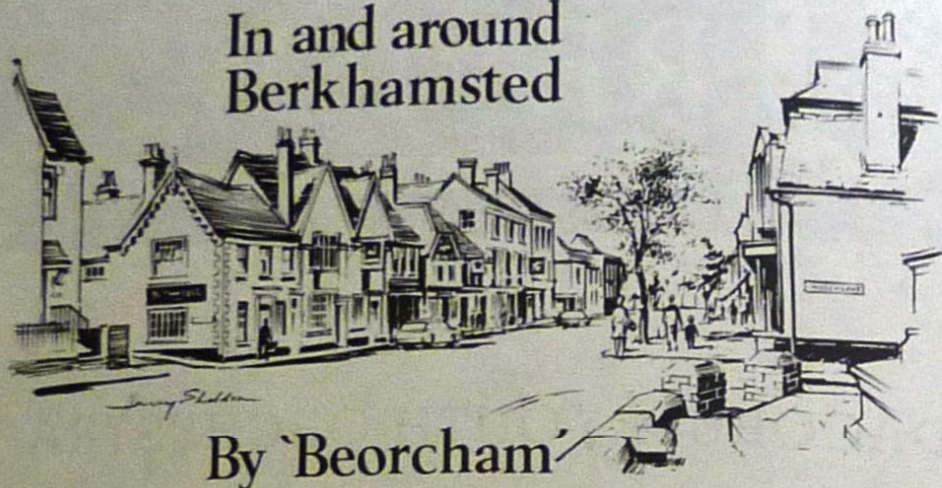


In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

SHORT STORIES

One of winter's coldest and slippery evenings did not deter local historians from filling the Court House to hear the reminiscences of the son of a canal lock-keeper whose house formerly faced the towpath a few yards west of Lower Kings Road bridge.

Reginald Short's earliest recollection was of the canal being frozen for six weeks in February and March, 1916. Skaters were out in force and the manager of the flour mill (now offices) on the other side of the bridge took some terrible tumbles.

The ice breaker was brought to clear a passage for boats whose crews were in financial difficulties. The breaker was of strong steel construction with a flush wooden deck and a hand-rail fixed lengthwise at a height of about 4ft. Rocking the boat, the crew consisted of eight men, four on each side of the rail, and a steersman.

The boat was pulled by up to eight horses hired from local contractors. Mr Short recalled the twin telegraph poles along the towpath, carrying about 50 lines. Nearby was an osier bed, and in the autumn all the swallows and martins from the town came to roost in the willows prior to migrating. In the early morning the telegraph wires were black with birds.

TURNING TURTLE

Thames barges brought timber up to Key's timber yard, just below Castle Street bridge. After unloading they continued to a point opposite the railway station, where the canal had been specially widened for the barges to turn round for the return journey.

One of the canal workers Mr Short remembered was Tommy Dyer, who worked his own boats, taking hay and straw from Newground to London and bringing back horse manure from the many stables in London at that time. On one occasion the boat turned turtle!

Wages of the men were delivered by hand. A man started out from Cowley with the wage packets of all the men as far as the Cow Roast. The next man took his packet and handed the rest to the third man and so on right up the line.

The "boaties", as they were sometimes called, were very proud of their horses, and the women made elaborate lace covers for the horses' ears in summer.

The steamers, Mr Short added, went out of fashion because the engine room took up too much cargo space.

Thank you, Reginald, for one good story after another.

BY NUMBERS

A reference in last month's 'Review' to the time when Berkhamsted houses were first given street numbers reminded a reader that Alma Road, Northchurch was once known as Number Row, probably because it was the first road in the village with numbered houses.

LONG MEMORIES

Recently I received a letter from an elderly man who asked if I could trace a house in Cross Oak Road where he lived as a very small boy.

His memories of Berkhamsted were few and vague, but he could recall walks along Hog Lane (on the way to Ashley Green) and a small toy shop in our High Street kept by Mrs Figg. It was her son Hubert who became a well-known chemist in the town, a barrister, and for many years a member (and for a time chairman) of the Urban District Council.

In a postscript my correspondent said he still remembered the liquorice strips he could buy in Berkhamsted at a farthing a strip. In other words, 960 for an old-fashioned £.

A VISITOR'S VIEWS

Here's a nice compliment from a visitor who found Berkhamsted a very pleasant town. A friend tells me that a cousin, who had never been here before, thought that our canal was much more interesting than a well-known river which flows through her home town.

What especially impressed her was the sudden change from town to countryside as soon as one goes through the narrow Whitehill railway bridge.

She soon found that some of the best photographs of the Castle can be taken from New Road, and looking ahead to the Common the rural scenes were marred only by the heavy traffic. Madam, you must come again!

THE GARDEN SUBURB

"In March the effects of a national coal strike were felt in the town and the price of coal rose to 31 shillings per ton." I came across this report in an old scrapbook of local press cuttings, and I wonder if you can guess the date by the price of coal? It was one of several interesting items in the *Berkhamsted Gazette's* retrospect of 1912.

In that year much interest was taken in a movement known as the Garden Suburb: "Twenty four houses had already been erected in the charming district of Cross Oak, and the main thoroughfare of the estate, Greenways, should be an attractive and charming road."

Several notable people paid visits to Berkhamsted in 1912. Sir Ernest Shackleton lectured on the South Pole to a large assembly in Deans' Hall. Lieut. General Sir R. Powell reviewed the scouts at Ashridge, where he was the guest of the Earl and Countess of Brownlow. Then there was an aeroplane which paid a visit to Durrants Farm, "the aviator being Lieutenant de Havilland, who came from Farnborough."

Groves, the town crier, entered a Crying Competition at Devizes, "and this occasion caused much interest." And in 1912 the question of a swimming bath came up for discussion and was shelved – not for the first or last time!

THE HIDDEN MUG

The other day I was reminded of an old story which may still raise a laugh. When a shop at the top of Manor Street was rebuilt, one of the bricklayers sent a boy to a nearby public house for a mug of beer.

The workman (obviously a connoisseur) pronounced the beer "flat" and after throwing away the liquid he cemented the mug into the brickwork, sending the word to the publican that if he wanted the mug back, he would have to pull the building down.

COPY DATES FOR THE REVIEW

APRIL 5th

Copy should be received on Fridays at the Court House Cottage, Church Lane
– preferably typewritten and on large sheets of paper with wide margins.

Review Office: The Court House Cottage, Church Lane
Editor: David Sherratt, The Court House Cottage, Church Lane. Tel. 5128
Advertising Manager: Neil Cowan, 23 North Road. Tel. 4916
Circulation Manager: Noel Agate, 21 Upper Ashlyns Road. Tel. 6387
Treasurer: Miles Nicholas, 46 Fieldway. Tel. 71598
Committee Secretary: John Cook, The Gardener's Arms, Castle Street

THE REVIEW CAN BE OBTAINED FROM W.H. SMITH'S, AND BOBBIES IN THE HIGH STREET; ANSELL'S IN CASTLE STREET AND AT GRAVEL PATH POST OFFICE. ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS FROM THE TREASURER, MILES NICHOLAS, 46 FIELDWAY, TEL. 71598.