

WOKINGHAM
Bowling
BECHES MANOR

WHAT happens now about historic Beches Manor Hotel? Listed for preservation as a building of historic or architectural merit, it was gutted by a mysterious fire last June. At their meeting last week, Wokingham Council learned that their Clerk had had to intervene to put a stop to demolition of the building. Now it stands partly pulled down.

500 years old

BECHES MANOR is one of Wokingham's oldest houses. Originally, it was part of the manor of Sonning and, at the end of the 15th century, was held by William Whitlock.

It is believed that the name of the estate was derived from the De la Beche family and came into possession of the Whitlocks through the marriage of John Whitlock to Agnes, heir of Robert De la Beche.

The initials "R. and E. H." and the date, 1624, were carved on the main door of the Manor. This was believed to represent Richard Harrison and his wife.

Not all the building was of historic interest, however. The owner, Mrs. M. P. Morris, pointed out that since her husband took over the hotel in 1934, there have been considerable improvements and addition to the old building.

But the owner, Mrs. M. Morris, of 11 Reading Road, Wokingham, told a reporter this week that the old building had started caving in, and that that was why she had called in demolition experts.

"The clerk was successful in stopping demolition work but the building has been rased almost down to ground level," the chairman of the Plans and Town Planning Committee, Coun. A. G. Skedgel, told the council last week. "We are now keeping a very close watch on the site."

Added the Mayor, Dr. P. P. Pigott, "The matter is now out of our hands, and is before the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. We have done everything we possibly could."

But have they?
"I live about 100 yards from the site," claimed Mrs. Morris. "It would not have hurt one of them to come and advise me what to do. It is all a little bit vague to me."

There was no intention of demolishing the hotel, said Mrs. Morris.

Some months ago, part of the roof caved in, and she called in demolition experts to advise her.

Then during the recent cold spell, there was a further collapse.

"The whole structure is very unsafe," she said. "The police have told me to put up danger signs, but the children ignore them and play among the ruins."

Mrs. Morris was also worried about the possibilities of a further collapse blocking the small side road adjoining the hotel site, which leads to Wokingham Bowling Club.

Commented Mr. E. C. Plumridge, secretary of the Wokingham Bowling Club, "At one point our road is less than 10 yards from the building. If it had fallen in our direction, the road would have been blocked."

Final comment from the Town Clerk, Mr. L. Goddard Smalley: "There are several courses open to the Ministry. The building was scheduled to be preserved. They could even make the owner rebuild it!"

Reading Standard.
19.1.62.



This is all that remained of the Beches Manor Hotel when this "Reading Standard" photograph was taken last weekend. In the centre foreground of the picture stands a bulldozer with mounds of rubble beside it. The old chimney stack is still intact above the shattered walls and gaping roof.

BLAZE

Four brigades race to Wokingham

POLICE and firemen were combing the charred ruin of a 17th-century hotel yesterday in search of a clue to the cause of a fierce fire which gutted the Beches Manor Hotel in Reading Road, Wokingham.

Shortly before midnight on Wednesday, several emergency calls sent Berkshire firemen racing to the hotel, which was reported to be blazing from end to end. Onlookers—watching one of the biggest fires in the town's history—saw flames shooting through the roof as the first machine from Wokingham arrived on the scene.

The roof collapsed while firemen were still in the blazing building, but they escaped serious injury and managed to prevent the flames from spreading to outbuildings. By this time, machines from Reading, Bracknell and Crowthorne had joined the Wokingham brigade.

Three-quarters of the rooms, and roof of the building were destroyed, but most of the furnishings had been removed some time previously. Fortunately the hotel was unoccupied at the time of the fire—the building and grounds were to be sold shortly for building purposes, and it is quite likely that the hotel would have been pulled down.

When seen by a *Reading Standard* reporter, the owner, Mrs. M. P. Morris, who lives in a bungalow a few yards from the hotel, said: "I have no comment to make at this stage, although I can tell you it was to be sold."

Part of the hotel dates back to 1624, additions having been made later. Most of the rooms were oak-panelled.

Until a few months ago, the hotel was occupied by a number of old people.

Car overturns after collision

FIVE-YEAR-OLD Colin Bailey and his mother, Mrs. Sylvia Bailey (32) were detained in Battle Hospital after an accident to the car in which they were riding at the junction of London Street and London Road, Reading, on Sunday night. After a collision with another car, driven by Mr. John A. M. Powell, of The Bungalow, Lamb's Lane, Spencers Wood, the Baileys' vehicle overturned.

Mr. Kenneth R. Bailey (32), of Hemel Hempstead, Herts, and his son, Robert (8) were both shocked but not detained. Mrs. Bailey and Colin sustained head injuries. Mr. Powell was unhurt.

offices "a disgrace"

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CASH STOLEN

Thieves who entered the Union Street shop of Charles Eighteen and Sons Ltd, during Monday night, are believed to have used the scaffolding erected after a recent fire to gain access to the first floor of the premises. They took £12 in cash.



The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh as they drove on to the day of Royal Ascot

Seventy had a home for that puppy...

REMEMBER our appeal last week for someone to give a home to the cross-bred sheep dog puppy due to be destroyed? RSPCA Inspector Charles Hardwick received over 70 calls from readers who jumped to answer the SOS. As a result, the dog now has a good home. So, too, have four puppies in similar circumstances.

Inspector Colin Platt was also inundated with calls, offering homes to the four abandoned kittens, found in a cardboard box by the river at Tilehurst.

So great was the response, that he has placed 16 kittens and has promises of homes for others.

SHOT GIRL: MORE INQ

"QUITE a lot more inquiries have been made in connection with the Streatley shooting case, the police said yesterday when the inquest was open to the girl who was found shot at Coc

She was Miss Patricia Anne Harrison, from Birmingham. She was taken to Battle Hospital, but found to be dead.

W/Cdr Howard Larkin, proprietor of the Thames Bank Nursing Home, gave evidence of identification.

He said Miss Harrison had been employed as a housekeeping assistant for two months. He last saw her alive at 3.30 pm on June 7, in

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All that remains of the hotel is a blackened shell.

Beware—adders more plentiful this year

BY-ELECTION