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PARISH FEASTS OF LONG AGO

Gone are the days when every stationer displayed greeting cards showing outside Christmas puddings or, worse still, lurid pictures of gluttonous families seated at "groaning boards." Artistic tastes have changed, but the Christmas dinner still arouses as much interest as in years gone by. So, pursuing this seasonable topic, let us turn back the pages of local history and recall a few feasts of long ago.

Here, for instance, is the bill presented to a party of eight men who dined at the King's Arms, Berkhamsted, in 1764:

Fish, Sauce, etc.	18	6
Chickens, Sauce, etc.	12	6
Beef	9	4
Salad oyl, etc.	8	
Pudding, Butter, etc.	2	6
Cheese, Butter, etc.	4	
Wine	1	2
Beer and Bread	4	6
Fire	1	0
Serots (? Cheroots)	2	6
	£3	13
		8

This dinner was attended by trustees of the Bourne Charity School, who were empowered to spend a sum not exceeding £5 per annum on entertainment. The details given above are copied from the minute book, and no one, apparently, detected an error of twopence in the reckoning.

At a later date, scholars were invited to the annual feast, and many an old Bourne boy will recall dinners held on the founder's birthday, December 16. The fare was usually roast beef, plum pudding, mince-pies, and oranges. This dinner, discontinued before the first World War, was always held in the King's Arms, and it is interesting to learn that a receipt bearing the signature

of a famous hostess of over 100 years ago (Mary Page, a friend of Louis XVIII) has been preserved. Dated December 16, 1847, it acknowledges the receipt of £5 for "Dinner for the Trustees and Children this day."

A CHRISTENING PARTY

Archdeacon Todd's rare "History of Ashridge" recalls an earlier and very different feast. The occasion was the christening, on August 21, 1615, of Mrs. Magdalen Egerton, ninth daughter of Sir John Egerton.

The "banquet" was dainty and, one suspects, rather sickly. Total cost was £20, this sum including 1s. 2d. for the hire of three and a half dozen "boules" and 2s. 4d. for the hire of seven dozen plates. Theft or breakages were responsible for this tell-tale entry: "For 2 plates wanting, 1s."

Here is a typical extract from the lengthy bill, under the sub-heading "Preserves":

Damsins, 1 lb. 10 oz.	4	11
Cheryes, 1 lb. 8 oz.	4	6
Whit pare plo., 1 lb. 8 oz.	4	6
Raspberries, 2 lb.	7	0
Goosberries, 2 lb. 1 oz.	6	3
Grene plomes, 1 lb. 3 oz.	3	9
Aprecot, 3 lb. 12 oz.	17	0
Quincs, 1 lb. 4 oz.	3	9
	£2	11
		8

"Drid Fruts" (including "drid orrings" and "drid lemons" at 3s. 8d. per lb.) added £7 8s. 2d. to the bill. Then there were "Rock Candes" (£1 15s.), "Pastes" (£1 12s. 4d.) and the following "Comfets" (£1 9s. 4d.): Almons, Collyanders, Anneseds, Sinent, Ginger, Lemons, Roses, Violets, Muske, Orringe, Rosemary, Ambergrese, Fine sinement, and Muscadines.

Four "double boxes of wafers" cost 2s. each, and the price for "Prince bisket" was 1s. 4d. per lb. Three shillings were paid to two porters who "brought these sweetmeats and glasses to Yorkhouse, and caryed away the glasses and emptie boxes."

By 17th century standards, £20 was a very large sum. But the Egertons of Ashridge were not poor. Here is part of the weekly bill in 1603:

Larder	£14	4	8
Buttry	47	0	
Pantry and Pastry	26	8	
Sellor (Cellar)	26	4	

HARRY DANCER'S FEAST

Earlier still, probably in the reign of Henry VIII, a parish feast was held in the house of Harry Dancer (harry dawnserris howsse). Full details are given in Cobb's "History of Berkhamsted," and one wonders how many guests enjoyed the beef, mutton, pike, geese, pigs, chickens, capons, eggs, milk, cream, batter, cheese, ale, and other good things.

