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In and around Berkhamsted

by 'BEORCHAM'

The Great West Window

I wonder how many, or how few, readers have ever seen a book entitled "Painted Windows", which was published 109 years ago on the subject of the great west window of St. Peter's Church. The author, the Rev. Frederick B. Harvey, was usher (second master) of Berkhamsted School. He was also a churchwarden, and the book was published by his fellow warden, William Longman, who lived at Ashlyns Hall and was head of the famous firm of publishers, then known as Longmans, Green & Co.

I cannot imagine that many copies were printed, and the one in my possession could be the sole survivor.

Harvey wrote a very detailed description of the window, which was first exhibited at the Paris Exhibition of 1867 and was awarded a bronze medal. It was the gift of Thomas Whateley, a Berkhamsted surgeon, who died before the window was installed shortly before a major restoration of St. Peter's Church was started in 1870.

I must return to this notable window on another occasion, but having mentioned Frederick Harvey, author of the book, I should add that he left the School in 1869 and for the next 24 years was Rector of Cheddington. Appropriately, his parishioners subscribed for a memorial window which, in the left-hand light, shows part of Berkhamsted School with some children in the foreground.

Taking Steps

One of the town's minor curiosities is the link between King's Road and Graemesdyke Road. Too wide to be described as a path, too narrow to be called a road, it rises steeply with sixteen wide steps to help pedestrians and deter wheeled traffic.

Recently, the Dacorum District Council provided a strong handrail which will be especially helpful in icy weather. The rail also protects a magnificent oak tree halfway up the hill.

This unusual byway is popularly known as The Steps, but originally it was part of Graemesdyke Road, and is so named on a map of 1897. At that time there were no steps, and some nasty accidents occurred when horse-drawn traffic used this very steep slope. It was to prevent further mishaps that the old Urban District Council took steps...

The Court House School

I am indebted to Mr. Edward Ruffett, of Northwood, for recording the following recollections of his mother, Mrs. Jane Ann Ruffett (née Richardson), who died a few months ago in her 97th year.

"In the *Review* some time ago I read about the Church of England Court House School, where I was a scholar from 1890 to 1897.

"There was one long room for Standards 5, 6 and 7 at the top, which were taken by Miss Frost, the Governess. Then came Standards 1, 2 and 3. The room was divided into sections by

green curtains, reaching two-thirds of the width of the room, so that you could not see the girls, only the teacher. Standard 4 was a room apart from the others, as that was considered the important class. The Rector took Scripture in the morning before the other lessons started.

"I was a 'Bourne' scholar for four years. We wore brown mushroom-shaped hats with a silk ruche round the crown; these hats were made in Castle Street by Mrs. Richardson, my aunt. As Bourne scholars we had to go to Church on Friday evenings. There were 40 girls and 40 boys, and we always had dinner at the Crown Hotel on 16th December (Thomas Bourne's, the founder's, birthday). We were also taken to the top of the church to see round Berkhamsted. We were given £5 a year, and had to go to Mr. Penny's office every quarter day to draw £1; in addition, 5s. was put into a savings bank to be used when we left school at the age of fourteen."

The Queen's Hall

"For sale" notices in Chesham Road will remind many older readers of the Queen's Hall and the Y.M.C.A.

For many years the premises, now empty, were used for commercial purposes. Before the war, however, the Queen's Hall was regularly used for dances, concerts, whist drives, political meetings and the Sunday afternoon gathering of the Berkhamsted Brotherhood. All this when the Town Hall, Sessions Hall, St. Peter's Hall, King's Hall and Progress Hall were also in regular use.

Rooms adjoining the Queen's Hall were used by the Y.M.C.A., which flourished in Chesham Road for many years after war-time huts on the Sports Ground were vacated in 1924 and replaced by a grandstand.

The rooms in Chesham Road were given to the Y.M.C.A. by the builder, Mr. David Pike, in memory of a son who was killed in the 1914-18 War. Mr. Pike also built the Queen's Hall, as well as the Court Theatre and dozens and dozens of houses. Between the wars he developed the Ashlyns Road area, popularly known as The Pikeries! I well remember David, a remorselessly active man whose eccentricities were almost legendary. Many stories were told of his ways of overcoming difficulties. Not so well known was the fact that he did much good by stealth; he never turned down a genuine request for help from working people, and his enterprises gave employment to a host of people.

Looking Around

"Thank you for writing about St. Leonards, the lovely little church just over the Buckinghamshire border. My wife and I enjoyed following in your footsteps (though we went by car!) and we hope that you will suggest other places of interest within easy reach of Berkhamsted."

So writes a reader. Here is another suggestion. Go to The Lee (only seven miles or so away as the crow flies), where many old houses face a neat village green. About 60 yards beyond the Victorian church stands its 13th century predecessor, now seldom used but fully deserving its Grade One listing as a building of outstanding historic and architectural interest.

At the entrance to the churchyard, note the memorial garden, a colourful tribute to the late Elsie Higgs, who was organist at The Lee for 73 years. I repeat, 73 years. A record, surely!



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