



BERKHAMSTED LOCAL HISTORY AND MUSEUM SOCIETY

Registered Charity No. 1210846 www.berkhamsted-history.org.uk
Founded 1950 as Berkhamsted & District Local History Society

BLH&MS Autumn newsletter 2025

75th Anniversary meeting

Our first meeting of the season was a celebration of our 75th anniversary. Members who attended were treated to a glass of wine and a very special cake. It was a great turn out, with just over 100 people in attendance.



Mary and Berkhamsted Mayor, Councillor Susan Jordan, cutting the cake.



Bill Willett and Norman Groves read some wonderful passages from books, written by Richard Mabey, describing growing up in Berkhamsted in the 1950's.



We were then treated to some personal memories of growing up in Berkhamsted in the 1940's, 50's and 60's with Giles Clark and Mynerva Altman talking to Peter Morgan.

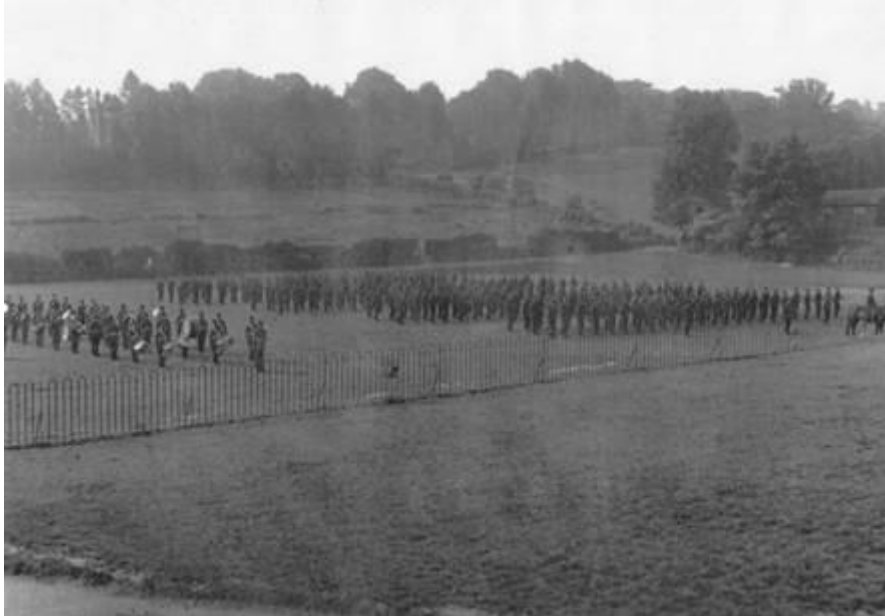
Giles told us about growing up next to the once impressive Berkhamsted Place, as well as about his father, after whom the Charles Clark noticeboard in town is named. He also lamented some of the buildings that have been lost in Berkhamsted since his childhood.

Mynerva was born in Berkhamsted just before the outbreak of World War II and provided her memories of wartime rationing, her father's work in building and then running the food storage depot by the Grand Union Canal in Beggars Lane and then, intriguingly, her memories of a very special visit to Butts Meadow. Mynerva recalled as a young child being told to remain inside the family home in Kings Road, as some important people were visiting Butts Meadow to inspect troops. She saw Winston Churchill and King George VI arrive in separate cars to inspect the troops, although she did not recognise the King until after he had left as she thought he would be wearing his crown!

This is the first time anyone on the BLHMS committee had heard of this visit to the town, so if anyone can throw more light upon this, we would love to hear from you. Separate enquiries have yielded nothing so far.



The picture below shows a parade at Butts Meadow, which has written on the reverse 'Parade at Butts Meadow 1943', was this possibly the Black Watch, 51st Highland Division. Was this the occasion of the King's and Prime Minister's visit? We would love to hear your wartime memories, as part of our 'Memories of Berkhamsted', so please contact us on memories@BLHMS.onmicrosoft.com and we will arrange to record these for posterity.



Heritage Open Days 2025

It was another successful year for BLHMS Heritage Open Days. The theme this year was 'Architecture' and we hosted 13 different walks and tours over the course of 10 days, with 24 different events being held. The ethos behind Heritage Open Days is that everything is free to attend and these events sometimes involve sites /areas that are not normally open to the public. So, a big thank you to all of our guides for the amount of research they did and the interesting walks and tours they then delivered, all without remuneration.

