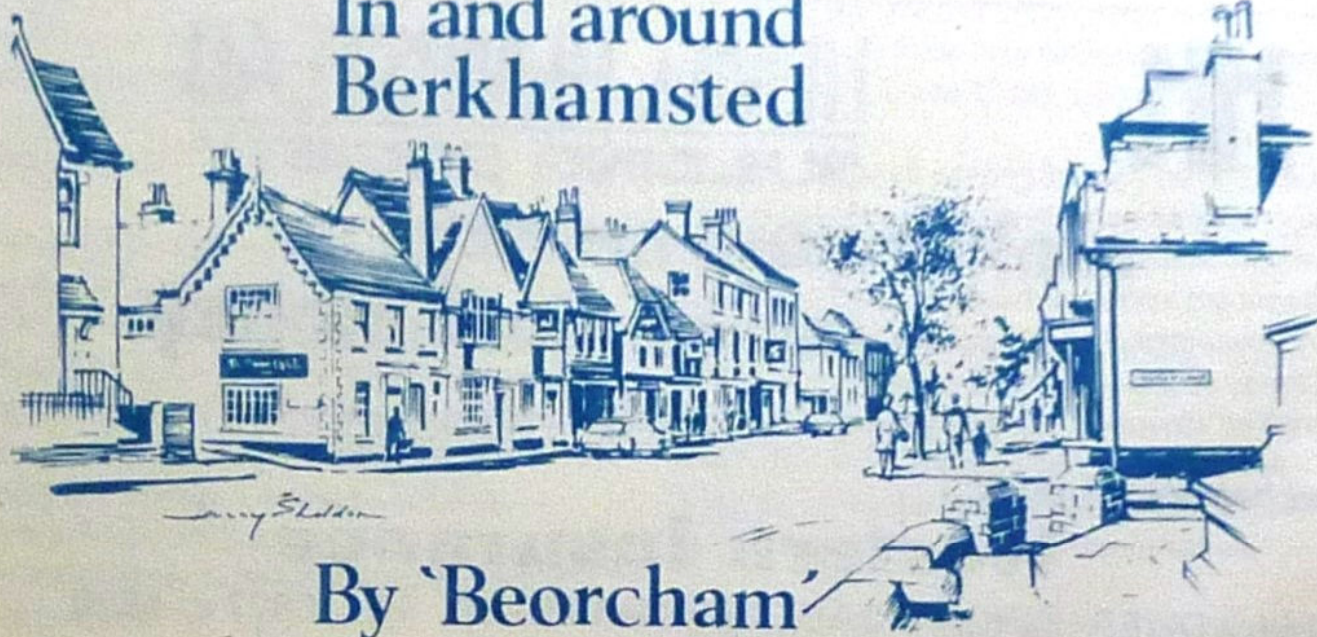


In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

100 YEARS OLD

At the start of a new year, I always look through my records to see if there was anything of great local interest 100 years ago. Perhaps the most important event of 1885 was the completion of Lower Kings Road, but I doubt whether the shopkeepers will commemorate the centenary by dancing in the street or staging an historical pageant in the car park.

The cost of the road, £3,097, was borne by donations. Not a penny on the rates! The Smith-Dorrien family gave £1,000, and the railway company £500. Smaller gifts included £25 from Berkhamsted School and £25 from the Cooper family, of sheep dip fame.

The new road, as my grandmother always called it, was shoddily made. Goodness knows what would have happened if the crackpot idea of a steam tramway to the railway station had not been abandoned. Between the wars and in recent times very costly repairs have been made to a busy but not very well planned road.

HARD TIMES

Now for a few more comments on local activities 100 years ago. In January, 1885, the local paper reported that 22 boys and girls were among the 83 paupers in the workhouse. A nurse was engaged at £20 a year, with "officer's rations". Then there was help for the outdoor poor, as they were called. Out-relief was anything but generous: £31 in money and £5 in kind, for 451 people: 255 not able-bodied, 44 able-bodied, and 152 children.

