

Taxi Service

Phone:

Berkhamsted 1254

for

Weddings,
Dances, etc.

★
J. GATES

• Hillcote, Darrs Lane,
Northchurch, Berkhamsted

F. W. FOX

(Proprietor—A. H. DOIG)

IRONMONGER

and

HARDWARE STORES

Engineers' & Carpenters'
Tools

All Household Goods and
Garden Requisites

Van delivery in town and district
three days a week

**125 HIGH STREET
BERKHAMSTED**

Phone 83

PLEASE SUPPORT
OUR
ADVERTISERS

A. J. CRUICKSHANK

A.F.C. F.V.I.

HOUSE & ESTATE AGENT
INCORPORATED VALUER & SURVEYOR

236a HIGH STREET, BERKHAMSTED Tel. 2364/5

85 HIGH STREET, CHESHAM Tel. 8856

Planning & drawing department at Chesham office. Consultant available by appointment at either office.

WHEN BERKHAMSTEDIANS STARED AT STRANGERS

Diaries of Long Ago

Historians are very fond of gossip. We seek it in old diaries and private papers, and are ever hopeful that someone will find, in an old attic or cupboard, the work of a local Pepys or John Woodforde to add homely, human interest to the information we obtain from more formal documents.

Unfortunately, few diarists are conscientious. A sudden burst of enthusiasm, and then we forget to make our daily entries. Those who keep up the good work are eventually so scared of revealing private thoughts to others that they burn their diaries, or leave them for uninterested descendants to toss into the dustbin. The casualty rate is so high that chances of finding an old diary are extremely slender.

Recently, however, it has been my good fortune to make the acquaintance of two diaries which, though not written by Hertfordshire men, are of considerable local interest. One, for the year 1830, was found among old family papers by Mr. J. C. Knowles, of Broadway Farm, and later in this article I shall have something to say about it.

SLOW COACH

The other diary, describing a Somerset man's visit to London in 1774 and 1777, was edited and printed many years ago. I was unaware of its existence until a reader of the *Parochial Review* showed me a copy, drawing attention to entries showing that the diarist included Berkhamsted in his travels.

The Somerset visitor had the good, honest name of John Yeoman, and his diary shows that he was a most observant young man. Accompanied by a cousin, he left Oxford Street, London, at 7.30 one morning, and the stage-coach brought them to Berkhamsted at 2 p.m. John had plenty of time to notice that it was "all Meadow from Tybourn to Stanmore"; at Berkhamsted it was "Chilly corn."

BERKHAMSTED'S MERRY MEN

For six days John and his cousin stayed with their uncle and aunt in Berkhamsted. Unfortunately, he does not name his hosts.

Seeing the sights, enjoying good walks, visiting taverns, noting the stares Berkhamsted folk reserved for strangers, criticising the parson and choristers of Northchurch, John had much to write

about, though there was an afternoon "So Very Dull that I have Nothing I can set in my Journal."

With his uncle, he visited a tavern by the Market Place (was it the King's Arms?) where he saw "half a Score Men Who I believe delight Much in Drinking, Smoking in Particular, they are a Merry Sort of People I do verily believe." On a later visit to the tavern, he found the men playing cards, paying them the compliment of being "Extrem Sober as to Cursting or such Like."

Our young diarist walked along the highway to see Peter the Wild Boy at Broadway Farm (where Mr. Knowles has discovered another diary). He visited a paper mill, and this must have involved a long walk to Two Waters or Apsley unless there was a mill nearer Berkhamsted of which we now have no record.

The "Chief Manufactory" in Berkhamsted was lace-making. "The People are So Countryfield as in any Town I know," John wrote. "They will Stare at you as if they had never seen no one before . . . they wear a Shepards White coat with a Handkechief Round their Neck, and their Shoes are Plated all Round with Iron. even the Farmers themselves Wears them . . ."

NORTHCHURCH OUT OF TUNE

On Sunday, John Yeoman went to "North Church, the Parson was the worst that ever I heard but Upton Noble, the clerk was Shocking bad indeed, they Sing the Same Tunes as we do but Very Bad . . ." John, apparently, was a good singer, and after the service some Northchurch folk told him they "should be glad to have me Live in That Part of the World for to Learn them."

