

Berkhamsted's Ancient Monument—2

BEFORE AND AFTER THE SIEGE OF 1216

By 'BEORCHAM'

The high mound of the castle was the last point of retreat in the event of a siege. A beleaguered and thirsty garrison would have been tormented by the sight of water far below in the encircling moats; that was why the stone-lined well we see at the top was made in the 12th century. The crowning glory of the castle, a stone tower on top of the mound, has gone; even the foundations of the strong circular walls are hard to find. But as a reward for the climb there are splendid views. If, from this elevation, the broken walls below seem small, the earthworks look impressively large.

The bailey, once divided between an outer and an inner ward, is now a lawn, empty but for the custodian's cottage and garden and some ruined walls. It requires much imagination to fill this space with the halls, chambers, chapels, stables and other buildings which, in medieval times, formed a small, fortified village, much grander than anything that existed in the town beyond the moats until the parish church was built.

RAMPART WALK

Broken stretches of the curtain wall survive, in some places 20-ft high. Even now they give an impression of great strength. One broken wall looks very much like another until one makes a close inspection. On three sections the rampart walk is clearly visible, but there are no traces of battlements. On the east side, the foundations of a hollow, semi-circular flanking tower have been exposed for all to see; this is one of the ten turrets which formerly bulged from the curtain wall. To remind us that

houses were built against the curtain, the remains of fireplaces may be seen. There are also recesses in the wall which could have been made to serve as ward-robbers or cupboards.

A gap in the wall opposite Castle Street indicates the original main entrance. Nothing remains of the barbican, but in modern times great beams from the drawbridge, which obviously collapsed across the moat, have been found in the water and mud.

So complete was the destruction of almost everything within the curtain wall that one inspects hopefully the ruins of a rectangular building near the custodian's garden. Recent excavations seem to confirm an old belief that this was a chapel. Unfortunately, we cannot identify other buildings, though extensive excavations would probably yield some clues. In exceptionally dry seasons, withered grass indicates the foundations of certain buildings, but several years may elapse before these tell-tale signs appear.

RAZED AND REBUILT

Grants of the honour, manor and castle of Berkhamsted were made to one high personage after another, sometimes at frequent intervals. William, son of Robert, count of Mortain, rebelled against the king and lost the estates he had inherited from his father; Berkhamsted Castle was razed to the ground, and the town and manor reverted to the Crown.

Then, in 1104, Henry I gave Berkhamsted to his arrogant chancellor Randolph, who, in the course of

restoring the castle, again with timber, tyrannised the workmen. In 1123, knowing that the king intended to visit Berkhamsted after spending Christmas at Dunstable, Randolph stayed in the valley, putting the finishing touches to the castle and leaving a look-out to signal when the royal cavalcade came in sight. When the signal was given, Randolph dashed up the hill to greet the king and had a heart attack; he fell from his horse and a monk rode over him, causing injuries from which he died at the castle a few days later. Berkhamsted was then given to Robert de Dunstanville, a natural son of Henry I.

THOMAS BECKET

From 1155-65 the castle was held by Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury and chancellor of England. The oldest surviving stonework is thought to date from this period. As we know from the Pipe Rolls, building on a considerable scale was in progress in 1160. Carriage of stone cost over £5, and two lime-kilns cost £8. There are references to the king's houses within the motte or mound, and a chamber within the bailey.

It has been said that heavy expenditure on Berkhamsted Castle was one of the causes of Becket's fall from royal favour. He was stripped of all lands other than those belonging to the archbishopric; the king also demanded £300 from him as the revenue from the honour of Eye, Suffolk, and the castle of Berkhamsted, which the king had given to Becket on making him chancellor. Becket replied that he had spent more than that sum on castles and the king's palace in London, but so as not to allow money to be a cause of anger between the king and himself, he paid the sum demanded.

Work on the castle did not cease when Becket lost the lease. During the tenure of his successor, William of Windsor, £60 was spent on the castle, lodgings, granary and bridges in 1273; in the following year a new lease was granted to William de Mandeville, Earl of Essex. In the early 13th century, another Earl of Essex, Geoffrey Fitz Piers, held Berkhamsted; he founded two hospitals in the town.

About 1189, Berkhamsted was granted in dower to Berengaria, queen of

BEORCHAM (Contd.)

Richard I, but she was dispossessed by King John, whose second wife, Isabella, resided here for a time in 1216, the year of John's death. For some time before and after the end of John's reign, the castle was in the custody of Waleran, a German mercenary soldier.

THE SURRENDER

In December 1216 the defences were put to the test for the first and only time. Prince Louis of France hoped to gain the crown of England by leading the barons to victory against the king; after taking Hertford Castle they marched upon Berkhamsted, camping on Whitehill, overlooking the castle.

