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Notable Berkhamsted Women—II

By 'Beorcham'

Anne Murray's Adventures

The late Mr. R. A. Norris, author of "The History of Berkhamsted St. Peter," provided an object lesson for local historians by studying the memorials in our parish church and following up every conceivable clue that would shed more light on local family history.

The beautiful mural monument to the memory of John and James Murray had always interested him, but for years he was unable to supplement the information given by Cobb and other historians. Then, not long after his "History" had been published, an article in *Blackwood's Magazine* sent him hurrying to the British Museum to piece together a fascinating story hitherto unknown to local historians. Results of this research were published in a booklet which appeared shortly before the war and, unfortunately, had a very limited circulation. This article is an unshamed "crib" from Mr. Norris's booklet, for it introduces us to Anne Murray, afterwards Lady Halkett, a remarkable woman who was no stranger to Berkhamsted and who, for a short time, owned the lease of the Manor of Berkhamsted.

Close Links with Royalty

First, let us recall the Murray connection with Berkhamsted. In 1610, Berkhamsted Place was sold by Sir Henry Cary to Henry, Prince of Wales, for £4,000. The boy prince died two years later, and in 1615 the house passed to his younger brother Charles, afterwards Charles I. But it was never intended that the royal owner should live at Berkhamsted, and the property was granted to his old tutor and secretary, Thomas Murray, whose wife, incidentally, had nursed Charles I in his infancy.

Anne was the youngest of the Murrays' seven children. She was born in London in 1622, a year before the death of her father; but as her mother was sole lessee of Berkhamsted Place for the next 24 years we can be certain that Anne paid periodic visits to the mansion. It must be pointed out, however, that Mrs. Murray and her children spent much of their time at a town house in St. Martin's-lane.

A Good Example

Anne Murray's upbringing was strict; "constant attendance at church services," and household prayers night and morning, with Bible reading. But Anne was never a reluctant worshipper; in her old age she wrote: "I bless God I had my education and the example of a good mother who kept constant to her own Parish Church and always had a great regard for the Ministers under whose charge she was."

Tutors were engaged to teach Anne and her sister to "write and speak French, play on the lute and virginals, and dance; and a gentlewoman to teach us needlework."

Above all, Anne was taught to be a proud and faithful Royalist. Had not her parents served in the Royal Household? Anne loved to hear the story told of the time when Charles I, as Prince of Wales, was entertained by her father at Berkhamsted Place, spending an afternoon hunting in the Park and killing a fat buck. There was no more loyal household in the land.

A Cellar Tryst!

A series of unhappy love affairs marred Anne's youth. One suitor, none too tactful in his advances, had to fight a duel with her brother-in-law, Sir Henry Newton. Another lover, William Howard, incurred her mother's displeasure, and Anne was forbidden to see him. But true love found a way. She bade her lover farewell by blind-folding herself and meeting him in the cellar, obeying to the letter mamma's injunction not to "see" Mr. Howard!

Another suitor, Colonel Bamfield, enlisted Anne's assistance in securing the escape to Holland of the 15-years-old Duke of York. This daring episode had a "Scarlet Pimpernel" flavour; it shocked and annoyed the Roundheads, and filled the Royalists with delight.

The Duke's Disguise

When the Civil War was in its closing stages, fears were entertained for the safety of the young Duke of York, who, with Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Gloucester, was in the custody of the Earl of Northumberland at St. James's Palace. So, in April 1648, Colonel Bamfield devised a plan to whisk away the Duke of York under the very noses of the palace guard and send him to Holland disguised as a girl.

The colonel obtained the Duke's measurements, and Anne Murray cajoled a tailor into making the garments. The tailor argued that a girl of that stature could not possibly have such a large waist, but he asked no further questions and made the clothes. They fitted perfectly.

Hide-and-Seek

On several days before the escape, it was arranged that the Duke should play hide-and-peek with his attendants after supper. By April 20, this evening gambol was a routine affair, and when the party arrived in the garden the Duke slipped off to start the usual playful hunt. But the seekers sought in vain. According to plan, the Duke was stealthily led into St. James's Park, hustled into a coach, and driven to the Thames. He was rowed to London Bridge, where Anne Murray and her servants awaited him in a riverside house. The Duke changed into a girl's costume (the outfit included a scarlet petticoat!) and, in Anne's own words, he "looked very pretty in it." The boy duke doubtless held different views about his feminine garb! However, from London Bridge he proceeded by barge to Gravesend, and there embarked for Holland—and safety.

At home, the Royalists had all but lost. In the following year, Charles I was executed. In Anne Murray's words, it was "an execrable murder never to be mentioned without horror and detestation." So certain was she that some terrible catastrophe would overwhelm London that she hurried away from the city.

For Services Rendered

Determined to go on helping the Royalist cause, Anne well timed a visit to Scotland to coincide with Charles II's landing at the mouth of the Spey. She was escorted to his court, only to receive a frigid welcome. Charles II explained that he was embarrassed by his inability to thank her sufficiently for aiding his younger brother's escape!

Deprived of the Berkhamsted estate inherited from her mother, and forced to sell her jewels, Anne was all but penniless. But good friends, notably her brother-in-law, Sir Henry Newton, came to her aid, and in 1656 she married the elderly Sir James Halkett, thereafter devoting herself to "good works." She wrote several religious books and left behind a diary telling of her loves, her exploits, and, above all, her efforts to serve the Royal Family. The Duke of York, when he came to the throne as James II, relieved a penurious old age by a royal pension of £100 per annum—not a handsome reward for past services. Indeed, Lady Halkett was reduced to taking in paying guests to supplement her income. She died in 1699, and was buried at St. Andrews.

Yes, a remarkable character. What a pity we do not know what she thought of Daniel Axtell, the Berkhamsted-born Roundhead who was executed at Tyburn for quelling Royalist expression of sympathy at the trial of Charles I!

MEDICINE, PETROL & FOOD

Local Arrangements

Arrangements for the emergency supply of medicine and petrol are now operating in Berkhamsted as follows:—

CHEMISTS' ROTA

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

July 27—August 2: Dickman.
August 3—9: Taylors.
August 10—16: Boots.
August 17—23: Figg.
August 24—30: Dickman.
August 31—Sept. 6: Taylors

GARAGE OPENING

During the summer months one garage in Berkhamsted will open on each Sunday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. For the current month the rota is as follows:—

August 3—Callaghan's Garage, High Street East.
August 10—Kingsway Garage Ltd., Upper Kings Road.
August 17—Berkhamsted Motor Engineering Co., Gossons End.
August 24—Snaxalls Garage Ltd., Chesham Road.
August 31—Underhill & Young Ltd., High Street West.

FOOD OFFICE

The Food Office, in the Town Hall, is open on four weekdays as follows:—

Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2 to 5 p.m.
Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 12 noon

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—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2 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.

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