



BERKHAMSTED LOCAL HISTORY AND MUSEUM SOCIETY

Registered Charity No. 803417

www.berkhamsted-history.org.uk

Founded 1950 as Berkhamsted & District Local History Society

BLHMS Lockdown Newsletter May 2020

Dear all members

With no society news as such here are a few articles from the archives to keep you going during the lockdown. For those of you on Facebook, regular posts from Linda Rollitt satiate your thirst for local history on our BLHMS page.

Steel dumplings and Barley Spankers

Mr Ralph Miles of "Belsize" Sarratt, related in Hertfordshire Countryside magazine winter issue 1957-58 how at the age of seven he began work at a wage of 1s.6d. a week. He was one of a family of fourteen and his father never earned more than eleven shillings a week. Mr Miles was speaking of the 1820's. He said: *"We used to wash and cook the rinds of swedes for food. As for clothing, we rarely bought any, but were dependent on gifts. My mother used to beg boots, and whatever the size we had to use them. If they were too small the big toes had to come outside"*. Another Hertfordshire veteran, Mr George Monk, remembered *"I wore a smock-frock-inside out all the week and the right side up on a Sunday"*.

Berkhamsted's then oldest voter, Mr Thomas Hurst, of Holliday Street, had a word about fuel in the 1820's. He said that *"coal was 2s. 6d. a cwt., and that as there was no railway coal came by water. If the boats were frozen in the people got no coal. What the poor people used for firing was roots, logs, and tops of bushes."*

Steel dumplings" and "Barley spankers" seemed to be the staple article of food. Mr Carpenter, of Tring, a ploughman, said that the principal food of Steel dumpling which consisted of flour mixed with water and boiled. When cooked it was so hard and tough that it could be thrown about without fear of breaking. Sometimes the dumplings were eaten with vinegar and sugar. "Barley Spankers" were made of barley meal mixed with water and cooked in a frying pan if fat was available. If not, they were just boiled.

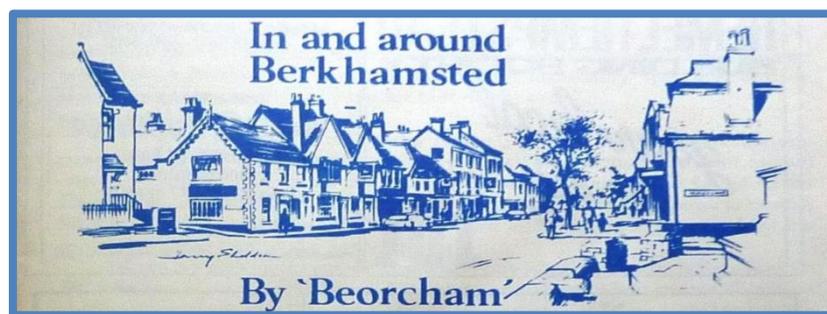
From: *"Testimony and Portraits of Men and Woman living in Hertfordshire"* published by R.J Childs of Watford 1886.

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Bill Willett writes:

"Lockdown has given me an opportunity to concentrate on some work that I have been working on for some time. Marion Alsop had copied into book-form two surveys that were made of the Manor of Berkhamsted; in 1607 and 1616. This was all to do in justification of the Bridgewater's attempt to fence-in part of the Common. I have photographed these surveys and in due course they will be available on our website. These surveys tell you the landowner's name, what land he (very few females) owned or rented (and the name of the owner), where it was (much land was in the

'open fields') and how much rent he paid. I have only finished the 1616 survey: 1607 nearly done. In 1616 Thomas Murray was by far the biggest landowner (700 +acres), the School next with 350 acres and only a handful with over 50 acres. All the data is in Excel so it can be thrown around number-wise. 186 names are listed. Assuming most were married and say had 1.5 children, then that would make a population of around 5-600. This sounds about right. Nic Brown is leading a team who are transcribing the Churchwarden's Accounts for this period so there will be some very interesting cross-referencing. They will eventually appear the Herts Parish Records series.

