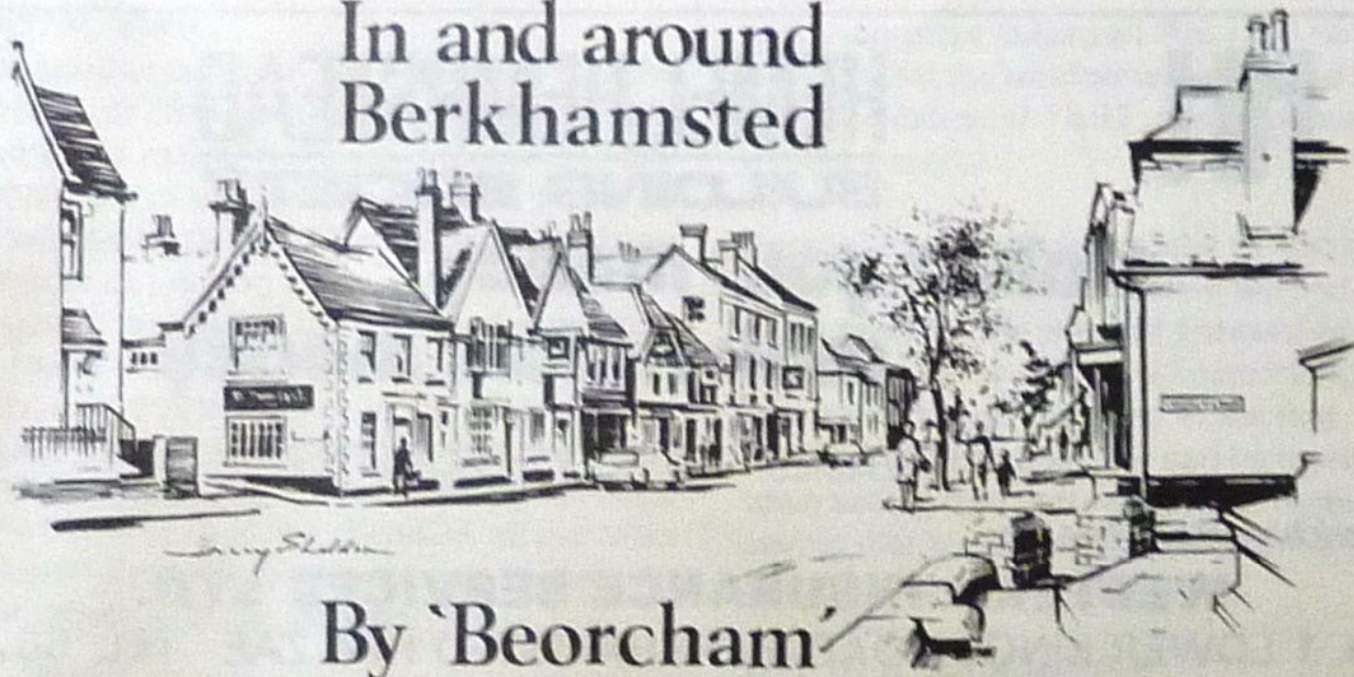


In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

CHANGES AT HARESFOOT

In years gone by Berkhamsted was noted for its many mansions, most of which have been demolished or used for purposes far removed from the owners' original intentions.

Perhaps the least familiar mansion was Haresfoot, in the middle of a park of the same name which was spelt Haresfordende in 1287 and Harrats Foot End on an 18th century map.

From 1720 or thereabouts a branch of the rich Dorrien family made Haresfoot their country house. The nearest mansion was Ashlyns Hall, the home of James Smith, another very rich man. A marriage explains the hyphenated Smith-Dorriens of late date.

Early in the 19th century a new and much larger Haresfoot House was built, and despite seven outbreaks of fire it survived until a completely new and much smaller house was built in 1962. In recent years it was the home of the Tollit family, and soon it will be a kindergarden and preparatory school.

A BUSY HOUSE

In Victorian times Haresfoot was a very busy house. Robert Algernon Smith-Dorrien was the father of six boys and nine girls, the most famous of the boys being General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, who was born at Haresfoot in 1859 and distinguished himself in the Boer War and again in the 1914-18 war. Many readers will remember Admiral Smith-Dorrien and his sisters, who lived at New Lodge, Bank Mill Lane.

