

The 60s (9th Sept 2009)

The sixties keep getting written about as I suppose those who were there appear to have the attitude that if you remember it, you weren't there. The latest one I've heard about is by Jenny Diski and entitled 'The Sixties' - catchy or what? They all seem to start from the time the author started at university and promptly got into the drug culture and then generally go into great detail on how their lives at university happened, what events they attended and who they roomed with. I get the feeling that not a lot of education went on either then or even now.

Being, (a most who know me) bitter and twisted and not being stupid enough to waste my time going to university, I thought we ought to start putting the record straight as far as our little town is concerned. The sixties in Berkhamsted brought big changes. Most of the town centre was knocked down and housing going up everywhere. This was the time when the railway was being electrified, commuter housing going up and the town expanding in an effort to catch up with the rapidly expanding new town of Hemel Hempstead.

You are going to have to forgive my recollections in some areas as I got hit by a bus in 1982 which has resulted in gaps due to a bump on the bonce, so let's start with the obvious. Durrents Estate was started just after I came to the town and, naturally, my parents moved into one of the first council houses (remember council houses?). Normal schools for us ruff raff were Chapel Street and Gossoms End, then to Park View or Victoria and then to the 'bi-lateral comprehensive' school called Ashlyns at the top of Chesham Road (this was the main road to Chesham). Choice was not high on anyones list.

In the early 50's most of the town had gas street lighting, a Sainsburys, the major retailer was the Co-op. Most roads had small grocers on the corner or little groups like Gossoms End, kittsbury Parade, Gravel Path, REX Parade and the Hall Walk. We had a lot of pubs, two cinemas, the KA Hall and the Town Hall. Being on the main road between London and Birmingham, the High Street was somewhat busy. Indeed, my grandfather was a chauffeur before the war, and I can recall him telling me that you always knew when you got the Berkhamsted as the roads were terrible and we had traffic lights (uncommon outside London before the war).

Before we get to the sixties, what else sticks in my mind? Well, the High Street had nasty yellow street lighting installed in the early 50's. You couldn't walk down the High Street without having to stop and natter to at least half a dozen people. Sharlands was the alternative to the Co-op, Harts and Norman Clarke were the shops for TV, radio and other electrical bits as an alternative the Co-op. On a personal front, I recall the school dinners being served at St Peters Hall, after a long march from Victoria, playing hop-scotch on the pavement in Holliday Street, the 'rec' in George Street, the paddling pool on the moor, falling into the lock at Ravens Lane (mention in local press and dad got a bill from British Waterways for 'saving' me), the slate to write on at Chapel Street school and the milk being warmed on the heating pipes at Victoria (along with the cold outside toilets). Let's have a go at remembering just what did happen in the town after the war.