Chris Armstrong has dug this topical article from the archives:
November 1957 - Berkhamsted Review Article by Percy Birtchnell



The Poor of Northchurch

£30 FOR THE DOCTOR

Every year the Northchurch vestry had the duty of appointing a medical attendant. In 1832 the appointment was offered to Mr Collier at £30 per annum. No extra charges of any kind were to be made, except when he was called in to give evidence on the inquest of a parish pauper or when his assistance was required in cases of childbirth. The fees were a guinea and half a guinea, respectively.

Mr Collier was required to attend and find medicines for all sick persons on receipt of an order from the overseers, to visit within the distance of six miles from Northchurch church, and to enter the names of all patients in a book kept for the purpose, noting the nature of the disease and adding a report twice a week of the patient's state. This agreement included vaccination.

FIGHTING AN EPIDEMIC

1832 was a busy year for Mr. Collier, owing to the prevalence of cholera in Northchurch. Nurses were engaged at 3s. 6d. each per day, and when the epidemic was over the vestry substantially increased Mr. Collier's fees. The Rector received the thanks of the parish "for unremitting exertions and attention during the period of affliction and distress."

To relieve distress, subscriptions were invited, and the Countess of Bridgewater, at Ashridge, was invited to head the list. She did so with a gift of £5, and the first subscription list totalled £37 4s. This was insufficient; the Countess made a second and much more handsome gift of £50, and the grand total was £115 0s. 8d.

Much of this money was spent on improving sanitary conditions in the village. "A great many drains and cesspools are in a very foul and unhealthy state," the clerk reported, and many of the cottagers were unable to effect improvements without financial aid.

Money was spent, too, on blankets, beds, lime, clothing, shoes, tar barrels, meat, and brandy. Brandy, in fact was the most expensive item of all £11 14s 6d.

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Berkhamsted resident **Rob Freeman** has shared a letter written by his mother, Olive to her sister Connie who was helping UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) with work in Europe about her antics with her friend Betty on VE day in London on May 8th, 1945. Olive worked for the British Council and part of her job was showing foreign servicemen around London. One of her colleagues at the British Council was none other than John Betjeman.

(The Freemans Moved to Gilpins Ride on New Year's Eve 1959. (2nd house to be occupied in the then new road).

You will read that during the celebrations she and her friend got within 10 yards of Churchill and she was one of those you see in all the newsreels on the Victoria Memorial in front of Buckingham Palace when the Royal Family appeared on the balcony! How she got her view makes interesting reading:

"It was a hot, sultry day and we had on our coolest dresses, oldest shoes & nothing of value in our handbags except food....we edged and wormed our way up Whitehall, people hung from every window and statue, the roof tops of bus shelters sagged under the weight and every lamp post was swathed with a Yank, Australian or what you will. A shelter sign had a little dwarf perched atop vigorously winding a camera. Everybody flaunted red, white, and blue ribbons, Union Jacks & Paper hats with slogans such as "You've had it Adolf" or "Squeeze me again" (just asking for trouble!). We were opposite the Ministry of Defence building for the Premier's speech and when the Scots Guard played "Cease Fire" at the end I wanted to howl. Afterwards we made our way to Parliament Square when there was a tumultuous roar & we were literally carried forward standing up ten yards from a car in which stood Churchill, cigar in mouth, looking v. fit and pink in the face smiling benevolently....."

We queued half an hour for a cup of tea in Charing Cross and 20 mins for a lavatory. Then we walked down the Mall & jostled ourselves to the Victoria Memorial. We had a splendid view of the Royal Balcony but alas! alas! by 9pm all the tall men in London seemed to be around us. Not content with swarming the steps the Navy stormed the Memorial from the side, splashing through the water. Girls went down like ninepins. It kept the ST. Johns men busy! One girl did a marvelous faint from the top of a cupid onto the air force below. When the King & Queen & the Princesses appeared two boys lifted me and Betty up high so we got quite a good look all told. Buckingham

