

New Facts about the 'Almshouse' Family

When Samuel Pepys met John Sayer

A SHORT TIME AGO I had the pleasure of accompanying Mr. John Sayer, of London, on a brief visit to the almshouses of Mr. John Sayer, of Berkhamsted.

Three centuries of family history link two men who share a well-known name—perhaps the most familiar name in Berkhamsted. We have many streets named after bygone worthies, but there is only one ancient building which proclaims its origin as prominently as 'The Guild of John Sayer Esq. 1684.'

A large chest tomb in St. Peter's Church supplies a few more details about this 17th century benefactor. John Sayer, says the inscription, was head cook to Charles II, to whom he constantly attached himself in difficult times, at home and abroad; he was pious and charitable; he was married to Mary; they had three sons.

These facts were not sufficient for the modern John Sayer, who spends much of his time tracing the Sayer family history. He came to Berkhamsted for additional information and in return added considerably to my knowledge not only of John Sayer but of the Rev. Joseph Sayer, a 17th century rector of Northchurch.

IN THE KING'S KITCHEN

I was delighted to learn that the donor of the almshouses was among the acquaintances of Samuel Pepys. In the famous Diary we find the following entry dated September 9, 1661:

'I went with Captain Morrice into the King's Privy Kitchen to Mr. Sayers (*sic*), the Master Cook, and there had a good slice of beef or two to our breakfast; and from thence he took us into the wine-cellar where, by my troth, we were very merry, and I drank so much wine that I was not fit for business.'

We are not told whether Sayer and Morrice were also unfit for business. Samuel Pepys departed at noon, 'walked in Westminster Hall awhile,' and then went to Salisbury Court playhouse to see first performance of 'a simple play, and ill acted.' It has twice been revived in the West End in modern times under its original title, 'Tis pity she's a whore.

'Tis greater pity that, so far as we know, there is no diary by John Sayer to tell us how he served his royal master in the long years of exile before the Restoration. But, by my troth, it is pleasant to read about the wine-bibbing session with Pepys. One small diary entry has changed my mental picture of a man whose large

BY 'BEORCHAM'

and sombre tomb and large and sombre house (Berkhamsted Place) has caused me to regard him as a rather sombre character. It is known that he was sometimes at loggerheads with the rector and churchwardens.

John Sayer was 42 years old when he moved to Berkhamsted in 1662. From Charles II he received £150 a year, plus £40 for livery (what, I wonder, was a head cook's livery?) Sayer obviously had other sources of income to maintain a large mansion and rear three sons, all of whom entered the Middle Temple.

John, the eldest son, was born in 1667 and went to Trinity College, Oxford, at the age of 12. The second son, Edward, became a barrister in 1694, published 'An Abridgement of the Common Laws' in 1709, and became owner of the manor

of Chilton, Berks—not to be confused with Chilton, Bucks, whence came the endowment of the Berkhamsted almshouses.

£1,000 BEQUEST

The date on the almshouses, 1684, presumably shows when they were built or when Sayer's bequest of £1,000 'for the building of an almshouse and the purchasing of lands for the relief of the poor in Berkhamstead St. Peter' was legally recognised. His wife, who survived John by nearly 30 years, augmented the bequest by several hundred pounds. She died in 1714 and was buried in St. Peter's Church.

Reverting to Samuel Pepys, it is interesting to find several references in the Diary to two of the three trustees named in John Sayer's will, Sir Robert Sayer (not Sayer), Attorney General, and Sir Stephen Fox, of the Treasury.

The third trustee, the Rev. Joseph Sayer, rector of Northchurch and archdeacon of Lewes, is referred to in the will as 'my loving kinsman.' It is difficult to establish the relationship between John and Joseph. If they were brothers, it is unlikely that the word 'kinsman' would have been used in John's will.

A RECTOR'S TRIALS

Joseph Sayer, born in 1631, was a son of the Rev. Francis Sayer, rector of Yattendon, Berks, 1620-48. Joseph was appointed rector of his late father's parish in 1656 and was instituted in 1660, three years after the death of his mother, whose will mentions four children, Joseph, Robert, Elizabeth and Francis. There is no reference to John Sayer, but if he was another son he could have been disregarded or even presumed dead, as he was sharing the King's exile.

