



BERKHAMSTED LOCAL HISTORY AND MUSEUM SOCIETY

Registered Charity No. 803417

www.berkhamsted-history.org.uk

Founded 1950 as Berkhamsted & District Local History Society

Winter newsletter 2021

Hello everyone, and hearty greetings to our new members. We have 125 members and an average of 61 attendees at our talks, so thank you for your continued support.

Let's start with a touch of Christmas; seasonal musings from member **Colin Garratt** recalls his youthful postman duties: *"I used to enroll as a temporary postman to help with the Christmas rush 1958-1960. The Post Office took over the packing shed at Woolf's Nurseries in Vicarage Road, Potten End and brought up a sorting frame from Berkhamsted. The regular postman did the sorting, and a few Potten End boys did the deliveries as we knew all the streets and the names of the houses, a lot of which did not have street numbers. Of course, we had both parcels and letters. We asked for a van, but they only gave us heavy bicycles with a carrier on the front for the parcels which were sometimes stacked so high that one had to look round them rather than over the top. 1960 was the last year that PO deliveries were made on Christmas Day and the children all thought that we were Santa if we brought a parcel.*

If we were lucky, we were offered a mince pie or a glass of sherry to help us on our way. One could not go back to base with anything left in the mail bag. If one found a couple of soggy cards at the bottom one would put them in the letter box outside the Potten End post office and they would go round again. One would also have to remember that if Mrs S's sister sent the usual turkey, we were to deliver it to Mrs T where Mrs S was spending Christmas. All this for 2/3d per hour!"

Here is **Percy Birtchnell** on Christmas in the *Berkhamsted Review* Dec 1980 about the way Berkhamsted celebrated Christmas in years gone by: "Perhaps the most notable change is the extension of the midwinter holiday. For many people it was formerly limited to Christmas Day and Boxing Day. Few shops staged Christmas displays until mid-December, but parents and children started thinking about Christmas months ahead; many presents were home-made and very simple.

As soon as one Christmas was over, hundreds of people started thinking of the next, joining coal and clothing clubs, usually run by a church or chapel, and paying a few coppers weekly or fortnightly for a spending spree at Christmas

And there was a rather special sequel which was discontinued many years ago. After the watchnight service at St Peter's on the last day of the year, worshippers (and revelers!) would gather under the yew tree, and as the church clock struck twelve everybody joined hands and sang 'Auld Lang Syne'

Chris Armstrong has been typing up the hundreds of Percy Birtchnell articles from the Berkhamsted Review and this is an early one from December 1944:

The dialect of old Berkhamsted "*Oi most'n gen'ly alwis goo ter market on Saradee*"

No, that is not a new language, neither is it a small child's uncorrected spelling exercise. It is a fair sample of the most un-Basic English an old countryman on the Herts-Bucks border would have used many years ago. His great-grandson has not only dropped the accent but discarded such phrases as "I mostly generally always." Today he would say "*I usually go to market on Saturday.*"

But we are not only losing a quaint dialect. many homely local sayings have passed out of circulation, and, unfortunately, been replaced in some instances by Hollywood and Services slang, I have for some years collected old local words and sayings, and whilst no claim is made that their use was limited to our district - some were common to many parts of Herts - all deserve a place in a local glossary.

BIRDIES, NESTIES, BEASTIES

Beaver sometimes pronounced "bayver," is perhaps the best-known example. It means a mid-morning snack - "elevenes," we now call it.

Hummock meant a clumsy, incompetent fellow. For instance, an old gardener was complimented on his hedge-cutting and retorted, "Yes, 'tain't so bad. Squire won't let no 'ummock cut 'is 'edges." A similar word, *hommock*, denoted heavy boots - "Keep your 'ommocks off the onion bed."

Old people spoke of *Birdies*, *nesties* and *beasties*, and even gave proper names the same improper termination. I can recollect an old townsman saying, "He used to work at Easties saw-mill 'Ousen' was a popular version of houses. "Housen be better than land tonight" was a saying when the weather was bad. "Himself" was rendered '*issen*."

