



BERKHAMSTED LOCAL HISTORY AND MUSEUM SOCIETY

Registered Charity No. 803417

www.berkhamsted-history.org.uk

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Spring 2021 Newsletter

Thank you for your forbearance during the Covid Crisis, and we are sorry that some valued events, particularly the talks programme, have proved difficult to arrange. We look forward to delivering to you enjoyable and fascinating events as soon as we can. In the meantime, do not forget you can experience new insights into the rich heritage of your town by going to our Website or opening our Facebook page and scrolling through the photos and other items. You do not need to be a Facebook member or download any programme, just search, click, and view.

Following the 'Mystery Painting' of our last newsletter (Dec 2020) I am pleased to report an update. Your committee secretary **Janice Boakes** had spotted a house with a deep sloping roof whilst out walking in Potten End, which matches the style of the one in the painting of 1927 we showed you. Putting this house (*Cherry Trees* in Vicarage Road) on a map (marked by a red cross) gives us a highly likely position of the spot the painting was taken from (marked by a red star) A call to '**Hedgehog**' (**Bert Hosier**) revealed that in 1948 he and Tommy Snowden worked for Les Bedford clearing the land around this area which once belonged to Lanes Nurseries. The land-clearing was all done by hand in preparation for the new housing stock to be built, Hedgehog recalls digging out footings for the first two houses, and later becoming drivers' mate on a wagon to and from Potten End Sawmills.



A dog-walk around the area confirms all surrounding houses are indeed 'modern' (post 1927).

Janice also located the house '*Beverley*' in Charles St where the (presumed artist of the painting) Agnes Turner lived. It is on the south side on the corner with Doctors Commons Road, previously numbered 45, it is now No. 3. (later it became part of Egerton Rothsay School and has now reverted to a private house).

By the way - at the time of going to press we are delighted that a newly built road in the development off Shootersway has been named 'Hedgehog Way' in respect of our much-valued life-member! Bert is very honored indeed!

Gift-Aid. Thanks to your Treasurer **Richard North**, we can now reclaim Gift-Aid on subscriptions going back 4 years.

You will receive your bumper edition of *The Chronicle XVIII* with this newsletter, for the first time in colour! Thank you to **Linda Rollitt, Jenny Sherwood and Janice Boakes** for their hard work editing and producing it. After you have read it why not pass it on to someone else you might think will appreciate local history, perhaps you could encourage them to join our society? Remember new articles/your local research projects are warmly welcomed for inclusion in next year's issue. A great way to get yourself published!

Programme: The speakers for last year have all been rolled over to the new season (Sept 2021-March 2022). We will continue to send you links other similar societies events (such as the Chiltern Society/HALS) which you are welcome to click and participate.

DHT: Norman Groves writes: **DHT:** The last newsletter referred to re-organisation proposals received from the Dacorum Heritage Trust which your Committee found unacceptable. The DHT is the body that was set up in 1993 primarily to care for, document, catalogue, and store in good conservation conditions the 80,000 or so objects and archives of several history societies in the Borough. To do this Dacorum Council supports the DHT with free accommodation (behind the Civic Centre) and a grant to engage trained staff and cover running costs. In recent years, the grant has not risen, the Store has reached full capacity, and the Museum idea for Hemel Hempstead failed to gain Lottery Funding. The DHT is thus reassessing its purpose, priorities, and direction.

The Committee met with DHT Directors in February and subsequently received a letter confirming that the DHT has had funding for 2021/22 renewed and that the Council is considering an independent Study to develop a long-term strategy to preserve heritage items and records, and to formulate a financially sustainable way forward. Progress with on-going negotiations will be passed on in future newsletters.

In the meantime, our plans to continue digitising parts of our collection of 29,000 items have been limited by Covid closures, and by limited time and space at the Store. Anticipating changes in Spring 2021, we recently made an application to the Covid-19 Fund, managed by The National Archives. In February we were told that the one-off Fund was four times over-subscribed and that unfortunately our bid was not within the successful 25%. We will continue to pursue other routes to carry out this worthwhile but large task that will help open up appreciation and enjoyment of the Society's collection.

