



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 Winter newsletter 2025/6

Membership update

We have 9 new members since the last newsletter, bringing our total membership to 235. A big welcome to you all.

French Radio coming to Berkhamsted?

In October we received an e-mail: *'We are a team from the French public radio (France Inter), planning to do a report on Charles de Gaulle in England, and for this we would like to know if it would be possible to visit the house where his family lived in 1941/1942. I think it was in the Rodinghead House, located at Little Gaddesden. I don't know if you can help us contacting the owners of the house?'*

We did as they asked and contacted the owner of the house and he was only too pleased to help with the proposed piece about the very famous former occupant of Rodinghead. The people from French Radio are proposing a visit to our town in September and, as well as visiting Rodinghead, we have suggested they should visit other nearby locations associated with him, such as Potten End, where he took the salute at the Home Guard parade in November 1941 and the former Catholic Church in Park Street, where he worshipped.

Rodinghead is significant enough to the legacy of Charles de Gaulle that medals have been produced in France, commemorating de Gaulle's time in England, including an image of the house (see below).

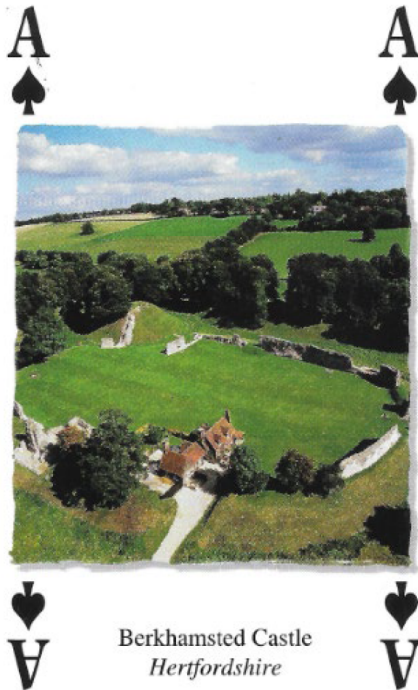


If they have time, perhaps we can show our Gallic visitors Berkhamsted Castle, besieged and captured by Prince Louis (later Louis VIII) of France in 1216, as well as acting as a prison for his successor, King John II, 140 years later, after the Battle of Poitiers. No doubt they would wish to visit an English pub and where better than The Kings Arms, where the French King-in-exile, Louis XVIII, regularly interrupted his journey to and from Hartwell House, as much to the visit the Landlord's daughter, Mary 'Polly' Page (described in The Times as his 'sprightly, chatting entertainer'), as to change his horses!

Heritage Open Days 2026

We are already starting to plan for Heritage Open Days (HODs), which take place between 11th and 20th September in 2026. The theme for this year is “**Everyday Histories**,” a dedicated focus on the extraordinary stories of ordinary people and the working lives that have shaped our local communities - from factory floors to kitchen counters, school desks to canal wharves, and all the corners of a grand estate.

Would you like to open your house, garden, business or place of worship as part of this festival of history? If so, contact admin@blhms.on Microsoft.com.



Castle Fields – message from Berkhamsted Castle Trust

With **20 months** remaining to pay back the loan of **£500,000** that enabled Berkhamsted Castle Trust to buy the fields, we're pleased to report that we've now reached **£71,016**.

There are lots of events planned to help reach our goal. We now have an amazing and still growing team of 14 runners signed up for the Berko half marathon and five-mile fun run on 1st March. If you would like to support their efforts, please go to <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/castlefieldsflyers>.

We've also developed a pack of information to answer any questions around how the funds raised are managed, plans to achieve the target and what will happen if we don't. If you, your family or neighbours would like to support us, we will happily share these details. Please contact James Moir at james.moir@berkhamstedcastle.org.uk

The playing card shown here was recently purchased as an individual card from eBay, does anyone know more about it? Was it a one-off, or part of a pack? It does have a wonderful view of Castle Fields, behind the castle.

As a reminder of the significance of the fields and the importance of saving them from development:

- These beautiful fields are part of a unique landscape of great historical significance to Berkhamsted.

- The fields will remain a bio-diverse open and undeveloped green space, beneficial to the future well-being of all Berkhamsted citizens and visitors.
- Footpaths will remain accessible to the public at all times, combined with some light stewardship and potential grazing.
- The fields are a key part of a jigsaw in re-connecting the Castle, the town's greatest asset, with the local community.
- Owning the fields will give the Castle Trust the platform to further interpret the heritage experience the castle offers to its visitors.

Chrysaline Limited

Many of us will have heard of Coopers/ Wellcome, East & Son Timber Merchants and Outspan, as businesses that operated in Berkhamsted, but until December 2025, very few of us knew of Chrysaline Limited, or the important role it played in our modern Christmas traditions.

On 10th December 2025, Dave Allen went some way to correcting that situation, when he gave a fascinating talk about his former employers, at our monthly meeting.

Mr Beverley Pick owned a design centre in central London post- Second World War and was also chairman of Chrysaline Limited, which initially used a soft, non-hardening plastic opaque material to make items, including lampshades and tables. The company was based in Timson's Yard, where the Waitrose main car park is today.