Anything from a shop was *boughten*; anyone feigning illness had "a touch of the *lurk*"; an unreliable person was "not much of a mucher." "Don't yorp so!" was an admonition for the talkative, and boasters were told to stop "craking on." *Slummocks* were untidy persons, and anything unpleasant was *unkid*. Strange, indescribable articles were *whin-whans*. *Tiggling along* meant playing about, and a *slocker* was a quiet walk - "We'm goin' for a slocker." "I'm in a '*otchall*'" meant that the speaker was in a hurry. A tramp was a *piker* - a name that may have originated in the turnpike days. Autumn was always referred to as "The Fall," an expression taken across the Atlantic by early settlers from the Home Counties and still used in the United States. A sovereign was a "thick 'un." "Arf a thick 'un" needs no explaining.

Fuzz and *fuzzen* are two variants of furze (or gorse) that have survived longer than most other local dialect words.

You can find all of Percy's articles on our website, along with a title index. To make it easier to read Chris is typing these into Word documents.

Your committee have been working hard on the digital archive data base: Including the Census data that **Ken Wallis** and **Bill Willett** have been working on for decades,

but also the Data for the Dotteridge and Norden Surveys. The Census work took hundreds of hours of work. Ken and Bill used to go down to the Metropolitan Archives and get printouts from microfiche. In recent years they have downloaded the Individual Household Schedules from Ancestry. These are for the Censuses 1851 – 1911. The 1921 data is due for release March 2022. So, you can say we have an 'Excel line' for every person in Berkhamsted 1851-1911. Bill has been using this to make a demographic study of Berkhamsted. (Berkhamsted includes Northchurch, Potten End, Frithsden etc.). There is a group who are doing the same for the Churchwarden's Accounts and **Chris Armstrong** will begin transcribing the Constables accounts.

Janice Boakes and her husband **John** have been steadfastly scanning our collection from DHT into the digital archive, again many hundreds of hours work. Since the end of September, they have scanned in 4700 photos, this equates to about 38% of our collection. John has now started digitising the slides and has completed 500 so far. If they can continue at this rate, they expect to have digitised most of the photos and slides by the end of March. While DH are allowing us this access we are using our capacity to digitise rather than add the digital images to the digital archives. We don't have capacity to upload the images and would welcome volunteers to support this activity which can be done in the comfort of your own home. Please contact Janice: janice.boakes@ntlworld.com We have a new scanner that can be used for larger items. John has also managed to use the stitching software that came with the old portable scanner to stitch together images to create digital images of very large items e.g., maps and school photos. The multi-media section of the digital archive now has all tape recordings uploaded and **Chris Armstrong** has done a fabulous job of typing up transcripts which will make the recordings easy to search going forward.



Adrian Barham-Chairman Berkhamsted Castle Trust writes:

This is the fragment of a "mappa mundi" (Latin for "map of the world"). It was discovered in the 1980s, hidden in the Hemel Hempstead Manorial Records where it had been cut up and recycled as a book cover. It is now held in the Duchy of Cornwall Archive. It is very significant for Berkhamsted because historians have researched its origins and

they think that it was probably commissioned sometime around 1286 by the Earl of Cornwall, Edmund of Almain (1249–1300). In the 13th century, Edmund was enormously rich and owned Berkhamsted Castle. He had certainly the wealth to procure a large mappa mundi which were very popular in the Middle Ages and were commissioned by royalty to show off their power and learnedness.

Edmund's uncle, King Henry III, had huge mappa mundi in his palaces at Winchester Castle and Westminster. The Palace of Westminster map was displayed in an exquisitely decorated room called the Painted Chamber. In the Middle Ages, Berkhamsted Castle also had a Painted Chamber in its royal palace. It is just possible that Edmund of Almain held court here in Berkhamsted at the administrative

centre of his Earldom of Cornwall. It also seems likely that as part of the spectacle of Edmund's wealth and power, he had a huge mappa mundi hanging in his Painted Chamber, so that anyone coming into his presence would have no doubt who they were dealing with – the richest man in England, the Earl of Cornwall himself.