Joseph too was almost forgotten in the will. Although substantial bequests were made to his brothers and sister, Joseph received 'twenty shillings and no more.' Had there been strife between him and his mother?

Larger troubles, however, loomed ahead for the young clergyman. It was an age of bitter religious feuds. Non-conformists, notably the Presbyterians, strongly opposed Anglicanism, and in 1662 over a thousand clergy laid down their livings rather than read the liturgy and conform to episcopal government.

From the quiet village of Yattendon, Joseph moved to Newbury to succeed a Presbyterian, Benjamin Woodbridge,

who, by complying so far as to allow his curate to read from the Book of Prayer, retained his post as rector until 1662. Newbury's religious sympathies were strongly Puritan, and Woodbridge, a very popular man, continued to preach in the district. Sayer, the new rector, was intensely disliked, especially when he succeeded in inducing an unusually large number of people to become communicants. In 1664 the election of churchwardens caused a riot; townspeople broke into the vestry and named two men of their own choice, The Royalist and Church party finally overcame the opposition, but not without further disturbances and much ill-feeling.

AT NORTHCHURCH

In the year 1675 Joseph Sayer was instituted rector of Northchurch, where his youngest daughter was baptised the following year. From his career and will we assume that he was a conscientious and very able churchman, but probably not a wealthy one. His scholarly handwriting may be seen in the Northchurch parish registers between 1675 and 1693, and in the record of affidavits for burials in woolen at Berkhamsted.

Joseph Sayer was buried at Northchurch on August 24, 1693. In his will he left £5 to be distributed among the poor of the parishes of Northchurch and Yattendon.

If you visit Yattendon Church (it is halfway between Goring and Newbury) you should look for a memorial to Joseph's brother, the Rev. Francis Sayer, which displays essentially the same arms as those on the tomb of John Sayer at Berkhamsted.

BOYS AND GIRLS VISIT PANTOMIME

Forty members of St. Peter's Boys' and Girls' Guilds went by coach to the Palace Theatre, Watford, to see the pantomime *Alladin* on 17th January.

'All enjoyed the excellent and colourful show,' said a member. Each girl and boy was given an ice cream during the evening. The party arrived back in Berkhamsted at 10.15 p.m. sleepy but happy.

The Boys' Guild meets at 6.30 p.m. on Wednesdays and the Girls' Guild at the same time on Thursdays, both in the Court House, and new members are welcome.

MRS. H. BAILEY

Through the medium of a letter from her niece, a former resident of Berkhamsted, Mrs. H. Bailey, asks 'to be remembered to anyone who still remembers her.'

Mrs. Bailey, who now lives at Abbots Barton, Winchester, will doubtless be remembered by many townspeople. For a long period she assisted her late husband, the former Councillor T. W. Bailey, in the stationery, printing and fancy goods business in the High Street.

She was a worshipper at the parish church and a member of St. Peter's working party.

On behalf of her local friends, we sincerely reciprocate her good wishes.

ALL SAINTS HALL FLOOR

Floor treatment for All Saints hall will cost £35, but the Hundred Club have offered to contribute £17.

Bottle Tops

THEY DANCED FOR THE BLIND

A display by St. Margaret's Dancing classes in the town hall in December raised £18 for the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. Under the direction of Mrs. J. D. Weatherill, the display, with an Alice in Wonderland theme, had three acts and 22 episodes, and was watched by a large and appreciative audience.

DOG No. 2

Jan.—Nov.	£73 11 0
December	£22 13 0

Total 1967	£96 4 0
Target	£250 0 0

The total for 1967 is thus just short of £100. Perhaps in 1968 a full £100 will be raised?

Please wash the bottle tops! Rancid milk smells awful! And no silver paper. Thank you.

BERKHAMSTED HELPS ANIMALS

R.S.P.C.A. Berkhamsted Auxiliary collected £200 for the Society in the year 1967.

HANDRAIL OFFER

An anonymous donor has offered to defray the cost of erecting a handrail by the steps leading from the north side of St. Peter's down into Castle Street.

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