, a pink carnation and wallflower to be nicknamed 'Gillyflower.' The word appears in 17th century records as the rent due in respect of a certain tenement. As, for instance, of another tenement, 'A clove Gillyflower when any King of Queen is crowned at the castle of Berkhamsted.'

“Three hundred years ago this form of socage tenure was not uncommon, the tenant undertaking to give a flower — usually a rose — as an acknowledgement that the tenure existed. When mention is made of the

gilliflower being offered for the same reason, we can assume that it was the single pink with the clovey scent that passed between tenant and landowner.”