Wages were counted in shillings, not pounds, and prices were correspondingly low. E. Meek had "the cheapest house for china and general hardware"; his price for a 64-piece dinner set was 17s. (85p). J. Sanders, tailor, made trousers to order from 14s. (70p) and business suits from £2 5s. (£2.25). At the coffee tavern in Castle Street one could have a good bed for one shilling (5p) per night, with comfort, cleanliness and civility, not to mention fruit syrups from one penny per glass.

At the police station Inspector Parish had three officers. The town crier and bill sticker

was Peter Wood. With a cattle market every Wednesday, a straw-plait market on Thursday and the general Saturday market, the High Street attracted many spectators if not many customers.

Loosley's Directory stated that the town's staple trade for the last 500 years had been woodenware, in which many hands were employed by East & Son, Sills and others. Cooper's chemical works, the far-famed nurseries of Lane & Sons, watercress growing breweries, carriage building, brushmaking, boat building, iron foundry and other operations, provided employment for large numbers.

At that time the population of Berkhamsted (excluding Sunnyside) was about 4,700.

THE WATERSPLASH

As the busiest pedestrian crossing in Berkhamsted is from Barclays Bank to the gap between Sharland's store and the Book Stack, one would expect the drainage to be excellent. But during and after heavy rain we have to take very wide strides over a temporary lake. Many a pedestrian has a shoe full of water.

I presume that our councillors and officials wear waders or high heels when they cross the High Street in the town centre. What about a raft?

ANCIENT HORSE TROUGH

Once again I am asked if I know the age of the horse-trough outside the Goat Inn. I don't think anyone knows the date. It may or may not have preceded the Victorian rebuilding of the inn. In his reminiscences of 1890, Henry Nash recalled the time when Victoria Road was a close or paddock attached to the Goat Inn. At certain times of the year large herds of

Welsh cattle grazed and rested before continuing on their way to Barnet Fair. Hence the name of Three Close Lane.

I certainly recall seeing horses (and Foden steam engines) stopping for a roadside drink. Eric Stebbings, whose father was licensee of the Goat from 1909-54, reminds me that the horse trough was very well patronised on Tring Show day, a famous event in years gone by. Boys called out to drivers to throw their mouldy coppers (pennies) into the trough. Then the lads would get wet sleeves and a wiggling when they went home.

Eric recalls the ancient games of quoits which were played in the Goat garden. Until the last war teams from several villages came to play the Goat enthusiasts.

Incidentally, the town's first horse-drawn fire engine (and horses) were stationed at the Goat outbuildings.

A WELCOME BOOK

Many histories of our county have been written, and the latest book, by Tony Rook, is one of the very best of its kind. "A History of Hertfordshire" doesn't deal with each town and village in alphabetical order, a sure way of encouraging skipping, but takes a county-wide view of periods, events, changes and people.

Not for the first time I realised how little I know of the east and north of one of England's smallest counties. Yes, I have been to Hitchin and Ware and Bishops Stortford, but there are many villages which are only names to me.

If you share my interest in maps you will enjoy studying the boundaries of ancient parishes with such nice names as Great and Little Hornead, Throcking, Aspenden, Wyddial, Furneux Pelham, Stocking Pelham and Brent Pelham. There is also Albury, without a 'd'.

The author is no stranger to Berkhamsted. In 1971 Mr Rook gave a useful and encouraging talk in the Town Hall when we were starting the Berkhamsted and District Archaeological Society.

"A History of Hertfordshire" is beautifully produced with many illustrations. It is published by Phillimore at £8.85.

UNUSUAL TENANTS

In her newly published autobiography, the veteran actress, Hermione Baddeley, recalls her mother's longing to leave London and live

in the country. She writes: "We found her a little cottage on a hillside in Buckinghamshire. It was, in fact, the cottage where D.H. Lawrence had once lived."

The cottage is about three and a half miles from Berkhamsted, near the Bellingdon end of Hawridge Lane. It is at the far end of a block of three tall cottages, and publication of the book may revive talk of placing a commemorative plaque on the wall. But very few people use what, for most of the way, is a steep and stony track, unsuitable for cars or even bicycles, but all right for well-shod walkers.