

Born 1872—still going strong !

THE REVIEW'S 100TH BIRTHDAY

By 'BEORCHAM'

BY A HAPPY coincidence the *Review* attains its 100th birthday while Berkhamsted is celebrating the 750th anniversary of the parish church. Originally called the *Gt. Berkhamsted Parish Magazine* (*Gt.* was quickly dropped from the title!), it first appeared in July 1872, nearly three years before the town's first truly local newspaper, the *Berkhamsted Times*.

If you turn to the front page you will see that this is No. 7 of Volume 95. Surely it should be Volume 101? Unfortunately, there are wide gaps in my collection of back numbers, many of which were bound without the original covers. Early issues, however, appeared without volume numbers, and I can only hope that I am wrong in assuming that the magazine was discontinued for a few years.

Page size, layout and printers were changed on several occasions. The founder, the Rev. J. W. Cobb, has been succeeded by seven rectors, some of whom edited the magazine, but in early times this task was entrusted to curates, and in later times Mr. S. H. Smith was the first of three laymen who have occupied the editorial chair. Early numbers were printed by William Cooper and Nephews, but for long periods the magazine was printed by Mr. T. W. Bailey and then by Mr. A. E. Loosley, both of whom had small printing offices in Berkhamsted. Some 33 years ago, however, the magazine returned to its original but much modernised home, renamed the Clunbury Press, in Manor Street.

No. 1 consisted of four small pages (8-in. by 5-in.), plus a cover and a

monthly religious magazine of the type which still adds bulk to many parish publications. In an introductory note, Mr. Cobb said that its chief purpose was to provide 'wholesome and religious matter for people who would not give much heed to a tract or general magazine.' Persons who intended taking it regularly were asked to pay their subscription (2s. a year) at Slater's Library, afterwards Mr. T. W. Bailey's bookshop. Mr. Cobb added: 'It must be understood that *only* the *poor* can obtain the magazine through district visitors at the price of one penny.'

RISING CIRCULATION

The second issue contained two and a half pages, in black borders, devoted to an obituary notice. Two sons, one a clergyman, of a local resident lost their lives in a boating accident in Switzerland, and it is interesting to compare this long tribute with a half-page notice (no black border) of the death of Augustus Smith, which appeared in the following (September) number. There is no mention of his great work for local schools and his fight for common rights in 1866; the report merely states that 'the deceased gentleman was formerly one of the churchwardens' who was 'personally known to many of our readers.' The understatement of the century!

In January 1883, Mr. Cobb announced that the magazine had 'gone on swimmingly from its first commencement, and appears to be fully appreciated by all who take it in, and especially by the poor, for whose reading

it is particularly suitable. To show how quickly the magazine became fashionable, we must mention that we started in July with 150 copies, which were rapidly disposed of, and applications made for more. The next month 250 copies were printed and sold, and since then 300 copies have been printed per month.'

HEALTH SCHEME

Cooper's printers must have worked overtime in 1874, when a special number, devoted to reports of a mission week, ran to over 40 pages. It is the shorter reports, however, which help us to picture local life nearly a century ago: prize-givings, outings, concerts, sales of work, and all the social activities of a busy parish. A 'public-house without the drink' was started--and was a failure. Not so a mission room in the Wilderness, where between 70 and 80 mothers met twice weekly.

In 1873 the parish was 70 years ahead of the Welfare State by starting a Health Scheme, membership being limited to members of the Church of England with incomes not exceeding 30s. a week. For small monthly payments members could choose their own doctor, and no further payment was made for medical treatment. Members, however, were warned that the treasurer, a churchwarden and brewer, was not to be expected to take the subscriptions and act as 'a licensed practitioner and distribute drugs and doses at his pleasure.' Mr. Foster, who kept the Swan Brewery, was used to filling bottles, but not medicine bottles! The magazine added: 'It would never do for a churchwarden to dose dissenters; it might be very dangerous indeed!'

UNKIND COMMENTS

Certainly no ecumenical spirit existed in 1873. The magazine, instead of pouring oil on troubled waters, made remarks about Nonconformists that were downright rude. Unkind remarks were also made about the Board school, which cost so much more to run than the Church schools.

In January 1914, and perhaps earlier, displayed advertisements helped to defray the printing costs. As World War I

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proceeded, the quality of the paper declined and the number of pages was reduced. It was still a small magazine in 1920; then, a few months after the arrival of the Rev. W. Chipchase Stainsby as rector, he brought out 18-page issues, well supported by advertisers, price 2d. Before this enlargement, the issue of August 1920 contained an article recommending celebrations to mark the 700th anniversary of the parish church in 1922; a pageant had already been suggested.

Mr. Stainsby said he was tired of the keep-off-the-grass and never-shout-or-laugh style of reading matter; he wanted people to read the magazine keenly. Certainly the magazine became more newsy, but neither circulation nor advertising revenue justified such an expensive publication. The number of pages was gradually reduced until the *Parochial Review*, as Mr. Stainsby renamed it, was again a very small publication with a correspondingly small readership.

AMALGAMATION!

Then an experienced journalist and energetic businessman came to the rescue. Mr. S. H. Smith turned a weak, small-circulation monthly into a lively publication which further increased its usefulness when it incorporated the *Berkhamsted Deanery Parish Magazine*, thereby serving several parishes in addition to St. Peter's.

The three-column format was introduced during the war, when the number of pages was curtailed and a number of tradespeople cheerfully paid for advertisements that were omitted 'owing to pressure on space'!

Incidentally, the *Review* of June 1942 contained the first of the long-running series of historical articles under the pen-name 'Beorcham'.
