

## HISTORY OF ARCHERY IN BERKHAMSTED

Berkhamsted was the favourite home of the Black Prince, and the fact that his residence coincided with the peak of the development of the Longbow as a weapon of war gives Berkhamsted a special association with Archery. Berkhamsted archers were among the victors at the battles of Poitiers, Crecy and Agincourt, and it is reasonable to suppose that many local men were engaged in making and repairing bows and arrows as well as associated equipment.

Jones' History of the Black Prince states that in 1384 Robert le Parker, keeper of the Prince's deer park in Berkhamsted was ordered 'to choose in those parts twenty four companion archers, the best he could find, and come with them with all speed to Dover'. This order was given when the King and the Black Prince were keeping Christmas at Havering in Essex, and had received news of treachery at Calais.

*Berkhamsted had an archer named Little John. He was sent by the Black Prince to Chester to collect 1000 bows, 2000 sheaves of arrows and 400 gross bow strings ordered from the bowyers and fletchers of Cheshire and to take them to Plymouth. Little John was paid sixpence a day for his wages and a reasonable sum for carriage, and he left Plymouth for Bordeaux on 10th September 1355 and eventually to the battle of Poitiers. There is a story that Little John and his companions wore uniforms of green and white. The story is unconfirmed but seems reasonable as the Guard of Honour at Hertford Castle for the reception of King John of France wore green and white.*

John de Paylynton, another Berkhamsted Bowman had his rent remitted 'for good and free service in Gascony'.

Ravens Lane and the brass in St Peter's Church perpetuate the memory of Sir John Raven, esquire to the Black Prince; Prince Edward Street is part of the road that originally led from the Castle to the town archery practice ground Butts Meadow, formerly known as the Buttericks or the Buttfield. Berkhamsted men were still practising archery in 1716 because it is known that in that year the Butts were repaired at the expense of the parish.

There are no known records of archery in Berkhamsted from 1716 until Victorian times when William Longman was the leading figure of a club in Berkhamsted. By the mid 19th century Archery had become a sport for the leisured classes and included many ladies who found the exercise beneficial. Mr Longman lived at Ashlyns Hall and it was his publishing house and his son C. J. Longman who were responsible for the publication in 1896 of a very comprehensive book on Archery. C. J. Longman was British Archery Champion in 1883.

The Archers' Register for 1898 published an obituary of William Hammond Solly of Serge Hill, Bedmond, Hemel Hempstead and says 'he was for many years connected with the South Herts Archery Club, where he held the highest distinctions, as also amongst the Aldenham and Berkhamsted Archers'.

'Trifles and Travels' by Arthur Keyser, published by John Murray in 1923 mentions 'annual Archery Meetings held in the picturesque grounds adorned by the ruins of Berkhamsted Castle' after which the prizes were presented by Lady Marion Alford, of Ashridge.

The records and trophies of the Berkhamsted Archers were unfortunately all destroyed by fire in 1940 when the premises of the Longman Publishing Company in London were destroyed by enemy action.

Notes from the Journal of the Society of Archer Antiquaries records that in 1931 the then Office of Works whilst excavating at Berkhamsted Castle found a bow 2½ feet down in the muddy silt of the inner moat on the east side. This weapon, now in the British Museum, was originally thought to be a Saxon short bow, but has now been identified as the prod of a cross bow.

The present Club Berkhamsted Bowmen was formed in 1950 and has shot regularly ever since. Their trophies are named for persons past and present who have contributed to the tradition of Archery in Berkhamsted.

M. F. Fitzjohn  
Berkhamsted Bowmen

Mrs Fitzjohn, of 20 Peter's Place, Northchurch can give details of the archery activities of the Berkhamsted Bowmen.