Symkyn Long received 2d. for a leg of mutton. Geese were 6d. each, and nineteen chickens cost 1s. 8d. "Hale" was slightly more than 1d. a gallon, and "small hale" was 1d. a pottle. But one ounce of pepper cost 3d., and two ounces of "sewgar" 2d. The cook and "hys man" received 9s., the "sqweeler and turner of spytys" 2d., "ye botteler" 4d. The wife of "mine host" was paid 4d. for wood.

WHY HORSEMEAT?

Total cost of the meal was 21s. 5d., but this did not include the additional item of 1s. 6d. for "horsmete." Why did they bother with horsemeat, especially as it was infinitely dearer than "beffe, motton, gesse, pygonys, checonys" and other more palatable dishes?

Half a century before this gargantuan parish feast took place, the Castle was still the home of Duchess, Cicely of York, whose cooks were required to serve boiled beef and mutton for dinner from Sunday to Thursday, with "one roste" as an additional item on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. For supper, "leyched beffe and mutton roste," Saturday's dinner consisted of salt fish, fresh fish and butter, with salt fish and eggs for supper. For fasting days, salt fish and two dishes of fresh fish were specified.

Incidentally, eating must have been a messy business in those days. No one could then dispute the saying that fingers were made before forks: forks, in fact, were not introduced to this country until the 17th century. But table linen was not unknown, for the monks at Ashridge were ordered not to wipe their noses on the tablecloths!

COMPLIMENT FROM COBBETT

Returning to more modern times, it is interesting to learn from "Rural Rides" that William Cobbett, in 1829, was guest of honour at a public dinner at the Rose and Crown Inn, Tring. It was "the best that ever I saw called a public dinner, and certainly unreasonably cheap. There were excellent joints of meat of the finest description, fowls and geese in abundance, and, finally, a very fine haunch of venison, with a bottle of wine for each person, and all for seven shillings and sixpence per head. Good waiting upon: civil landlord and lady; and, in short, everything at this very pretty town pleased me exceedingly."

But why go outside Berkhamsted for details of lavish repasts? I have been shown the menu card of a dinner given at the Town Hall in 1896 to employees of Cooper's chemical works. The items included roast beef, roast turkey, roast veal, boiled ham, sucking pigs, boiled mutton and caper sauce, roast pork, roast mutton, boiled chickens and white sauce, roast chickens, boiled beef; plum pudding, rhubarb tart, apple tart, mince pies, blanc-mange, tippy cake, jellies; cheese, celery; dessert.

And that, I think you will agree, is quite enough!

'BEORCHAM'

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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:—

November 29—December 5: Boots.
December 6—12: Figg.
December 13—19: Dickman.
December 20—26: Taylors.
December 27—January 3, 1954: 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.

All Welfare Foods are also obtainable from Gossoms End Stores.

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.

Y.M.C.A.

The Y.M.C.A. in Chesham Road, which has been closed since last April, will be re-opening on Wednesdays and Fridays as from 1st January, 1954, on which date there will be a Re-opening Social in the club premises at 8 p.m.

All ex-members, prospective members and their girl friends or wives will be welcome at this social. The admission is Free and refreshments will be served at moderate prices.

It is hoped that the Y.M.C.A. will once again take its part in the social life of Berkhamsted.

BIBLE SOCIETY

At the Committee meeting of the Berkhamsted, Northchurch and District Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Rector of Berkhamsted (Rev. Robert S. Brown) was elected President, together with Hon. Treasurer, Mr. A. T. Read, Hon. Secretary, Mr. John Douglas, and Hon. Auditor, Mr. Ernest Lockhart.

The annual meeting of the Auxiliary has been arranged for Tuesday, 23rd February, at 8 p.m. when the speaker will be the Rev. B. P. Mohan, M.A., regional secretary of the Society, and the chair will be taken by the Rector of Berkhamsted.

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