In 1851 there was a domestic staff of twelve at Haresfoot, with many more working on the estate. A very popular butler, Mardell, was in the billiards room when a paraffin lamp crashed down on the table. He tried to blow out the flames, thereby setting his whiskers on fire. The whiskers were his pride and joy, and their value was recognised by the insurance company. Not only was Col. Smith-Dorrien's billiards table replace, but the butler was given £5 compensation for the partial destruction of his whiskers.

ROYAL VISIT

On another occasion the butler was told the Prince of Wales (afterwards Edward VII) would be calling for lunch. Mardell told his informant to tell it to the Marines, but it was perfectly true. "Teddy" who had been thrown out during a run with the local hounds, had asked his equerry if there was a friend in the neighbourhood, and was told that Algy Smith-Dorrien in the 10th Hussars lived nearby at Haresfoot. When convinced of the genuineness of the call upon his services, the butler rose to the occasion, as did Miss Marion Smith-Dorrien, who was hostess in the absence of her parents.

Another of the Dorriens lived at Clifton, and in addition to bearing the cost of building Ashley Green Church (£2,000) she endowed the church at the extra cost of £6,000. She said that she liked to spend her money that way despite the fact that she was a stranger to the neighbourhood. It must have been a great occasion when the church was consecrated on the last day of 1873; the Bishop of Oxford, an archdeacon and a canon were driven to church through heavy snow in a horse-drawn sleigh.

THE BLACKWELLS

Many years ago fetes were held at Haresfoot, giving the townspeople a rare opportunity of seeing the mansion. But the Dorriens left Haresfoot a long time ago. For many years the mansion was the home of the Blackwell family, of the well-known firm of Crosse and Blackwell. A popular joke was that if you trespassed on their preserves you would be in the soup. What naughty people we used to have in Berkhamsted!

READERS' COMMENTS

I was stopped in the High Street by a reader who said she was surprised to learn from last month's *REVIEW* that the great west window of St Peter's Church was the subject of a book called "Painted Windows." She

was even more surprised that I did not mention that the window was exhibited at the Paris Exhibition of 1867, and was awarded a bronze medal.

Another reader was interested to read about some unusual local characters we had in years gone by. He thought I should have included Johnny Collins, a costermonger, who came to Berkhamsted in the first World War. With a donkey cart he toured the town selling fruit and vegetables, repeatedly saying that his donkey came first, his wife second, and himself third.

LIFE IN A LOCK-HOUSE

How's this for a coincidence? Alfred Wesley, now 90 years old, started work at Costin's boatyard, between Castle Street and Ravens Lane. He soon decided to emigrate to Canada, and on retirement paid a visit to his home town. The first thing he saw on leaving the railway station was the totem pole in Alsford's timberyard, and at once recognised it as the work of a close friend in Vancouver!

For this information I am indebted to Reginald Short, who moved to Amersham many years ago but has pleasant memories of the years when his home was the canal lock-house a few yards west of Lower Kings Road.

With two rooms up, two rooms down and a very damp cellar, lock-house No. 53 was demolished a long time ago, but Mr Short remembers his father's many duties when most of the barges were horse-drawn, though there was an increasing number of steamers, their pop-pop-pop being heard all along the valley. But for the towpath the house would have been on an island site, with watercress beds where today there is a miniature jungle.

Mr Short is still interested in canals. With a small library of books on waterways and memories of his father's varied duties it is hoped that he will give a talk to the Local History Society.

NEW FROM CORNWALL

I have received a very cheerful letter from Sidney Chappell, well known as Berkhamsted shopkeeper in years gone by and a life-long chorister.

Now 92 years old, he lives at St Merryn, near Padstow, Cornwall, where the vicar is an old boy of Berkhamsted School. Sidney sometimes meets Amy Meager, who, with Alfred, her late husband, kept a boot and shoe

repair shop a few doors from Sidney's shop in Lower Kings Road.

Although living alone he is well looked after by his daughter and son-in-law five minutes' walk from his house. His copy of our '*REVIEW*' is read by many of his friends, and no doubt they imagine that Berkhamsted is even nicer than Arcady.

TAILPIECE

A teacher tells me that one of her young hopefuls wants to know why the town was called Great Berkhamsted when it was much smaller than it is today.