

Stories behind the Monuments—2

THE ADVENTURES OF ANNE MURRAY

By 'BEORCHAM'

WHEN the late Mr. R. A. Norris wrote his *History of Berkhamsted St. Peter* shortly after the first World War, he devoted five lines to the memorial to John and James Murray, describing it as 'a beautiful monument depicting two youths holding hands, the elder reading from a book.'

On his own admission, Mr. Norris constantly regretted that he did not do fuller justice to the monument, which is on the north wall of the chancel, now the Lady Chapel. Soon after the book was published he came across some references in a magazine to Anne Murray, sister of John and James; her story was so extraordinary that he collected all the information he could find about the Murrays and published it in a booklet entitled *The Mural Memorial to John and James Murray in Berkhamsted Parish Church 1635*.

FAMILY HISTORY

This booklet appeared in 1937, had a very small circulation, and is now probably rarer than Norris's earlier *History*. The only criticism I can make of the booklet is that the long title does not indicate the scope of the contents. Very little is known about John and James, but there is much to relate—and Norris relates it well—about their remarkable sister.

Here we have another instance of a church memorial setting a local historian on the road to new discoveries. But first we must establish the Murray connection with Berkhamsted. In 1610 Berkhamsted Place was sold by Sir Henry Carey to Henry, Prince of Wales. The boy prince died two years later and in 1616 the manor and house passed to his younger brother, afterwards Charles I. It was never intended that the royal owner should live at Berkhamsted, and the lease was granted to his old tutor and secretary, Thomas Murray,

whose wife, Jane, had nursed Prince Charles in his infancy.

STRICT UPBRINGING

Anne, youngest of the seven Murray children, was born in London in 1622, fifteen months before the death of her father. Mrs. Murray succeeded to her husband's interest in the Manor of Berkhamsted and often stayed at the hilltop mansion. But most of her time was spent at a town house in St. Martin's Lane and at the Charlton home of her elder daughter and son-in-law, Sir Henry Newton.

Anne's upbringing was strict. There were prayers with Bible reading night and morning, and 'constant attendance' at church. Masters were engaged to teach Anne and her sister to write and speak French, play on the lute and virginals, and dance. A gentlewoman was kept to teach them needlework.

Above all, Anne was taught to be a faithful Royalist. She must have been proud to know that Charles I, as Prince of Wales, was entertained by her father and mother at Berkhamsted Place, spending an afternoon hunting in the park and killing a fat buck. There was no more loyal household in the land.

Anne had several love affairs. Her mother objected so strongly to one suitor, William Howard, that Anne was forbidden to see him. True love found a way. She bade her lover a tearful farewell by blindfolding herself and meeting him in the cellar, thus literally obeying her mother's injunction not to see Mr. Howard.

HIDE AND SEEK

Another admirer, Colonel Bamfield, enlisted her help in securing the escape of the 15 years-old Duke of York. This daring episode had a 'Scarlet Pimpernel' flavour; it shocked and annoyed the Roundheads, and delighted the Royalists.

Towards the end of the Civil War, fears were entertained for the safety of the young duke, who, with Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Gloucester, was in the custody of the Earl of Northumberland at St. James's Palace. In April 1648, Colonel Bamfield devised a plan to whisk away the Duke of York from 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 cajoled a tailor into making the garments. The tailor argued that a girl could not possibly have such a figure, but he made the clothes and they fitted perfectly.

THE DUKE'S DISGUISE

Several days before the escape, it was arranged that after supper the duke should play hide-and-seek with his attendants. By 20th April this evening gambol was a routine affair, and as usual the duke slipped off to start the playful hunt. But the seekers sought in vain. According to plan, the duke was led into St. James's Park, hustled into a coach, driven to the Thames and 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.' From London Bridge he proceeded by barge to Gravesend, where he embarked for Holland and safety.

At home, the Royalist cause was all but lost. In 1649 Charles I was executed, and Anne described the event as 'an execrable murder never to be mentioned without horror and detestation.' So sure was she that some catastrophe would overwhelm London that she hurried away from the city.