In the previous year orders had been given to strengthen the castle with timber; perhaps the curtain wall had not been completed. The garrison, led by Waleran, made spirited sallies, seized chariots and provisions, carried off a banner, threw the camp into confusion and disarmed the barons as they sat at table. However, the barons' mangonels rained great stones upon the castle. On the fifteenth day of the siege the castle was surrendered and the defenders were spared their lives, goods and houses. In the end their cause triumphed, for Louis was driven from the land, the youthful Henry III was on the throne, and Waleran, the German castellan, not only became constable of Berkhamsted but was also given a small manor in Cornwall.

RICHARD OF CORNWALL

For much of the remainder of the 13th century the castle was held by two Earls of Cornwall, father and son. Richard of Cornwall, second son of King John and younger brother of Henry III, was a man of great wealth and talent, famous at home and abroad; he was elected King of the Romans at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1257.

When in England, Richard spent much time at Berkhamsted with his first wife, Isabella. They erected a chapel, lavishing much money on its decoration; the hall and the lord's quarters also came in for special expenditure.

In 1243, three years after Isabella's death in childbirth, Richard married Sanchia de Provence, who gave birth to their son Edmund at Berkhamsted in 1249. They built a tower of three storeys here in 1254. At Christmas, 1260, Richard stayed with his brother, Henry III, at Windsor, but Sanchia remained at Berkhamsted. She was unwell, and a document of the period tells us that at

Berkhamsted the weather was so fine and mild for days on end that one would have said that summer, not winter, was i-cumen in. Sanchia died at Berkhamsted in October 1261.

On marrying for the third time, Richard does not appear to have spent so much time at Berkhamsted. But in 1269 the barbican, keep and turret over the sally port were repaired, and mention is made of the chambers of the king and queen, the queen's chapel, and the nurse's chamber. Thomas Becket had not been forgotten; a chamber was still known as Sir Thomas's.

Richard of Cornwall paid his last visit to Berkhamsted in November, 1272. His strength was ebbing, and he died at the age of 62. His son and heir, Edmund, who was born at Berkhamsted in 1249, also travelled widely. In Saxony he obtained what was supposed to be a drop of Christ's blood and founded Ashridge in its honour.

(To be continued)

WAYFARERS' CONCERT

The Wayfarers Choral & Orchestral Society are giving the first of their concerts this year at 7.30 p.m. on Saturday, 14th March in St. Peter's Church, Berkhamsted. The two main works are by Purcell and Bach, in contrast to previous concerts which have included works by Vaughan Williams, Britten, Kodaly, Beethoven and Brahms. 'Come ye Sons of Art' by Purcell is an ode written for the birthday of Queen Mary in 1694. For this the orchestra will include recorders and there will be a harpsichord continuo. The instrument has been kindly lent to the society by its president, Miss Dorothy Erhart.

J. S. Bach's *Magnificat in D* must be one of the most inventive and glorious thirty minutes of composition ever written. St. Peter's Church will prove the ideal setting for the high Bach trumpets. The soloists are all young and experienced Bach singers who have given many concerts with the London Bach Society.

In between the two main works, the Wayfarers—whose programmes have often included an unusual item—are giving the first public performance of a short work for chorus, strings and organ by Robert Barclay-Wilson, a professor at the London Guildhall School of

Music. The work, *Mors Janua Vitae*, 'Death is the Gate of Life', was composed in memory of the fine bass singer, Norman Walker. It is set to words by Dylan Thomas. Professor Barclay-Wilson will be in the audience to hear the performance of his work.

CHRISTIAN AID — SOME FACTS

Here are some facts about the position of relief to Nigeria, particularly as it affects Christian Aid, the World Council of Churches and its members. We use the word 'we' in most cases because Christian Aid and the W.C.C. are the Church to which WE belong.

1. Christian Aid and the W.C.C. took the view from the very beginning of the conflict that it was necessary to meet human suffering on both sides and early in the war we worked through the International Red Cross until their flights were grounded, and then so far as Biafra was concerned, this was done through the Joint Church Airlift. This J.C.A. operation received maximum publicity but we continued to assist with aid to Federal Nigeria through the Red Cross, but the fact that similar publicity was not given to this aid is not the Churches' fault.

2. The Nigerian Government has now rejected J.C.A. and Caritas, but not relief agencies in general or Church agencies as such.

3. Horror and starvation exist and this is intolerable whatever the degree may be or the numbers involved.

4. Christian Aid is part of the relief agency of the W.C.C., working through the Christian Council of Nigeria, and in the last 3 weeks £60,000 has been sent from the W.C.C. It is beginning a rehabilitation programme amongst the IBO people in the ASABA region.

5. From Christian Aid, £20,000 has been sent as an immediate contribution, 4 nurses have left for Nigeria, heavy trucks and land-rovers are on the way, as well as medicines, milk, and so on.

6. Christian Aid is ready to fund to the limit of our resources relief and rehabilitation programmes, and we call on Churches to respond.

It is against this background of an ever increasing commitment that your local Committee is now meeting monthly and appeals for your help and support in the coming weeks.



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