

# IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham'

## OUR FIRST SUNDAY SCHOOL

At home and abroad the 200th anniversary of the founding of a Sunday School at Gloucester by Robert Raikes is being celebrated. It was not the first of its kind - Hannah Ball started a Sunday School at High Wycombe some years before 1780 - but it was Raikes, a newspaper editor and philanthropist, who started what rapidly developed into a national movement.

It is widely accepted that the first Sunday School in Berkhamsted was established by the Baptists and Congregationalists in 1810. This claim is made by Henry Nash in his 'Reminiscences of Berkhamsted'. According to the churchwardens' accounts, however, a Sunday School was in existence here as early as 1789. Small sums surplus to the needs of the Grammar School were used for the benefit of the poor, and from this source the churchwardens devoted £39 8s. 4d. to clothing for 95 Sunday School children and eight adults in 1789. Three years later, £47 was allocated to clothing for 108 Sunday School children and 34 adults. Subsequently, similar but smaller gifts were made; in 1804 £10 was spent on clothes for children and £6 8s. 11d. for 30 adults.

Why gifts of clothing? Such was the poverty that many of the scholars, adults as well as children, would not have been presentable at Sunday School. The clothing provided almost

certainly consisted of cloaks and frocks.

## THE BALLOON WENT UP!

When the Nonconformist Sunday School was started in 1810, £11 was spent on books, £21 on teachers' fees, and £1 16s. 2d. on clothing for the scholars. Moving on to 1844, we find that children attending Northchurch Sunday School wore uniforms provided by the parish.

Sixty-two girls were given black and white check woollen cloaks at a total cost of £18. In May, the cloaks were handed back to the teachers to be stored until the following winter, and for the summer the girls were given white shawls, costing 11d. each. Fifty boys were given dark olive green round frocks, the price per garment varying from 1s. 9d. to 3s. 3d.

From early times summer treats were provided for Sunday School children. Many a boy and girl transferred to the school with the best treats! At Northchurch, the annual treat started with a parade from the school to the Rectory garden, the children marching behind a drum and fife band and singing 'Onward, Christian soldiers'. After races, swings and tea under the trees, a large balloon was released from the lawn, a signal to mothers that their children would soon be home, clutching meat sandwiches handed out by two maids as the children departed through the Rectory gate.

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## WHO HAD THE FURNITURE?

It is a pity that so little publicity was given to the recent exhibition arranged by the Dacorum Museum Advisory Committee. It was rare to see more than two or three grown-ups at a time in the large hall at the top of the Civic Centre, but now and again parties of school-children ran up the stairs to see old documents, pictures, and archaeological exhibits.

The displays included several worked stones from the Castle which were found when Berkhamsted Place was demolished some twelve years ago. Told that much masonry was taken from the Castle by the men who built the Elizabethan mansion, one bright lad wanted to know what happened to the furniture of the Castle when it was abandoned in 1495. A good question, but who knows the answer?

## THE TOWN HALL

The re-opening of the Market House and the re-slating of the Town Hall are the subjects of many complimentary remarks. Although a vast sum of money is needed to bring all the rooms into use again, the building is beginning to have a lived-in look, and the let's-knock-it-down brigade is now in full retreat.

The architecture may not be to everybody's taste, but the Victorian architect, Edward Buckton Lamb (1806-69) continues to arouse much interest. One of his admirers (not a local writer) is collecting information for a biography of the man who also designed a much smaller Town Hall at Eye, Suffolk, as well as churches, rectories and other buildings. But it is likely that our Town Hall will be given pride of place in the proposed book.

## 'THE COMMON GROUND'

Speaking of authors, I have greatly enjoyed

reading Richard Mabey's new book, 'The Common Ground'. His plea for nature conservation is of national if not international importance, and as a fellow townsman I am especially pleased that Richard starts and ends his book with some passages of local interest. An expert naturalist, he tells us of the changes that have taken place in a favourite square mile where the Bourne Gutter still occasionally flows.

In the final pages he writes about the swifts nesting in St Peter's Church, the Baptist Church, and 'in the eccentric eaves of the Victorian terrace cottages'. He mentions swallows hawking over the Castle moats, nesting on the iron girders of the railway bridge, and in their short journeys for food 'bridging a thousand years of history'.

This splendid book thoroughly deserves the much longer and enthusiastic reviews in the national Press.

## BEATING AND BUMPING

'Why don't we beat the bounds of our parish?' someone asked after reading a *Gazette* report of the ten miles' walk of some 60 Aldbury parishioners.

Well, this would make a change from the modern type of sponsored walk. The last time Berkhamsted beat the bounds of the parish was in July, 1903; there was a full-day walk on a Wednesday, starting at 7 a.m., and a half-day walk two days later. The beaters carried peeled willow-wands to beat the bounds (and sometimes to beat one another!), and it was customary for boys to be bumped, causing howls of delight or otherwise.

The then rector, the Revd H. G. Constable-Curtis, joined in the fun and allowed himself to be bumped when the beaters were on the way to Haresfoot.

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## THOSE WERE THE DAYS

My thanks to a reader for giving me a copy of the particulars and conditions of sale of a row of six freehold houses and shops at the top of Castle Street, plus the detached corner house. They were all let to good tenants at gross rentals totalling £141 7s. per annum.

Can you guess the date of this sale? It was October 20th, 1920. Mr. J. H. V. Bailey paid £24 rent per annum for the corner house, and only £12 a year for the shop, back sitting room and three bedrooms. Mr J. W. Bamford, a dyer, cleaner and bleacher, lived next door and paid £15 12s. per annum. The tenants of the remaining four houses paid £19, £29, £18, and

£22 per annum.

The printed particulars described Berkhamsted as 'the far-famed residential and scholastic town' and stressed that the properties were only five minutes' walk from the railway station and within one hour's journey from Euston.

## TAILPIECE

'What a lot of trees you have here,' a visitor remarked. 'This is one of the greenest towns I have ever seen.'

'Mind you,' he added, 'I spend most of my time in Abu Dhabi.'