Beverley Pick was a true entrepreneur, who travelled to trade fairs around the world looking for inspiration. He thought London was very drab in the 1950's and wanted to produce a spectacle that would change this. Fortunately, the Regent Street Traders Association was like-minded and was looking for a way to encourage shoppers. Until the end of the 1950's Christmas decorations in streets were simply bunting and multi-coloured lights hanging from streetlamps and buildings.

Mr Pick proposed that decorations be hung across Regent Street and suggested families would travel from miles away just to see the lights. So, in 1959, Chrysaline manufactured 25 chandeliers to hang above Regent Street, each with 684 lamps. They were the sensation Mr Pick had anticipated.

The rest, as they say, is history, leading to displays all over the country, from neighbouring Oxford Street, to Glasgow and the Blackpool Illuminations as we know them today. Most people who visited 'Ashridge House Illuminated' over Christmas would not have been aware that were it not for a company based in Berkhamsted, the evolution of such displays would have started much later.



Christmas lights leaving Eddy Street on the slow journey to Central London

Acquisitions

We have been gifted the schoolboy journal of Charlton George Lane, who was the rector of Little Gaddesden from 1869 until his death in 1892. He was educated on the Isle of Wight, then at Westminster School and Christ Church College, Oxford. He found a love and aptitude for cricket from an early age and at Westminster played in the First XI and was captain in 1855. At Oxford he was known as the Admirable Crichton, the sobriquet of a 16th Century genius and athlete, because of his versatility in sport. He rowed three times for Oxford against Cambridge, played four years in the University cricket XI and was captain in 1860. He also won the university racquets competition and played for five years in the famed Gentlemen v Players match. Additionally, he was asked to captain the first English XI proposed to be taken to Australia, but this tour never took place.

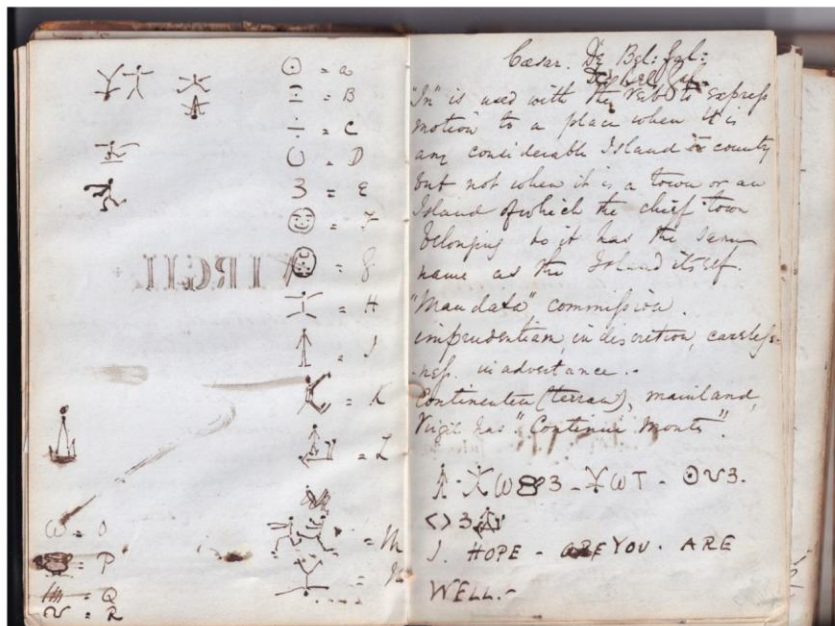
Charlton was also a capable artist, who carried his satchel everywhere he went so that he could recapture a scene he particularly liked. He fell in with the pre-Raphaelites and made friends with John Everett Millais. As you will see, his artistic talent was evident from an early age.

While at Oxford he made the acquaintance of both Earl Brownlow and the Prince of Wales, who both offered him a living when he became ordained. He chose to serve as curate at Great Witley, Edlesborough and Little Gaddesden, before becoming Rector of the latter for the last 22 years of his life.

The donator of the journal purchased it on a bookstall in Farrington Road in the late 1960's, but, at the time, she had no idea there was a local connection. What attracted her to purchase the journal was the wonderful doodles of a Victorian schoolboy, one of which is shown below. The journal is dated July 1853 and was mostly used for Greek and Latin translations, when the 17-year-old Charlton was at Westminster as a day boy. He also used it to practice his signature. It gives a unique insight into Victorian life and we are honoured to be able to add the journal to our collection.



On another page he has created a code presumably so that he could send secret messages to his friends.



For more information, please see Jenny Sherwood's article about him in the Chronicle XVIII 2021 entitled 'Charlton George Lane (1836-1892) - A Cricketing Artist and Rector of Little Gaddesden.'

Our next meeting – 11th February 2026 at 20:00 - Berkhamsted Civic Centre

Paul Rabbitts will be talking to us about how Berkhamsted developed by way of 50 buildings in the town. Paul has written a series of books about towns across our area, based on their buildings and Berkhamsted is now included.

Mary Casserley
Chairman, Berkhamsted Local History and Museum Society