ANNE'S MARRIAGE

For a time Anne was in the thick of Royalist intrigues. When Charles II landed in Scotland, she was escorted to his court at Dunfermline, only to receive a frigid welcome. Charles explained that he was embarrassed by his inability to thank her sufficiently for aiding his younger brother's escape. Defeat at the battle of Dunbar did not diminish Anne's enthusiasm for the Royalist cause—she attended to the wounds, some so nauseating as to be almost unapproachable, of sixty soldiers; but in the early years of the Commonwealth she had to sell her jewels and was almost penniless.

For years Anne was in love with

Continued on page 19



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'BEORCHAM' (from page 17)

Colonel Bamfield, who with her had helped to secure the Duke of York's escape, but apparently he was not a free man; it was uncertain whether his wife was still alive. This friendship ended in 1656, when Anne married the elderly Sir James Halkett after having twice rejected him.

After the Restoration, Anne claimed £2,400 from the Exchequer, besides the value of her share in the lease of the Manor of Berkhamsted, but she received only £500. Left a widow in 1670, she devoted herself to the care and education of her only surviving child, Robert, and to ministering to her poorer neighbours. Not that Anne was rich; she supplemented her income by taking paying guests.

ROYAL PENSION

In 1685 James II granted her a pension of £100 a year, not a very generous recognition of the part she had played in his escape. She died in 1699, leaving behind diaries which tell of her loves, her exploits and above all her efforts to serve the Stuarts. She wrote several religious works and was the subject of a biography written by a friend.

The family name lives on in Murray Road, and her two brothers continue to gaze across the Lady Chapel. But not a stone remains of the Berkhamsted mansion in which Anne spent many early and we hope happy days.

CHARITY CHRISTMAS CARDS

There will be two more sales of Charity Christmas cards on Saturday, 30th November and Saturday 7th December from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Dacorum College Annexe, High St., Berkhamsted when fifteen charities will be selling their cards.

Parochial Paragraphs

(continued)

One of the strong implications of the Maud Report on the 'Management of Local Government' is that the public should have a greater say in civic affairs, but, even so, the final decision must obviously rest with their elected representatives.

In the case of a Warding Scheme for Berkhamsted the responsibility of a decision rests with the County Boundaries Committee after evidence has been heard at a Local Inquiry.

That procedure is much to be preferred to a ragged referendum.

The reassurance given by Mrs. Shirley Williams, Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (when she spoke at Ashlyns School Speech Day) that she and her department were fully aware of the strong feeling in Berkhamsted about the much-needed second and third Middle Schools, and that something would be happening 'pretty soon', should have been sufficient to put an end to the mournful allusions (or illusions?) which have been prevalent in some local spheres concerning the Three-Tier System of Education.

Far better would it be for those well-intentioned but effervescent individuals to support the consistent and practical efforts of a large number of local educationists (at local, divisional and county level) to provide Berkhamsted children with the best possible school facilities.

Much more time and thought than can possibly appear on the surface has been given in inner circles to the preparatory stages leading to the full implementation of the Three-Tier System which without any doubt is the ideal solution of Berkhamsted's special problem.

A fact which the Ministry evidently recognises. For we now know that the second Middle School has been included in the 1969-70 programme and that it will be available in 1971, with the third Middle School, it is hoped, to follow in 1972.

In the meantime close consideration is being given to 'bridging the gap', including the erection of additional classrooms at Westfield and Greenway in order to relieve primary school pressure.

The final point I am asked to pass on is that the local representatives who are responsible for the management of education in the town are not dumb and docile, and that persistent public pin-pricking has no other effect than to irritate those who are doing their best to smooth out the inherent local difficulties of a frustrating national situation.

This is my last paragraph—not only for this issue but for good. When in July last I resumed writing this feature I looked forward with zest to continuing it for a reasonably indefinite period. But conflicting circumstances have intervened—giving some personal point to the poet's lines: 'The best-laid schemes o' mice and men, Gang aft a-gley; And leave us nought but grief and pain For promised joy'. And so from 'Parishioner' and his paragraphs it must be—Good-bye!



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