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## Notable Berkhamsted Women—III

By 'Beorcham

# 'Proud Cis' and Lady Marion

Who was the most famous woman in local history? In two earlier articles we have recalled novelists, benefactresses, an ardent Royalist of the Civil War, and an innkeeper's daughter who won the admiration of Louis XVIII. But none was so celebrated as the great and gracious lady who was the last tenant of Berkhamsted Castle before it was abandoned.

She was Cicely Duchess of York, and such was her beauty that in her youth she was known as "the Rose of Raby." A red rose, it may be said, for she was a grand-daughter of John of Gaunt, founder of the house of Lancaster. She married one whose emblem was the white rose—Richard Duke of York—and lived throughout the Wars of the Roses, which ended when her grand-daughter married Henry VII. "The Rose of Raby" was later known as "Proud Cis," but "Tragic Cis" would have been an equally apt nickname. As she declaims in Shakespeare's "Richard III":

Accused and unquiet wrangling days!  
How many of you have mine eyes beheld!

### Mother of Kings

Of course, there were also days of glory and pageantry, for Cicely lived to see two sons (Edward IV and Richard III) and a grandson (Edward V) ascend the throne; she saw, too, the coronation of her grand-daughter, Elizabeth, Henry VII's queen. But what of the "accursed" days? Richard III was killed on Bosworth Field; another son, George, Duke of Clarence, was drowned in a butt of wine; and her grandsons, Edward V and Richard, were smothered in their beds at the Tower of London.

There's history for you! But of greater importance to Berkhamsted is the fact that Cicely spent the last twenty years of her life at the Castle, where she died in 1495. From her Orders and Rules (probably compiled by her secretary, Robert Incent, father of the founder of Berkhamsted School) we learn much about her piety, her love of a well-ordered household, and her zeal for the welfare of a large staff of servants.

### Sick Benefit—and Pensions

In some respects, Cicely anticipated the "Welfare State" by 450 years. Sick men were to have "all such things as may be to their ease," and the aged were to have the same wages as when they "might doe best service." A gentleman was entitled to 1s. 4d. weekly for his board, plus 9d. for his servant. For a yeoman the allowance was 1s. weekly, and for a groom or a page 10d. "The rate for the job," indeed! Still, there was a measure of social security at Berkhamsted Castle in the 15th century.

Cicely ran the Castle to a strict timetable. On fasting days she dined at noon (there was "a later dynner for carvers and for wayters"); on "eatynge dayes"

dinner was at 11 a.m., and supper at 5 p.m. Menus followed a weekly routine: for example, on Saturdays dinner consisted of salt fish, fresh fish (doubtless from the Bulbourne) and butter; for supper, salt fish and "egges" were served. Wine was served daily to head officers; the "lower orders" were rewarded with ale and bread when Cicely had been served with the second course at dinner and supper.

### Candle Control!

Fuel and lighting were strictly controlled; full supplies in mid-winter, but half-rations from Candlemas until Good Friday, when "expieth the tyme of fyre and candle alsoe."

Here is another interesting order: "Proclamacion is made four times a year about Berkhamsted in market townes, to understande whether the purveyors, cators, and other, make true paymente of my ladyes money or not; and also to understande by the same whether my ladyes servantes make true payement of their owne debts or not; and if any default be founde, a remedy to be had forthwith for a recompence."

### Prayers—and "Honest Mirth"

And how did the Duchess spend her days at Berkhamsted? Rising at 7 o'clock, she "hath readye her chapelyne to saye with her mattins of the daye, and mattins of our Lady." Then followed a "lowe masse" in her chamber; after breakfast she went to the Castle chapel for "devine service and two lowe masses." During dinner she heard a religious lecture, then gave audience for an hour, slept for a quarter of an hour, and prayed "unto the first peale of evensong." After drinking wine or ale "at her pleasure" she said "both evensonges" with her chaplain, went to chapel to hear "evensong by note," and afterwards took supper, during which she recited to all present the lecture she had heard at dinner. After supper she enjoyed "honest myrthe" with her gentlewomen, took a cup of wine at 7 o'clock, and "after making ende of her prayers for that daye" was in bed by 8 o'clock. "I truste to our Lordes mercy that this noble Princesse thus devideth the howers to his high pleasure," concludes this remarkable document.

A pious lady, indeed! On her death, she directed that "all my plate not bequeithed be sold, and the money thereof be putte to the use of my buryng." She left vestments to "the parisshe church of Much Barkehampsted," Ashridge Monastery, and St. Margaret's Nunnery, near Great Gaddesden.

### A GREAT VICTORIAN

From a 15th century Duchess of York let us turn to a remarkable lady of the 19th century—Lady Marion Alford. She

was the most striking and forceful woman to live at Ashridge since Queen Elizabeth. Wife of Lord Alford, she figured in a remarkable law-suit which arose from the will of the seventh Earl of Bridgewater. The circumstances were extraordinary, and for a moment it is necessary to delve into the Bridgewater family history.

According to the will of the seventh Earl, his widow was the life tenant of the Ashridge estate. The Earlord, however, passed to his brother, a clever but eccentric scholar, who lived in Paris in a house occupied mainly by cats and dogs, dressed up as men and women. On the death of the Countess of Bridgewater in 1849, the estate passed to Lord Alford, and when he died only two years afterwards it was necessary to refer again to the will of the seventh Earl of Bridge-

### £144,000 Acquisition

The Earl stipulated that the estate was to pass to Lord Alford and his issue on one condition: if he should die without having acquired the title of a Marquis or Earl of Bridgewater, the estate was to pass to other parties named. In the words of *The Times*, Lord Alford "died without having accomplished the requisite juggle with the decorations of his coronet," but nevertheless litigation finally decided in favour of Lord Alford's young son, Earl Brownlow, inheriting the estate.

The law-suit was conducted largely by Lady Marion Alford on her son's behalf, and afterwards she virtually controlled the estate. Her influence was enormous, and it was upon her advice that the Duchy of Cornwall's extensive property in the Berkhamsted district (with the exception of the Castle) was purchased by the young Lord Brownlow's trustees for £144,000. Lady Marion was her son's stoutest defender in the long dispute occasioned by the enclosure of Berkhamsted Common, which, in fact, she largely engineered. The demolition of the fences by Augustus Smith's hirelings was perhaps the bitterest blow of her life, and to the last she firmly believed that the steps taken to enclose the Common were perfectly right and proper.

### Notable Hostess

Lady Marion was a first-class business woman, and it was due to her that Ashridge became one of England's famous country seats, offering hospitality to our own Royal Family as well as to such picturesque potentates as the Shah of Persia. She travelled widely, and was well-known at Mentone when the Riviera was both fashionable and exclusive.

Some sixty years ago a memorial, consisting of a long stone seat half encircling a fountain, was erected at Little Gaddesden to Lady Marion's memory. And, like many another noble family, the Alford's had a public-house named after them: the Alford Arms, at Frithsdon.

## 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:—

August 31—Sept. 6: Taylors  
September 7—13: Boots.  
September 14—20: Figg.  
September 21—27: Dickman.  
September 28—October 4: 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 31—Underhill & Young Ltd., High Street West.  
September 7—Callaghan's Garage, High Street East.  
September 14—Kingsway Garage Ltd., Upper Kings Road.  
September 21—Berkhamsted Motor Engineering Co., Gossons End.  
September 28—Snaxalls Garage Ltd., Chesham Road.  
October 5—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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