Today, only a fragment of the Berkhamsted Mappa Mundi survives, showing Africa and its fantastic beasts. Nobody knows where the other parts are, but maybe one day they will be found. Read more: medievalist Dan Terkla explores the history and design of the Berkhamsted Mappa Mundi:

www.berkhamstedcastle.org.uk/objects/mappamundi/Hereford Cathedral

The Castle winter opening hours are 10-4. **Ken Wallis and Adrian Barham** are to be applauded for their steadfast service opening/closing the gates daily. At least they will have a day off on Christmas day!

Heartfelt thanks to **Sandra Jenkins** and **Jenny Sherwood** for their dedication organising this years Heritage Open Days which saw 280 attendees in total to these many FREE events. Thank you too to all our tour guides.

Norman Groves writes on The Society and Dacorum Heritage (previously Dacorum Heritage Trust)

In the summer Newsletter we reported that Dacorum Heritage is undergoing re-organisation moves that potentially seriously affects the BLHMS. DH is the body established with the core public-funded role to care for and catalogue heritage collections from several Dacorum borough history societies, including ourselves. This includes the Society's collection of about 30,000 photographs, documents and objects built up since 1950.

In the summer Dacorum Borough Council commissioned a Heritage Review to develop proposals to preserve heritage archives and artefacts in a financially sustainable way. The Review was submitted in September, but as yet the Council has released no results. We now understand that DH is discussing their future plans and the level of Council financial support for 2022/3 in January 2022.

The DH held an open meeting in November 2021, which outlined their future plans for re-branding, media, collection management, building upgrades and public engagement. You can read the presentation on the DH website. Recently there have been further (paid) staff and (volunteer) Board changes at DH, with five Directors leaving in the last 12 months.

At the open meeting reference was made, among other changes, to moving the external societies collections from Loan Agreements to Storage Agreements. This was proposed in 2020, but to date no draft details have been provided. Your committee fears that, taken together, the re-organisation plans of the DH as currently set out will potentially lead to a major diminution of the range and quality of heritage conservation services in the borough.

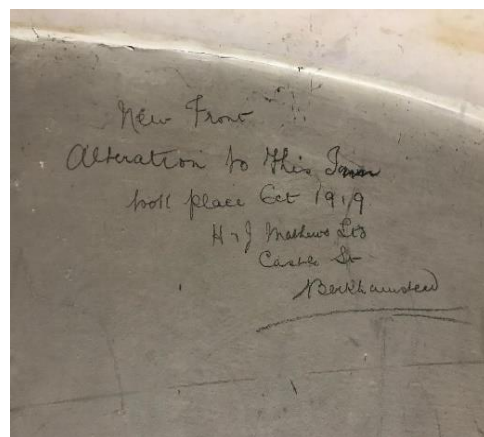
It is hoped that the Council will better support DH to tackle longstanding issues of very inadequate buildings, amount of space, and of reduced public funding. Improvements that benefit residents and the history societies will not come without Council commitment to the heritage of the Borough.

Working on our collection at the DH store (behind the Civic Centre) is still very restricted by Covid and lack of space. We are pleased that, after long negotiations since 2020 about 'museum rules', the BLHMS managed to agree a system to borrow-back items from our collection to digitise them, an essential part of expanding further our extensive public engagement services.



We have recently bought an OTC IOC Swagger stick from e-bay. Its metal crest is stamped "*Berkhamsted*". As DH is "full" and cannot take any acquisitions, I am keeping it safe at home. In November we did a presentation to the pupils of St Mary's school, Northchurch who are doing a project on Berkhamsted in WW1, so it proved a good prop.