Berkhamsted Castle Trust. Adrian Barham (Chairman) writes:

The events of 2020 have had a significant impact on our operations at the Castle. We were (and remain) legally required to close the Visitors' Room to visitors, meaning that the vast majority of our 45 or so dedicated volunteers (who are mainly drawn from BLH&MS) have been unable to help us on site. We remain committed to getting people back as soon as it is safe and legal for us to be able to do so and thank everyone for their understanding. The castle grounds remain open every day for your enjoyment and exercise, however (10am-4pm daily until the clocks change, then 10am-6pm).

Notwithstanding this we have been incredibly active behind the scenes. We have undertaken condition surveys of the wells and the standing stones and have done running repairs where we can (particularly the handrail up the motte). We also worked on a proposal to acquire The Crystal Palace pub with a view to converting the unused space into a new visitors' centre and exhibition space. Unfortunately, a revised nomination to Dacorum Borough Council for The Crystal Palace to be listed as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) was again rejected by the Borough Council. The owners' planning application to convert the building to residential use is still to be decided. We await the outcome with interest.

We very much hope that 2021 will see a return to some sort of normality. In the meantime, we continue to work to improve our understanding of the site. In conjunction with Herts Highways, we have asked Museum of London Archaeology to oversee an archaeological investigation of the outer moat of the Castle along three transect lines. This will help us to identify how much silt has accumulated over the years and hopefully determine the original depth / profile of the moat. Phase two of the project will see some of this accumulated silt removed from the outer moat to provide additional capacity to receive run-off water from adjacent roads, to help reduce flooding nearby. Our Facebook page and Twitter account will continue to keep everyone up to date with the latest developments. And the castle website is at www.berkhamstedcastle.org.uk



An evocative shot of Berkhamsted Castle by Martin Evening. For more like this see the Castle FB page

'A Country Wedding' painting- Bill Willett writes:

Many years ago (decades!) John Wilson came to Berkhamsted and opened a bookshop in Castle Street, next to the Gardeners Arms. He was, among other things, President of the Book Plates Society, and because he could not go, asked his son, Andrew, to attend a sale of Book Plates at one of the London Auction Houses. While awaiting the sale of his lot Andrew wandered around, saw, recognized it as being in Berkhamsted, and then bought this oil painting (reproduced below) which was listed as *A Country Wedding*. Smaller Facsimiles, at a much smaller size were made and sold and there are a number around the town. Andrew then ran a picture-framing business, and the painting was displayed in his shop window. Several people had expressed interest in the picture if it came to be sold and it was acquired by a gentleman in Northchurch who still has it and has researched it.



It is by **Charles Hunt, Sr.**, and dates from around 1830 for it shows the Market House which burnt down in 1854. The artist is standing in the middle of the road looking eastwards round about the front of the Civic Centre. In the distance can be seen: the vine growing up the front of the shops opposite the Swan, the Yew tree by the church and the Poplars at the site of the house called *The Poplars* near Highfield Road. Note the other large tree opposite the Church. It is thought the girl in the right with the floral headdress is Polly Page and the red-cloaked, black-hatted lady is the gypsy Fortune-teller, Betty Leatherland, who lived to be 112! There is a chimney sweep in attendance for good luck, a parson, and by the looks of it the Town-idiot. *MC adds I was invited to view it recently (standing in the garden looking through the window to comply with social distancing!). It is much larger than I imagined.*

Mrs Sayers recollections

Mrs Sayer's grandfather was a tailor and a schoolmaster. He lived with his wife and thirteen children in the house, which is now *Per Tutti*, and was then Thomas Bourne School. Her father was the only son prepared to take on the tailoring business. He was also a schoolmaster - better at teaching than at getting in bills for the tailoring business, says Mrs Sayer.

Her earliest recollection is of hearing the 'knell', a bell rung to denote a death. The children were sent to read the name on a piece of paper pinned to the church door by the vergers. It was tolled for each year of the age of the dead person.

