

In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

THE ELMS

Much interest has been aroused by a poster advertising the sale by auction of a High Street freehold property in a commanding position, consisting of 13 rooms, conservatory, greenhouses, and out-buildings.

Another major change in Berkhamsted – not at all. The poster advertised Woodman & Son's sale by auction in the Sessions Hall on May 9th, 1900. This well preserved poster has been framed and is now displayed in Lloyds Bank, which moved to the valuable property soon after the first World War.

Few exterior changes have been made to the building, which previously was a private house called the Elms, a fitting name when many elm trees were in that part of the town, hence the name of nearby Elm Grove.

The present building replaced, probably in the 1850's, a very old and dingy house which merited a page in Henry Nash's "Reminiscences of Berkhamsted", published in 1890. The old house, Nash said, had a forbidding aspect, over-shadowed by

trees and not calculated to improve the condition of patients who consulted Dr. Steele, whose surgery was in The Elms.

But, to quote Nash, Dr. Steele was the beau-ideal of a gentleman when on horseback, his usual mode of locomotion. He was never known to trouble poor patients with long bills and had a opinion of the salubrity of the town neighbourhood. When patients consulted him as to the advisability of seeking a change of air at Brighton, he told them that the air was as good on Berkhamsted Common as anyone would find at the seaside.

In later Victorian times The Elms was the home of Charles Bullock, a solicitor, whose bankruptcy was the cause of the sale of the house in 1900.

Many Berkhamstedians will recall a small building behind the bank which for many years was the Labour Exchange.

Lloyds Bank, by the way, first had an office next door to the Town Hall; at the time of

writing it is being prepared for a building society.

THE COWPER WINDOW

A Chelmsford man has written to say how greatly he enjoyed spending an hour or so in St Peter's Church. A great admirer of William Cowper, he was puzzled by the great east window which, over a century ago, was completely and beautifully reglazed as a memorial to the poet. But every panel is clearly visible except the one depicting William at his prayer desk with his tame hares.

Many people wish that this panel was not obscured. A few years ago, when Songs of Praise was filmed and recorded in St Peter's, the BBC photographers climbed ladders in the hope of showing the Cowper panel. The result could best be described as a squint.

Now for a few words about the great west window, which tints the pillars of the nave so beautifully on bright summer evenings. Did you know that this window had the distinction of being the subject of a book? I have a copy of "Painted Windows", written by the Rev. Frederick Harvey, usher of Berkhamsted School, in 1869.

The new west window was the gift of Thomas Whately, a surgeon, who lived at Egerton House, replaced by the Rex Cinema. Whately died before the new window was completed, but his connection with Berkhamsted is not forgotten; occasionally I hear from members of the family in Australia and the United States.

Harvey's book contains a very interesting ground plan of St Peter's Church. The organ was just inside St Catherine's Chapel, and behind the organ was the vestry. I imagine that the vestry was very short lived in that situation; probably it was used following the demolition of a very ugly box-like vestry at the north corner of the church, shown in some early prints and photographs.

THE SPORTS GROUND

My thanks to Mr George Wright, of Moore Road, Northchurch, for the loan of a copy of the particulars, plans and conditions of sale of "the northern portion of the Ashridge Estate." Sixty two lots were auctioned at Berkhamsted Town Hall on September 6th 1923.

Of great local interest was Lot 57, the narrow, tapering strip of land on the east side of Lower Kings Road, north of the canal. It was described as an exceptional site for the erection of factory premises.

Lot 60 was "the highly valuable enclosure" on the west side of Lower Kings Road, between the canal and railway. It was already used as a sports ground, and the auctioneers said that the frontage land was ripe for development, eminently suitable for the erection of lock-up shops and business premises.

As we all know, the sports ground did not move westward until recent times, and now there are houses and flats, not lock-up shops or other business premises as suggested in 1923.

Typical of many rural properties was a smallholding at Ivinghoe Aston; a brick and tiled seven-roomed cottage, brick and tiled barn, four-bay open shed, cowhouse, orchard and grassland, the whole containing nearly ten acres. The price? £700.

FAMOUS SOLDIERS

My recent mention of George R. Pearkes, V.C. who recently died in Canada at the age of 96, prompted a reader to recall the career of a distinguished and very popular old boy of Berkhamsted School. At the end of the second World War, Major General Pearkes commanded the western defences of Canada.

And it was another old Berkhamstedian who commanded Canada's eastern defenses! L.F. Page had a very distinguished career in both wars.

Then there was a third Major General, H.W. Foster. As my informant says, it is quite strange that one school should have produced three Major Generals in the second World War.

100 YEARS AGO

There were housing problems 100 years ago. The following appeared in the Berkhamsted Parish Magazine for October, 1884:

We are sorry that Rev. W.G. Marsden, who has had the charge of Potten End chapel and hamlet, is leaving us for the similar charge at Wilstone, in the Parish of Tring, where a house has been provided for him. There being no house available at Potten End and no other suitable accommodation, has made this decision necessary.