There is always something new to learn about our historic town and, as usual, most of our walks/ tours were popular with some 'selling out' almost immediately. Over 400 people participated in these events. Places were booked using Eventbrite UK with additional details available on the Heritage Open Days website. This annual event is Europe- wide, with hundreds of different activities held all over the UK.

We had 4 new events in Berkhamsted this year to cover the 'Architecture' theme:- Ashridge House and the Curse of the Bridgewaters; The Lost pubs of Northchurch and The History of Berkhamsted in 10 buildings. We also held a new event, which was an exhibition of photographs of 'The Lost Buildings of Berkhamsted', housed in the south transcript of St Peter's Church. Many thanks to St Peter's for facilitating this.

Again, we had very positive responses to these new events and some constructive comments, which will all be taken into account when planning next year. Thank you for all of these.

Following this year's theme, a previously held walk, specifically about local architect Charles Henry Rew, took place twice, courtesy of James Moir and Janice Boakes. This walk involved walking through the town, pointing out and explaining the magnificent buildings of Charles Henry Rew.

There was also a very interesting and informative tour/ walk around Rectory Lane Cemetery, during which the graves of local architects and builders were pointed out. The links between various local families was fascinating.

Berkhamsted Castle Trust was also very successful with its tours of the castle, which included more in-depth information about some of the inhabitants of the castle, as well as the buildings that once graced this. Eight tours took place and all were sold out, resulting in 120 people visiting. Thanks again to the guides, Bernard Edwards and Patrick Emery, for leading these.

We very much look forward to next year's Heritage Open Days.

Saving Castle Fields - £500k - I'm In!



Our Challenge

With the help of an interest free loan from a generous individual, Berkhamsted Castle Trust has purchased fields overlooking the Castle to save them from development and make sure they can remain an open and accessible public space for all the citizens' of Berkhamsted – for all time.

We are asking for everyone's help to raise the £500,000 toward the repayment of the loan. Any contribution is welcome – be that helping to drive the campaign forward or donating money or running events that raise money – as we have only two years to do this. We need £10,000 every two weeks to hit our target – a big ask but a small price to pay for this beautiful space.

Our Heritage

The fields are of great historical significance for our town, being the site of the great siege of 1216 prompted by the annulment of Magna Carta by King John. They were also a part of the medieval Royal Deer Park – one of the best in England - that brought many Kings and Queens to our Castle. Berkhamsted Castle Trust aims to reconnect the Castle with the past as part of its development strategy over the next few years. This will allow greater access for people to roam, for biodiversity to flourish and for the well-being of our growing town.

Our Community

The fields are a key part of a jigsaw in re-engaging the Castle with another of our biggest assets – our local community. Owning the fields gives Berkhamsted Castle Trust the platform to widen the experience that a visit to the Castle can provide and will keep this beautiful natural space open and accessible to all.

Please ACT now – we haven't got long!

To keep the fields, we need to repay the loan. You can donate now on the Berkhamsted Castle Trust website. You can get involved with events, market stalls, and other fundraising activities. Perhaps you have design skills, or want to run our social media account, or are happy to encourage high net worth contributions – we need you!

Look out for a great programme of events, but most of all you can just tell everyone you know that we have this window of opportunity and that we need any contribution, big or small, to hang onto this wonderful green space.

Thank you!

For further information please visit the Berkhamsted Castle Trust website: www.berkhamstedcastle.org.uk or e-mail:

james.moir@berkhamstedcastle.org.uk

Berkhamsted Castle Trust

A Charitable Incorporated Organisation

Registered Charity (England & Wales) no. 1176286



**BERKHAMSTED
CASTLE TRUST**

Membership update

We welcomed 29 new members, bringing our total membership to 226.

Railway 200th anniversary

The Stockton and Darlington Railway opened on 27th September 1825. It marked the beginning of the modern railway era, with 2025 marking the bicentenary celebrations, known as **Railway 200**. These celebrations showcased the remarkable history, as well as the importance of rail currently and in the future. Events and initiatives throughout 2025 aimed to engage the public with the pioneering history of this transport revolution.

This was the world's first public railway to carry fee-paying passengers using steam locomotives. It was a groundbreaking innovation that transformed transport, travel and time, with the introduction of timetables and timekeeping leading to the standardisation of time to GMT across Great Britain, in place of localised time, in 1840.

The success of the S&DR sparked a global railway revolution, with railways rapidly spreading across Britain and the world, connecting people, and industries. As our Victorian local historian Henry Nash wrote *“The railway bought with it a mixture of good and evil; it came as a boon to physical necessities of man, but morally it left some terrible desolation behind it”* and yet *“The crowded trains of passengers and goods aroused the energies of manufacturers and tradesmen”*.

