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'Beorcham' reviews

Some Early 'Reviews'

A short time ago we glanced through early copies of the *Berkhamsted Times*, a newspaper which was started in 1874 and afterwards incorporated in the *Watford Observer*. This month, let us inspect the yellowing pages of an older local publication—none other than our own *Parochial Review*. It was started in July, 1872, as the *Berkhamsted Parish Magazine*, and 150 copies of the first number were printed at William Cooper and Nephews' works.

In its eighty years this magazine has changed greatly in size, contents, and circulation. Early issues were small, but in 1874 a special number, devoted to reports of a mission week, contained over forty well-filled pages. Later, this magazine was printed by Mr. T. W. Bailey and then by Mr. A. E. Loosley, but some fourteen years ago it returned to its original, if much modernised, home in Raven's-lane.

Suitable for the Poor

Unfortunately, I have never seen the first six numbers. The earliest copy in my possession bears the date January, 1873—exactly eighty years ago. In a New Year message, the first Editor, the Rev. J. W. Cobb, was already convinced that the magazine "would not go the way of similar productions in other parishes and enjoy but a short life." It was, he said, "fully appreciated by all . . . and especially by the poor, for whose reading it is particularly suitable." No one familiar with Victorian life need be infuriated by this condescending reference to the poor.

Of course, Christmas activities were fully reported in the January, 1874, issue. Church decorations were lavishly praised, especially as the pillars were wreathed for the first time. Mrs. Cobb supervised the decorations, and her

assistants included the Misses Longman (daughters of the eminent publisher, who lived at Ashlyns), the Misses Smith-Dorrien, and Deaconess Collier, whose stipend was approximately £30 a year. In the church schools, the usual end-of-year treats and prizegivings were held, and "on the dismissal of the children each received a bun."

Midnight Parade

St. Peter's Drum and Fife Band celebrated its fourth Christmas. At midnight on Christmas Eve the band marched along the High-street to "salute the happy morn," playing sacred music and halting from time to time to sing carols. On Boxing Day, the band travelled by train to Cheddington, spending the morning playing at farmhouses, dining off roast beef and plum pudding in the village school, and returning to Berkhamsted to "enliven the town for several hours." On the following day, the band toured Northchurch and afterwards played for two hours at Berkhamsted Hall before the High Sheriff, Mr. Curtis.

In 1873, the parish was over seventy years ahead of the Welfare State in starting a Health Scheme. Membership was limited to members of the Church of England with incomes not exceeding 30s. a week. Monthly contributions varied from 5d. a month for single persons to 7d. a month for man and wife, or widow with children under 14, and 10d. a month for man, wife and children under 14. In return, members could choose their own doctor, and no further payment was made for medical treatment. If they so desired, members could register elsewhere at the start of each half-year.

The Wrong Medicine ?

This little scheme apparently worked successfully, but a short time after its inception members were reminded that the treasurer—a churchwarden, and a brewer!—was not to be expected to take not only the subscriptions but act as "a licensed practitioner and distribute drugs and doses at his pleasure." Mr. Foster, whose brewery adjoined the Swan Hotel, was used to filling bottles, but not medicine bottles! To quote the magazine: "Much as we all respect our admirable churchwarden, we must confess we should have no particular desire to be doctored by him, any more than he, one would think, would desire to have any one of us for his patients . . . It would never do for a churchwarden to dose dissenters; it might be very dangerous indeed!"

This reference to dissenters was perhaps not intended unkindly, but in general early writers were intolerant and sometimes downright rude to nonconformists. ("Independency! The very name is enough to condemn it.") Unkind remarks were made, too, about

the Board Schools, especially as they cost much more to run than Church Schools.

Came the year 1876, and in his New Year address the Rector (Mr. Cobb) gave "certain remarkable facts" about the offertories made in the parish church during the previous year. Collections amounted to £22 12s. 5½d. in copper, £237 17s. 10d. in silver, £60 10s. in gold, and £5 in notes. "For this," said Mr. Cobb, "we ought to gather . . . that the poor and middle classes give a very large proportion of the offertory, and, according to their means, much the largest quantity."

A "Dry" Public-House

Addiction to strong drink naturally called for trenchant criticism in the golden age of temperance reform. A number of church workers went so far as to open "a public-house without the drink" in a house near the parish church. "The ground floor will be fitted up so as to serve both as a shop for the sale of non-intoxicating drinks, cocoa, etc., and as a coffee-room, where anyone may sit down and have a comfortable meal. The first floor has been taken by the Church Institute, so that now games will be played in rooms separate from the reading room. This new arrangement will, we hope, give a stimulus to the intellectual tastes of the members, and create a greater thirst for knowledge."

But the "public-house without the drink" was not a great success. In the following issue this significant statement appeared: "We regret that there was not a single response to our appeal for help."

In the Wilderness

Meanwhile, a Mission Room in the Wilderness (the little by-road which runs parallel with Water-lane) was a roaring success. Between 70 and 80 mothers attended meetings twice a week, and nearly 50 girls attended weekly classes. The Mission Room was also the headquarters of the Berkhamsted Penny Bank, the Needlework Society, the Parish Library (600 volumes), the Dispensary, and the Communicants' Class. In addition, it was a depot for the sale of ready-made clothing, for the issuing of grocery tickets (given out of the offertory), and for the distribution of blankets and loans for the sick. The Mission Room in the Wilderness enjoyed one year of glorious life; thereafter activities were transferred to the Bourne School, which has just been vacated.

Finally, here is news of another interesting venture: "We are glad to announce that the Parochial Nurse Association has taken the premises at Gossoms End, formerly occupied by the National School, with a view to establishing a nursing home." A spirit of tolerance was abroad, for invitations to serve on the committee were extended to representatives of different religious denominations.

But did Berkhamsted really have a nursing home in Victorian days? I shall have to undertake a little more "digging" to find out!

Medicine and Food

Local Arrangements

Arrangements for the emergency supply of medicine now operating in Berkhamsted is as follows:—

CHEMISTS' ROTA

The week-day evening (6-7 p.m.) and Sunday morning (11.30 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.) service rota adopted by Berkhamsted chemists for the dispensing of medical prescriptions, is as follows for the current month:—

December 28—Jan. 3: Boots.

January 4—10: Figg.

January 11—17: Dickman.

January 18—24: Taylors.

January 25—31: Boots.

FOOD OFFICE

The Food Office, in the Town Hall, is open on four week-days 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.

ST. PETER'S

MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION

The annual general meeting will be held in St. Peter's Hall on Wednesday, 11th February at 7.45 p.m. Speakers will be announced in the February Review—Please keep the date free.

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