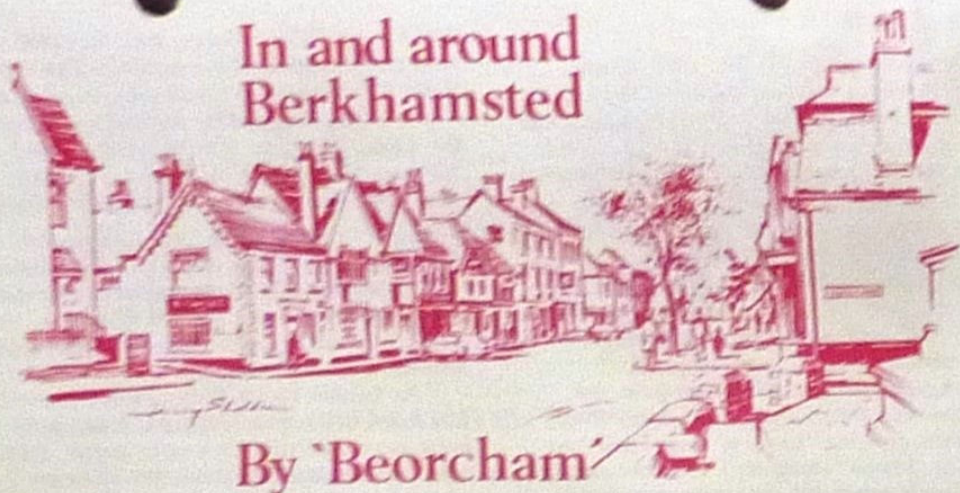


In and around Berkhamsted



By 'Beorcham'

ST JOHN'S WELL LANE

The proposal to build a bridge over the canal from St John's Well Lane car park to the swimming pool reminds me of the substantial changes which have taken place in what was once a very quiet part of the town.

No side-street has altered so much as the short and formerly very narrow lane which led to the plank bridge over the watercress beds. The east side of the lane was lined by huge glasshouses owned by the Lane family, Berkhamsted's once famous nurserymen. For many years there were also nurseries on the west side of the lane, before houses with long gardens were built about the turn of the century. The lane was less than half the width of what is now a very busy road to and from the car park.

Until the 1930s a notable feature was the well which gave the lane its name; a tiny stream of water flowed down the east side of the lane to join the Bulbourne.

In ancient times the well was the town's principal source of drinking water. Two keepers or wardens were appointed to regulate the use of the well and save it from pollution. That they carried out their duties zealously is shown by the prosecution in 1400 of women who washed clothes at the well.

In Victorian times St John's Well was said to have curative properties for people with poor eyesight. Many bathed their eyes at the well. My grandmother told me that the gentry were known to sit in their carriages at the top of the lane while the coachman filled bottles of the precious water for home treatment.

St John's Well takes its name from a mediaeval hospital for poor and infirm persons. Until modern times the land was called Spital Mead, and many bones and coins were found from time to time. For some time before the Post Office was built, allotment gardens replaced the former nurseries.

With the recent building of flats down the lane, many more people have what is one of the nicest addresses in the town — St John's Well Lane.

HIGH AND LOW

A newcomer tells me that she is fascinated by the great variety of buildings on the north side of the High Street from Lower King's Road to the Post Office. What particularly pleases her are the roofs — a remarkable variety of slate and tile, some high, some low, some steep, some not so steep, nearly all different and some still proclaiming that they were once houses or cottages, with modernity confined to the shops.

I often include slides of this part of the High Street in illustrated talks, and it is remarkable how many people comment on the roofscapes. "We should stand and stare a little more," someone remarked recently.

I also hear comments on High Street changes which are far from complimentary. Not that this is a new topic of conversation. I recall an evening before the last war when the Citizens' Association organised a meeting on the theme "Is Berkhamsted being spoiled?" The late Mr C.H.B. Quennell, a distinguished historian who lived here at that time, stated in one of his books that Berkhamsted was vulgarised in the 19th century: "there have been hideous suburban developments, and multiple shops spoil the High Street." That was written many years ago!

A HAPPY BAND

I regularly see "Double B", the newsletter of the Berkhamsted and Boxmoor Band Supporters' Association. In a recent number Bernard Kempster, of Charles Street, recalls that when he was a 13-years old choirboy at St Peter's, the late Levi Newell asked him to join St Peter's Town Band, founded by Thomas Ellens in 1888.

At his first practice at the Victoria School he was given a battered old cornet and was told that he would be playing at the next Berkhamsted Town football match!

With the help of Roger Mardie and Frank Deacon, he eventually became assistant solo cornet and then played tenor horn until he was called up for military service in 1940.

Returning home after serving in North Africa, Sicily, Italy and Austria, Bernard rejoined the band and served under several

musical directors, one of whom walked from Chesham and back because he could not afford the bus fare. Bernard was especially proud to have been the prime mover in getting the Berkhamsted St Peter's and Boxmoor Silver Bands to unite. From 1960 he was chairman of the Band Supporters' Association. What gave him much pleasure was taking the learners' class.

Deservedly proud of his 53 years with the band, Bernard ends his article with a tribute to his wife, May, who has always worked hard making things to sell for the benefit of the band.

MUSIC IN THE AIR

The other day I was looking through Chauncy's "Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire" (1700) and came across an unkind reference to the bells of St Peter's Church — "a ring of five bells, not very tuneable."

This recalled many friendly arguments when, as a boy, I visited my grandparents and aunts at Gossons End every Sunday evening. We were exactly halfway between St Peter's and St Mary's, and there were endless arguments whether Berkhamsted or Northchurch had the more tuneable bells!

You may not know that in 1940 the ringing of church bells was limited to sounding an invasion warning. One very bright day in July, 1940, the parish was startled by the tolling of a bell at St Peter's. What happened was a warning by an Observer Corps unit that some objects in the sky looked suspiciously like parachutists. It was soon ascertained that Hitler's invaders were puffs of smoke from rocket signals fired experimentally at Brocks' works, Hemel Hempstead.

COPY DATES FOR THE REVIEW

Your copy should reach the Gardener's Arms, Castle Street by the Friday night. Please TYPE or WRITE CLEARLY preferably on large sheets of paper, leaving a wide margin round your copy.

FRI APR 8

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham' *(continued)*

MARLIN CHAPEL

A brief reference to Marlin Chapel in the December Review prompted three enquiries for further information.

One reader asked if I knew when the chapel was built. Almost certainly in the 13th century. Another enquirer asked if I knew when the last services were held in the chapel. I haven't a clue; probably a very long time before a writer of 1728 said that the chapel was used as a malthouse.

The third enquirer said he would like to see the ruined chapel. Where is it? I advised him to go to the top of Cross Oak Road, turn west along Shootersway for a short

quarter of a mile, and then left down Gallows Lane, signposted "Bridlepath". The downhill part of the walk is often muddy, so go well shod. From the valley take the forward path, hedge on your left and then on your right. Keep straight on, passing on your left moated Marlin Chapel Farmhouse, on the site of the ancient manor house. You now enter a small meadow and on your right you will see Marlin Chapel, now so overgrown that little of the ancient, broken walls is visible.

If anyone seeks further information, I shall be pleased to send a photostat of a full length article on Marlin Chapel which appeared in the Review for October, 1960.