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## THE BLACK PRINCE'S HAPPY HUNTING GROUND

# Berkhamsted Park

WHAT is the future of Berkhamsted Park? Will the rolling grassland which has so far escaped "development" continue to survive in all its green loveliness?

No one appears to know the answers to these important questions. But if the Park is further reduced in size, it is poor consolation to know that a centuries-long process will be continued.

Little, precious little, still remains of the Black Prince's deer park which extended from Coldharbour to the Bulbourne, and included the Moor, the Sports Ground, and water-meadows now isolated by the railway and canal. The fishing rights were valuable, but the densely-wooded hillsides were the chief attraction of the Park, giving the deer good cover and their pursuers good sport. Hunting, in fact, was responsible for the creation of the Park.

### Out of the Common

Until Norman days all the cultivated fields were on the south side of the Bulbourne valley; opposite, beyond the Castle, stretched miles of waste or common land. It was to preserve the game for his own sport that the lord of the manor enclosed a large and the most easily accessible part of the waste land, but many years were to elapse before the park was properly fenced in. It was difficult to know whether one was in the Park or on the Common, for both were wild, heavily-timbered survivors of the ancient Chiltern forest, teeming with game and providing valuable feeding grounds for the townsmen's herds of swine. To avoid his lordship's protected area the commoners had to go farther afield—but not too far, for towards the end of the 13th century Ashridge Park took another large slice out of the waste land.

A new official came into being—the parker. In 1302, we learn, "William called Hereford of Berchamstede"

was given custody of the "wood, park and warren," receiving 5½d. a day, a robe costing 10s. a year, and all the windfallen timber. He was responsible for the preservation of game. Hay, it is interesting to learn, was bought specially to feed the deer during the winter.

In the Black Prince's time the parker and other estate officers were generally men who had served with the Prince in the French wars. As the late

### By "BEORCHAM"

Mr. G. H. Whybrow's excellent "History of Berkhamsted Common" tells us, in 1346 Robert le Parker received the office "for good service to the King and the Prince," and was in charge of both the Park and the Common. He received 2d. a day, less than half the payment made to his predecessor, and he wore "a robe of the livery of the Prince's craftsmen." Robert le Parker had scarcely commenced his duties when he was commanded to choose "six good companion archers, the best he could find," and hasten with them to Dover; but a few months later he resumed his peaceful occupation at Berkhamsted. In August, 1347, he was ordered to take "a buck of grease" [a fat buck] to the Abbot of St. Albans, a relative of whom was about to commence his studies at "Oxenford" and evidently wished to start well by making a handsome present to the head of his college. Robert le Parker's successor was Richard Raven, doubtless a kinsman of John Raven, the Black Prince's "Esquire" at Crecy, and the subject of one of the oldest brasses in St. Peter's Church.

### Present for the Rector

Berkhamsted Park was not completely fenced in until 1353, when the Black Prince cut down and sold beeches on Berkhamsted Common to buy oak palings for the Park, the hedges being repaired "as well as possible" until the new fences could be put up. Destruction of timber proceeded apace and hastened the transformation of the forested Common to what is now, in every sense of the term, an open space. Hundreds of beeches were cut down, the majority being sold to defray the expense of repairing the Castle. The Black Prince also presented a number of trees to his friends and neighbours, including Sir William Wenlok, "parson of the church of St. Peter," who received three beeches for fuel at Christmas, 1351—a most warming and seasonable gift.

For generations Berkhamsted Park provided good hunting, and deer were still numerous in the days of the greatest of all royal huntsmen, the Stuarts. In 1616, when Charles I was Prince of Wales, he visited his old tutor, Dr. Murray, at Berkhamsted Place, and spent the afternoon hunting

in the Park, killing "a fat buck, which he gave to those the townsmen that attended him." Then, as in more recent times, poaching was rife, and we may be sure that wily Berkhamstedians were as active as their neighbours at Ashridge, who, "with greyhounds, mongrels, setting dogs, guns, trammells, tunnells, nets, and other engines, contrary to the statutes," destroyed "hare, pheasant, partridge, heron, and other wilde fowle."

Two years after Prince Charles' visit, 300 acres of the Common, in the Coldharbour locality, were enclosed and added to Berkhamsted Park; but in 1627 the area of the Park was reduced from 1,132 to 375 acres, and Dr. Murray's widow was authorised to use the disparted land for agricultural purposes. It was soon found that the Coldharbour enclosure was not so suitable for tillage as had been expected; the land was found to be "worne out of harte," stony, cold, and "squeasy." No doubt Stony Bottom received its name at that period.

### The Brownlow Regime

More and more land was taken for farming until only a relatively small area, below Berkhamsted Place, continued to merit the name of Park. An interesting point is that the famous avenue of limes to the mansion figures in a print dated 1724.

In 1862 the Park was purchased from the Duchy of Cornwall by the second Earl Brownlow, in whose family the vast Ashridge Estate, stretching from Studham to the Bulbourne, remained until 1924. In anticipation of the thwarted enclosure of Berkhamsted Common in 1866, Earl Brownlow intended to make a road which would have followed the line of the present footpath through the Park; instead he constructed what is now known as "Brownlow-road," on slightly higher ground. Of the ancient track through the Park, once known as Potticoat-lane, nothing remains but a ridge west of the present footpath.

A short-lived development at the end of the 19th century was a 9-hole golf course across the Park, made for the benefit of players who found the walk to the original 9-hole course on the Common a little too much for them. A hut for club members stood in the Castle grounds.

### That Secret Tunnel!

The name "Kitchener's Field" reminds us of the time when "Kitchener's Army," followed by the Inns of Court, trained in the Park and erected a large number of huts which were promptly removed when the first World War ended. Between the two wars a corner of the Park was sacrificed to create the Castle Hill Estate, and the future of the remainder is still obscure.

One thing is certain—if the much-discussed and long-postponed Senior Modern School is built in "Kitchener's Field," the scholars will have ample scope for historical research. They may even start excavating to find the secret tunnel which, tradition has it, runs from Berkhamsted Place to the Castle!

## The Mothers' Union

A VERY enjoyable meeting was held at The Dyke on Tuesday, June 8, when our Diocesan President, Mrs. Lindsay Dewar, came to speak. A large number attended, and after the meeting tea was served in the garden under the able direction of Mrs. King with her helpers. A "bring and buy" stall in aid of branch funds brought in the very welcome amount of £6 1s. We are very grateful to Mrs. Dewar for her inspiring talk.

We shall hold our Thanksgiving Service in St. Peter's on Thursday, July 15, at 3.15 p.m.

On Tuesday, July 13, we go for our annual outing, making a circular tour to Cheltenham, Broadway, Stratford-on-Avon, etc. There are still a few seats vacant, and Mrs. Spengler will be glad to hear if any other member can go. The cost is 13s. 6d. coach fare and 2s. 6d. tea. The coach will start at 8.30 a.m. from outside the Church, and will return to Berkhamsted about 9 p.m.

We very much regret the loss of an old member, Mrs. Everitt, who died on June 23, and we extend our deepest sympathy to Mr. Everitt and Mrs. Greenwood, their daughter.

### YOUNG WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

At a meeting in St. Peter's Hall on June 1, a presentation was made to the Rev. C. K. Hughes of a book token, in grateful recognition of his help as Chaplain to the Fellowship.

The members gathered at "Greetwell," Anglefield-road, on June 15, when Mrs. Spence gave a helpful talk.

The summer outing will take place on Tuesday, July 6, and will be to the Tower of London and home via Windsor.

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