Local industries, such as Coopers Chemical Works, were located within easy distance of the station and the railway essentially changed the way we worked and lived. Berkhamsted station opened on October 16th, 1837, as part of the London and Birmingham Railway, with two tracks, initially to and from Euston, but within only a few weeks it was possible to travel to Bletchley and within a year to Birmingham. Initially three up and three down trains stopped on weekdays, with first, or ‘mixed’ options, but, with ‘mixed’ also taking first or second class, this required four scales of fares. For example, a single fare from Berkhamsted to London was 8/- 1st class (4 people in a carriage) or 7/6d (1st class 6 in a carriage). Second class coaches were open to the sides and cost 6/6 and third 5/-. And you thought today’s ticket prices were complicated! The fares were considered high as even a skilled workman earned only £1 week. On Sundays there were two trains each way to London with anyone missing the 9.20am having to wait ten hours for the next train. The service took 80 minutes up to Euston, but 110 minutes down!

The original station, as shown in the engraving below, was in a classical style and remarkably you can still see the bricked-up entrance to this at the rear of the narrow bridge in front of the Crystal Palace. A new station was built in the current location in 1875, which, along with Harrow

and Wealdstone, is one of only two intact architectural Victorian stations on the LNWR line still in their original form, something we mustn't take for granted. Even though the original 1837 station was only demolished in the 1930's we at BLHMS have yet to uncover a full photograph of it.



Acquisition



Our latest acquisition is a medal awarded to JH Hodges for 'special merit' at the 1896 Industrial and Fine Arts Exhibition, organised by the Berkhamsted Mechanics Institute. That year marked the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Institute. There had already been successful exhibitions in 1870, 1878 and 1886. In November 1895 the committee voted on who should be asked to open the event. They proposed, in the following order: the Prince of Wales, the Duchess of Teck, Lord Rothchild, Hon. Walter Rothchild and Earl Brownlow. By February 1896 they had received a decline from Lord Rothchild, who had, in turn, asked the Hon. Walter Rothchild, but without receiving a reply. On the 13th May 1896 the exhibition was opened by Lady Salisbury, wife of the Prime Minister and chatelaine of Hatfield House. *Did she know that she was at least 6th on the list?!*

On a beautiful spring day, Lady Salisbury alighted from the 1.10pm train from Euston. She was accompanied by her son, Lord Hugh Cecil. They were met on the platform by Mr A Smith-Dorrian and, outside the station, by the E company of the Bedfordshire (Vol) Regiment under the command of Major Foster, with the regimental band playing a selection of music. What a great start.

The proceeds of the exhibition were to raise funds for the "Henry Nash Library fund". The intention was to invest the profits and use the interest to restock the library. There were newspaper reports about previous exhibitions listing all the winners, but we can find nothing about the 1896 exhibition until July, when it was reported that "We regret to hear that the recent Arts and Industrial Exhibition resulted in a loss to the Institute".

So who was JH Hodges and what was his 'merit' for? Research shows there was a JH Hodges living at 2 Cowper Road, who was a School Master working for Herts County Council. The society holds the minutes of the Mechanics Institute and a Mr. Hodges ran art classes for them. We can therefore assume that it was for a piece of art. Maybe someone in Berkhamsted still has that winning item?

Enquiries

We continue to reply to enquires, many from outside of the UK. We were recently contacted by a Dutch gentleman, who was interested to know what Dutch soldiers were doing at Ashridge in 1943. He shared some wonderful images of some of the men.



We were able to share information from “Country Women at War” by Ruth, Lady Craufurd. She explained how “by far and away our happiest times were spent when the Dutch Princess Irene Regiment arrived. They were one and all parted from their families, who were in Holland under German domination. They could have no contact with their dear ones, not even knowing whether they were alive or dead, or worse still, in German prison camps, so we took them to our hearts”. She invited the Dutch officers to her home, Brightwood, nearly every Sunday and some of the men visited regularly in the week. Many years after the war, Lady Craufurd and her husband visited Captain Jan Beelaerrts van Blockland at his home in Holland.

The image on the left shows Jacobus van Rij (Jack in English) on the right. He was born in Gouderak on 31st May 1920 and survived the Normandy landings. He died in Ouderkerk aan den IJssel on 15th April 2010.



Mary Casserley, Chairman