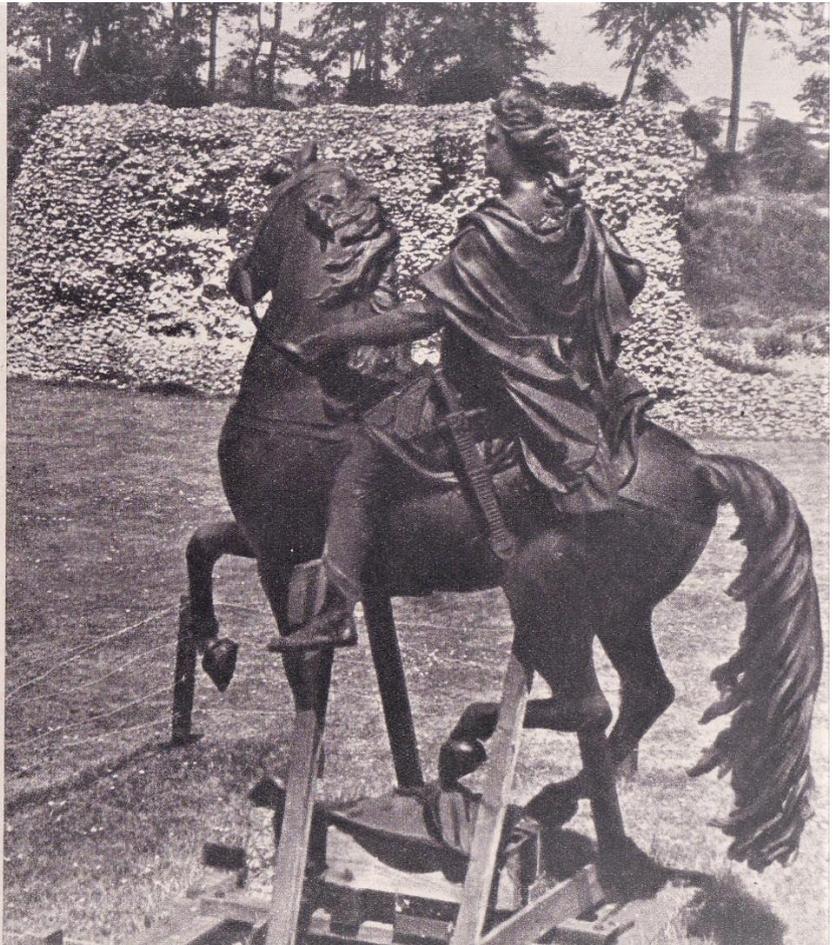
Palace, Admiralty Arch and Big Ben looked grand in floodlight. Fireworks were being lit everywhere but I can never enjoy them again. They're much too reminiscent of the Blitz....."

Disconsolately they stand with the rain running down their collars and the falling leaves settling on their horses' rumps. They don't want houses to let. They don't want flats. They don't want rooms in luxury hotels. All they want is a pedestal at a convenient cross-roads, or a plinth in the middle of a public square. They're the banished statues of London exiled, for a war now over, to the grounds of Berkhamsted Castle.



"Let's Get Cracking!"

We shall, anyway, if they don't shift us soon. Field-Marshal Lord Wolseley (above) makes common cause with William the Third (right), who's wearing his Roman get-up.



*Photographs of London Statues at Berkhamsted Castle by Bill Brandt
From Picture Post November 17th, 1945*

We are still open for research articles, enquiries etc. There is a special offer from the National Archives allowing free downloading of documents online and at HALS and LMA, so you can work on your article for next years' Chronicle. Berkhamsted Towns web archives has also interesting history website. **Jenny Sherwood** is preparing Heritage Open Days as best she can.

We are fortunate to have been given Hedgehogs (Bert Hosier) slides of Northchurch and are scanning them in. Thank you, Hedgehog!

I hope you all are finding use for your enforced time indoors, keep well and safe. Why not send in your memories of VE day?

Mary Casserley
Chairman BLHMS