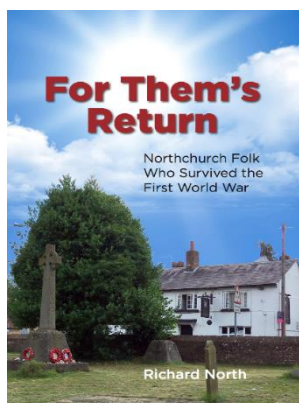
James Moir reports on the newly refurbished Crystal Palace Pub: These photos were provided by the Site Manager who was asked if there was any sign of the original cast iron frontage/fanlight left - as you can see, the front wall was entirely rebuilt by Noel Rew/Mathews in 1919 - as pencilled on the plasterwork. So, the myth that the original cast iron frontage was intact does need putting to bed once and for all. What clearly does survive is (most of) the barrel vault over the former club room - which will remain concealed in the current conversion. We wish the new owners of **The Big Smoke** every success.



BOOKS: **Colin Heathcote** has written a book "**No Fires in Tring**". Despite the title it's all set in Berkhamsted, Tring and the surrounding areas in the late 60's/early 70's. Colin tells his reminiscences in the guise of a novel; but every story in the book is true. You will recognise names, places, and some of you will remember the stories as reported in the paper. Who remembers Cliff Richard coming to, and singing in

Northchurch for example? It's all in this highly readable, factual book. After working for Television Audience Measurement (TAM) Ltd in Berkhamsted, Colin joined the Berkhamsted Gazette as a cub reporter in 1966. At that time, he was living at home at The Rear Lodge in the grounds of Ashlyns School where his mum was the Bursar. The title refers to a paragraph of copy that could be used to fill a gap on the front page of the Tring and District News whenever necessary

Only available from Amazon link: <https://www.amazon.com/No-Fires-Tring-Colin-Heathcote/dp/151917456X>



'For Them's Return': Northchurch Folk Who Survived the First World War, by your committee treasurer **Richard North**, tells the story of the servicemen and women who went off to WW1 and returned. It follows on from his earlier book, 'For Them's Sake', co-authored with Ray Smith, which told the stories of the men named on the Northchurch War memorials. Using material from numerous archives, newspaper reports from the time and information supplied the servicemen's families, Richard now tells the stories of those who went off to war but who seldom spoke of their experiences on their return. It covers those living in the Northchurch Electoral Parish which at the time included Northchurch village, Cow Roast, and the eastern part of Berkhamsted as far as Bourne End, Winkwell, and Potten End.

For Them's Return: Northchurch Folk Who Survived the First World War is published by New Generation Publishing and can be purchased online from Waterstones.co.uk and Amazon.co.uk in both hardback (£16.99) and paperback (£10.99) versions. ISBN 978-1-80369-090-2 (hardback) and ISBN 978-1-80369-089-6 (paperback).

For Them's Sake: Northchurch Folk Through Two World War, also published by New Generation Publishing, is still available online from Waterstones.co.uk and Amazon.co.uk in both hardback (£17.99) and paperback (£12.99) versions. ISBN 978-1-78719-392-5 (hardback) and ISBN 978-1-78719-391-8 (paperback)

We also carry stocks of the following new publications: Berkhamsted in WW1, Men of Berkhamsted - Lest we forget, The Devils' Own, Berkhamsted - A Gateway to the Chilterns, Berkhamsted – A Celebration and Miscellany, Berkhamsted Quiz Book, Postcards of Berkhamsted and Steaming Through the Chilterns. All at greatly reduced prices. Contact Mary 01442 824362 for details and free local delivery.

Our December talk on Weds 15th Dec 8pm is "Cribs, Cards Christingles". Complimentary drinks and nibbles will be served from 7.15pm in the Town Hall

We wish you all a merry and healthy Christmas and look forward to resuming our talks which resume on Wednesday January 19th when local researcher **Carol Fulton** talks to us about researching house histories.

Mary Casserley-chairman BLH&MS

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Your 2022-23 renewal subs slip is being sent with the newsletter. Your committee voted against raising subs, which continue to be fantastic value for money: 7 talks, 3 newsletters, and a copy of the *Chronicle* at £10.