

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham'

A BARBER'S RECOLLECTIONS

I have had an enjoyable chat with one of Berkhamsted's many nonagenarians. In the course of a long career as a hairdresser, Mr George Lyth met hundreds of people and heard all the local news and gossip.

Born in 1888 at Whitby, where he was apprenticed to a local barber, George came to Berkhamsted in 1910 to assist Mr W. Rickard, whose shop was a few doors east of the Town Hall. Hours were long: 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (up to 8.30 if there were late callers), and 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Saturday. The price for a man's haircut was 4d. (2p) or 8d. if the client preferred a plush chair at the back of the shop.

George cut the hair of many famous men, not to mention boys who became famous. W. W. Jacobs, the humorist, and G. M. Trevelyan, the historian, were regular callers. Then there was the Greene family: Charles, headmaster of Berkhamsted School, and his three sons, Raymond, Graham and Hugh.

Charles Greene's predecessor, Dr Fry, was another client. On one occasion he was very angry when Mr Rickard supplied tobacco to his son. How shameful to encourage the boy in dissipation! The 'boy' was about 30 years old.

SHOP TALK

People in all walks of life went to Rickard's shop. Councillors and shopkeepers loved arguing and pulling each other's legs. 'City' types were usually in a hurry. William Elliott, the town crier, was a regular caller, and so was Johnny Rippon, the parish church organ blower. Sometimes a haircut was cut short by the sounding of the fire hooter at the nearby waterworks; firemen dashed off to accompany 'Alice', the horse-drawn fire engine, to the scene of the fire.

On one occasion there was a fire in the shop window. The hot sun caused the handle of an umbrella to sizzle and give off acrid fumes.

George Lyth stayed with Mr Rickard until 1930; then, for many years, he was in charge of the men's hairdressing salon above Dickman's shop.

In the 1914-18 War, George served in France and was invalided home to recover from trench fever. He was a keen cyclist until he was 80 years old and paid daily visits to the Berkhamsted Institute reading room until it was closed some years ago. Now he goes to the County Library.

His wife died eight years ago, and he is

regularly visited by his married daughter, who lives at Croxley Green.

Last, but anything but least, George has always been a staunch Roman Catholic.

FIRST IMPRESSION

Overheard on a Green Line coach passing through Berkhamsted: 'This must be a very big town. Look at the size of the Post Office!'

A LINK WITH FIJI

I imagine that very few readers know that a plaque inscribed 'Berkhamsted Parish Church' adorns a wall of the cathedral of Suva, capital of the Fiji Islands.

Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting someone who had visited the cathedral and seen various wall plaques bearing the names of famous British and Continental cathedrals and just one parish church - ours!

My informant, Mrs Wright, of Aldbury, recently visited Fiji to see her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren. Mr Gordon Ward, the son-in-law, is a magistrate at Suva.

Mrs Wright, whose late husband was a Methodist minister, tried to find as much information as she could about the Berkhamsted connection. Visits to the museum and archives were in vain, the Dean could not find anything in his records, and the Bishop of Polynesia was absent. But Mrs Wright will be going to Fiji again, and she hopes to bring back a photograph of the Berkhamsted plaque, which, she says, is delicately coloured and, in her opinion, more attractive than the ones bearing the names of famous cathedrals.

Meanwhile we must try to find out why Berkhamsted has this special connection with Fiji.

JUST LIKE THE IVY

Mr Robert Grace, whose Victorian and Edwardian slides of Tring delight many audiences, has sent along a metal badge inscribed 'Berkhamsted Ivy C.C.' No, not a cricket club, but a cycling club, Mr Grace tells me.

I have never heard of this club. Have you?

READERS' COMMENTS

Mr O. W. King, who appropriately lives in King's Road, comments on two items in last month's *Review*.

On the subject of the organ at the Court Theatre, he recalls an invitation to suggest signature tunes for the organist. For some time 'Here we are again' was played at the start and 'Auf Wiedersehen' at the end of the recital.

Referring to my comment on the Auction Room in Middle Road and its military ancestry, Mr King says that a similar army hut stood on the east side of Kitsbury Road, some 60 yards from the High Street. This huge hut was pulled down shortly after the 1914-18 War and the land was levelled for a tennis court for employees of William Cooper & Nephews, the sheep dip manufacturers. The tennis court was abandoned when the firm provided a large recreation ground near the factory and offices, and eventually houses were built on the Kitsbury site.

Another reader tells me that the Kitsbury Road hut was re-erected at Gossoms End, where for many years it was used as a garage and workshop.

THE COUNTY MILITIA

Much interest was aroused at the County Library by a recent exhibition of copies of old documents now in the safe keeping of the County Record Office, Hertford.

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'A list of all persons in the Parish of Berkhamsted St. Peter between the age of 18 and 45 liable to serve in ye Militia', dated 1782, concluded with the words: 'All persons who think themselves aggrieved may appeal at the Kings Arms in Berkhamsted on Friday the first day of February next and no appeal will be afterwards heard.'

The list contained 176 names, 33 of which were crossed out. After each name the man's trade was stated, ranging from basket-maker and breeches-maker to shovel-maker and victualler. I counted three esquires, two

surgeons, and mealmen (millers), one of whom was James Archer. His name appeared again in another document, showing that he was elected a trustee of the Sparrows Herne Trust, which was in charge of the highway and collected tolls for its repair.

Another interesting exhibit was an inventory of books kept in St Peter's Church in 1500. An accompanying note stated: 'Unhappily, none of these books have survived, but this list give us some idea of the form of divine service held at Berkhamsted before the Reformation.'