On Monday morning, John and his cousin rose early and took leave of their uncle, who was "Very uneasy and would vain have had us Stay longer, whether it was in his Heart or not God knows."

JOHN FORDHAM'S DIARY

Now for the diary of 1830, which, as I have already stated, was found among other family papers by Mr. Knowles, to whom I am indebted for permission to quote from the 32 manuscript pages, containing an entry for every day of the year. The diary is unsigned, but a little detective work, which included

inspection of the registers of St. Mary's Church, Hemel Hempstead, confirmed Mr. Knowles' belief that the diarist was one of his ancestors, John Pope Fordham.

The year 1830 was an important one in the life of the diarist. Though living at Little Kimble, Bucks, John Fordham, was often in this district, for he was courting a girl named Elizabeth Eggleton, of Field Ends, between Potten End and Pouchen End. In October, 1830, they were married at Hemel Hempstead.

John Fordham was a farmer who lived an extremely active, interesting life. He travelled far beyond his parish of Little Kimble, riding to markets in many Chiltern towns, selling and buying, meeting friends, enjoying good company, and never failing to attend church or chapel—sometimes both—on Sunday.

BERKHAMSTED COMMON FAIR

Every day he wrote a short weather report. It was "a wonderful rough Day" when the first ewe lamb was born on January 20. The next day men were busy digging snow out of the road, but more snow fell on the morrow and he could not take the waggon to High Wycombe. Snow was still falling when, towards the end of January, he visited Aylesbury "to appeal against surcharge of taxes."

On a fine, frosty day he "began Brewing to fill the Gt. Barrel." (Most farmers brewed their own beer.) There was "a Great Deal of Thunder and Lightning in the Morn" when the King (George IV) died. It was a fine day when he rode to Aylesbury for the county election—a "wonderfull many People, from 15[00] to 2000 it was calculated."

But it is John Fordham's courtship

at Fields End which provides the local interest. His visits became more and more frequent. I was especially pleased to find that on June 1 he walked to Berkhamsted Common Fair, for we find few references to an annual Whitsuntide event which was discontinued by 1867. On the Common, he must have witnessed the traditional games and sports: a cricket match between married and single men, donkey races, jumping and rolling in sacks, bobbing for treacled rolls, climbing greased poles for legs of mutton, and so on. A day after seeing Berkhamstedians at play, John Fordham rode over to Redbourn for the races.

WEDDING DAY

We have to read between the lines to detect that a romance was in progress. He refers to his fiancée, Elizabeth Eggleton, as "Miss E. E.", and the marriage itself is mentioned in a curiously oblique way. Here is the entry for October 26:

"I went to Hempsted Church, and tyed a knot with my Tongue which I could not untye with my Teeth, and then back to Fields End to Dinner and from their home to tea in prime style, every thing very pleasant, a little ram but a very pleasant Day."

Perhaps the most interesting entries in John Fordham's diary concern a visit to London just before the marriage. There were walks and rides over Blackfriars and "Southard" (Southwark) bridges, to Barbican and Leadenhall Market, to "Hyegate" and Westminster, to Poultry Chapel to hear Mr. Clayton preach to 2,000 people, to the "Zoological

All building repairs
and maintenance
Painting and
decorations

All work under personal
supervision

S. Gilbert & Sons
Builders

'GREENLY,' TRING ROAD
NORTHCHURCH

Telephone : 1517

cal Gardens to see the Beasts, etc., etc." The zoo was "one of the most Delightful places I ever saw before," and it was "the pleasantest Holiday I ever had in my life." Like John Yeoman, our earlier diarist, John Fordham rode back to Hertfordshire by coach from Oxford Street.

And there we must leave our two Honest Johns, travelling slowly but enjoyably, living very full lives, and leaving for posterity some homely observations to add a little more interest and colour to our knowledge of the past. "BEORCHAM"

ECONOMIC
CENTRAL HEATING
WITH
SOLID FUEL

Order now at Summer Prices

F. H. WOOLSEY LTD.

24 Lower Kings Road
Berkhamsted

Phone: Berkhamsted 60

F. H. WOOLSEY LTD.

89/90 Akeman Street
Tring

Phone: Tring 2009