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WHEN SCHOOL FEES WERE 1d. OR 2d. A WEEK

**Playing Truant at  
the Chalk School**

Berkhamsted is very fond of changing the names of its schools. Our oldest foundation was to have been called "Dean Incent's Free Schole and Chantry in Barkhamstedde" for evermore, but it is always dangerous for mere mortals to say "for evermore," and what was popularly known as the Grammar School in Victorian times is now Berkhamsted School. Ashlyns School provides another example: during a very short life it has had three different names.

But the record for name-changing must be held by Park View School. When founded in 1834, it was known as the British or the "Chalk" School; after the Education Act of 1870, it became the Board School; when County Councils were formed and took over local control of education, it was renamed the County Council School. Today it has the more individualistic name of Park View School, though a periscope would be necessary to view the whole of the park.

**First Elementary School**

This 118 years old foundation, built on the site of an ancient work-house, has received scant attention from local historians, with the sole exception of Mr. A. E. Loosley, to whose notes I am indebted for much of the material in this article.

It was due to Mr. Augustus Smith's foresight and enthusiasm that this, the first elementary school in Berkhamsted, was started. At that time Berkhamsted School was almost derelict, the Bourne Charity School could accept but a limited number of boys

and girls, and few parents could afford the fees charged by a variety of private "academies" in the town. Consequently, scores of young children were left to run wild when they were not assisting in the home, running errands, or helping the family income by bird-scaring, stone-picking, fruit-gathering, or straw-plaiting.

**Poor Attendance**

The "Chalk" School was for children of all denominations, but it was stipulated that every scholar must belong to a Sunday School and that the minister of any congregation had the right to visit the school and instruct children belonging to his own community. Though at first an enthusiastic supporter of the school, the then rector afterwards declared that he would never voluntarily be found working with Dissenters. Thus, two years later, the Church of England School—alias the "National" School—was started behind the Court House.

Were those early schools successful? Up to a point, yes; but until 1870 there was no compulsory education, and at one period not more than one-third of the children on the "Chalk" School registers attended regularly. Many never went to school at all. Conditions were no better at the Church School: indeed, in 1874—four years after the passing of the famous Education Act—the rector complained in the Parish Magazine of irregular attendance, especially "the very common practice of sending the children for half a day only."

**"School Pence"**

A stumbling block was "school pence"; parents had to contribute 1d., 2d. or 3d. a week towards their children's education, the total annual cost of which (in 1875) was £1 9s. 5d. at the Board School and £1 4s. 1d. at the Church School per child. Unless the children attended often enough to qualify for the Government grant—250 times a year—they were, in the words of the rector, "a dead loss to the school."

Many parents could not, or would not, pay what now seem trifling fees. In 1873, the headmaster of the Board School reported that he had great difficulty in getting the boys to pay 2d. per week; many parents said they were too poor to pay. Threatening language was used by one mother, who stated that she "would not pay the arrears for anybody," and that if either she or her husband called at the school, the headmaster would "both hear and feel them"!

**Work and Play**

The log-books of the Board School, started in 1869, are full of interesting and, at times, amusing comments. Here, for example, are some extracts dated 1870:

MAY.—Plait trade revived. One boy gone to a plaiting-school.

JUNE.—Six or seven boys are partially employed at home or elsewhere at work done in school time, which is unsatisfactory, and neither one thing nor the other.

SEPTEMBER.—A little boy kept from school that he may plait. Two others to mind the baby and two more for pig-keeping. Boy absent because he has got no shoes. An elder girl left the school, parents thinking it time she assisted in gaining her living. Several scholars during the week kept from school to pick acorns and blackberries.

**Matthew Arnold**

It is interesting to find that on September 30, 1870, the school was visited for the first time by H.M. Inspector—none other than Matthew Arnold, the distinguished literary son of the famous headmaster of Rugby.

Revisiting the school in 1871, the inspector found "much tendency to copying, and the boys ill-behaved." But even in those days it was considered valuable to arrange visits to places of interest; 23 of the "largest scholars" and two ex-scholars spent a few hours at Kenilworth Castle under the patronage of the Earl of Clarendon.

**The Teacher's Catapult**

In February, 1872, several absentees were required to fetch soup from the kitchens set up in the Castle grounds and at the Swan Brewery to relieve distress among the unemployed. In the same year Mr. A. F. Wakelin was appointed headmaster, and here are a few of his comments:

Some of the boys are very saucy and impudent.

Many boys are away nut-gathering. Monitor Rance is absent. He has a sore head.

Found two little boys in R—'s class asleep. Spoke to the teacher about it.

Albert — (9) learned 72 lines of Byron's "Prisoner of Chillon" in 20 minutes. (In the following year the same lad was reported for truancy!)

Trouble with Pupil Teacher R— for shooting in the playground with a catapult, and being brought up before the magistrates charged with poaching. He was acquitted but was given notice to leave.

Yes, boys—and even pupil teachers—will be boys. As human nature is much the same in every generation, it is not surprising to find that, despite much truancy, there were always full attendances for summer treats and for teas in the schoolroom!

'BEORCHAM'

**CHEMISTS' ROTA**

Local arrangements to meet emergencies

The week-day evening and Sunday morning service rota adopted by Berkhamsted chemists for the dispensing of medical prescriptions, is as follows for this month:—

March 30 - April 5 : Figg.  
April 6-12 : Taylors.  
April 13-19 : Dickman.  
April 20-26 : Boots.  
April 27-May 3 : Figg.

On week-days the respective shops will open from 6 to 7 p.m., including Wednesdays, and on Sundays from 11.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

**LIBRARY OPENING TIMES**

The Berkhamsted Branch of the County Library is open in Prince Edward Street on the following days and times:

Monday and Friday—2.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.; 5.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.  
Wednesday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 5 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.  
Thursday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
Saturday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

The early summer show of the Berkhamsted Allotment-holders Association will not be held this year.

It is felt that in view of the fact that this year will see the tenth anniversary of the inauguration of the Berkhamsted and District Horticultural Show an all-out effort on the part of all gardeners and allotment-holders should be made in order to make the September show the greatest success ever.

Doubtless the Committee of the Horticultural Show will very much appreciate the action of the Allotment-holders for this gesture.

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