The first school she attended was at the Court House cottage, at the back, and she remembers the cobbled playground and the steps leading down to it. Later she attended Victoria School. On 16th December (Thomas Bourne's birthday). Bourne scholars were given a dinner at the *Kings Arms* hotel, then listened to a sermon about their benefactor before being taken up the church tower to view places of interest in the town.

There were several private schools in the town, one up an alley beside Egerton House (on the present cinema site) in a very picturesque cottage, run by a Miss Dell and her assistant Miss Abbey; Miss Abbey's two sisters kept another up Chesham Road, and a Mrs. Popple ran another small school.

William Cooper came to the town as a vet and invented the world-famous sheep dip. Two of Mrs. Sayer's uncles opened up the business, one in South America, and another in Africa. Two of her aunts were the first pupils of the new Berkhamsted Girls School in Kings Road.

Berkhamsted had a large workhouse - the only one between Aylesbury and Watford - at the bottom of Kitsbury Road which was a country lane then. Her grandmother, a tiny old woman, kept the key for the first Roman Catholic church in the town, in Castle Street - she lived next door in one of the 'sunken cottages'. She was asked, by the Rector, to undertake the training in housewifery, cooking and so on of girls who were not being looked after properly. Mrs. Sayer doubted they enjoyed it as her grandmother was a strict disciplinarian!

When one of her sisters had a series of styes the doctor told her mother to take her to the spring in St. John's Well Lane and bathe her eyes in it. This she did and the styes went. Maybe they would have gone anyway, but ...

There were isolation hospitals in Tring and Aldbury and Mrs Sayer remembers being taken in a horse-drawn cart at night to Aldbury, no one was allowed to go with her, and she didn't know where she was going, she was terrified! Her father who had a bad heart, used to walk there and back to see her through a glass window.

She remembers going to the back of the station, Lord Brownlow's private entrance, and seeing him with Lord Kitchener, an imposing figure with a black moustache. The

Salvation Army used to meet in a hall in Lower Kings Road, and the band played outside the town hall. She was living in a house opposite and the children could sit in the window and watch. Happy memories.

(this article was first published in the *Berkhamsted Review* April 1990)

Heritage Open Days September 8th-19th 2021. **Jenny Sherwood** shall shortly be starting the initial preparations which need to be registered by the end of April. restrictions continue to be lifted; we anticipate a full complement of these ever-popular FREE local tours. Full details and how to book your space to follow.

We say goodbye to our Programme secretary **Chris Armstrong** who has been with us since May 2019.

We thank her for her involvement with our local history which as you know is her passion. She turns up snippets in her research that I knew nothing about keeping us on our toes. She loses herself for hours typing up all the old articles and trawling through the old newspapers online to record anything she finds there (such as the article above), as well as copy-typing the oral histories. Any changes in the town she photographs to keep old and new versions of the property. Long may her trusty laptop prod us into an interest in our past. Chris is kept busy with her involvement as secretary to the Berkhamsted U3A and we wish her all the best for the future.

Mary Casserley has teamed up with local steam-enthusiast **Rob Freeman** to produce '*Steaming through the Chilterns*' by delving into her famous grandfather's railway archive (**H C Casserley**). The book is a fascinating view of railway activities in the Home Counties. Social history merges with railway history as the record moves from an immaculate Royal Train in 1938 to the appalling winter scenes of 1947, the electrification of mainlines and the slow death of nostalgic rural branches.

This volume includes a section on Berkhamsted and Northchurch, but also includes other railway lines nearby and features lines around Princes Risborough, Rickmansworth, Chesham, Aylesbury, Watford, St Albans, and Potters Bar among others. There are also (despite the title) some rare views of early diesels and electrics which replaced steam.

£22 Available on-line post free from www.marycasserley.com or Waterstones.

Thank you to all for continuing your membership, we are pleased to report numbers remain at a healthy 260.

Mary Casserley
Chairman

www.berkhamsted-history.org.uk