

Berkhamsted's Ancient Monument—3

THE CASTLE IN ITS HEYDAY

By 'BEORCHAM'

(Last month's article ended with a reference to Edmund, Earl of Cornwall, founder of Ashridge, who succeeded his father at Berkhamsted Castle in 1272.)

EDMUND died without issue in 1300, and his cousin, Edward I, granted the manor, honour and castle in dower to his second queen, Margaret of France. In 1309 she was dispossessed temporarily in favour of Piers Gaveston, whose marriage to the king's niece took place at Berkhamsted. But it was not long before the detested Gaveston, who was created Earl of Cornwall, lost both Berkhamsted Castle and his head. The earldom was once again revived, this time for John of Eltham, Edward III's brother, who held the castle until he died in 1336.

OUT OF REPAIR
Edward III himself spent much time at the castle, and during his long reign much money was spent on building repairs. One survey states that the great tower was split in two places and needed a new roof; the walls and turrets were in a bad state, the outer gate and barbican were decayed, and much work was needed to restore the great painted chamber and the great chapel. It was, of course, an enormous building to keep in repair, and some of the trouble was probably due to the erection of heavy walls on earthworks which had not sufficiently settled to provide a solid foundation.

As we have seen, the castle was occupied by several Earls of Cornwall;

now it was to become one of the possessions of the Duchy of Cornwall. In 1336, Edward III made his young son Edward the first Duke of Cornwall and gave him many large estates, including Berkhamsted, 'to hold to him and the heirs of him and the eldest sons of the heirs of the kings of England and the dukes of the said place for ever.'

Six years later Edward became the first Prince of Wales. Famous in history as the Black Prince (a name which cannot be traced earlier than the 16th century), he seems to have been more closely identified with the town and townspeople than any other occupant of the castle, which is said to have been his favourite home.

ROYAL PRISONER

Several picked men from Berkhamsted fought with the Black Prince. Among them was Henry of Berkhamsted, who, after the Crécy campaign, was promoted to the prince's staff and became porter at Berkhamsted Castle, receiving two-pence a day and a robe yearly. Several prisoners taken at Crécy were brought to Berkhamsted; the most famous prisoner-of-war, however, was John, King of France, who was taken at Poitiers in 1356. The castle was 'put in readiness' for him. At Poitiers, Henry of Berkhamsted distinguished himself by saving the prince's baggage and was promoted from porter to constable of the castle at fourpence a day. He died in 1398; what is believed to be his tomb is in St. Peters Church. Another of the prince's

BEORCHAM (Contd.)

henchmen, Sir John Raven, is represented as a figure of armour in St. Peters Church.

To his father's displeasure, the Black Prince married his cousin Joan, the Fair Maid of Kent; the honeymoon was spent at Berkhamsted. Here the couple entertained the whole Royal Family for five days, so the king could not have been wholly dismayed by the marriage.

Each time the prince returned to Berkhamsted, his retainers noted changes in his appearance. He became harsh, prematurely aged, and was obviously ill. At the age of 46 he left Berkhamsted for the last time and died after a painful journey to Westminster. He bequeathed 'our great table of gold and silver, all full of precious reliques,' to the high altar of Ashridge.

MERRIE BERKHAMSTED

From the Black Prince, the castle passed to his son, afterwards Richard II, during whose reign Geoffrey Chaucer was clerk of the works. This was one of many similar appointments held by the poet, and though we have no documentary evidence that he ever came to Berkhamsted, it is pleasant to think that he did so.

It is also pleasant to think of Merrie Berkhamsted, with kings and princes hunting deer in the park, brave young men tilting in tournaments within the castle arena, and great parties feasting in the painted hall, which was probably draped with tapestries.

Not that we know much about the way the various occupants spent their time at the castle until the very last tenant, Cicely, Duchess of York, drew up a detailed time-table showing that she attended one religious service after another. It seems that there were few notable occasions, and even fewer occasions for merry-making, during the troubled reigns of the Lancastrian and Yorkist kings. In 1399, on his accession, Henry IV granted the castle to his son, afterwards Henry V, from whom it passed to Margaret of Anjou, queen of Henry VI. Then, some years after the Yorkists' triumph, Edward IV, in 1469, granted the castle to his mother, Cicely, Duchess of York.

ORDERS AND RULES

'Proud Cis', grand-daughter of John of Gaunt, founder of the House of Lancaster, was the wife of Richard, Duke of York, head of the rival House of York. During the last 26 years of her life one tragedy followed another. Her

son Edward IV and her grandson Edward V died in the same year. Two years later her son Richard III was killed at Bosworth Field. Another son, George, was drowned in a butt of Malmsey. Two grandsons, Edward and Richard, were smothered in their beds. Cicely, however, was spared to see the House of Tudor firmly established; her grand-daughter Elizabeth was Henry VII's queen.

Cicely's Orders and Rules show that on rising at seven o'clock she 'hath readye her chapelyne to saye with her mattins of the daye, and mattins of our lady; and when she is fully readye she hath a lowe masse in her chamber, and after masse she taketh somethinge to recreate nature; and so goeth to the chappell hearinge the devine service, and two low masses; from thence to dynner, during the tyme whereof she hath a lecture of holy matter.'

HONEST MIRTH

After dinner, Cicely gave audience for an hour 'to all such as hath any matter to shewe unto her'; then, after sleeping for a quarter of an hour, she continued in prayer until the first peal of evensong. After drinking 'wyne or ale at her pleasure', she said 'both evensonges' with her chaplain and after the last peal went to the chapel to hear 'evensong by note.' Then to supper, during which she recited to all present 'the lecture that was had at dynner.'

Now we come to a lighter note. After supper she 'disposeth herself to be famyliare with her gentlewomen'; 'honest myrthe' is mentioned. Then, 'one howre before her goinge to bed, she taketh a cuppe of wyne, and after that goeth to her pryvie cosslette, and taketh her leave of God for all nighte, makinge ende of her prayers for that daye; and by eighte of the clocke is in bedde. I truste to our lordes mercy that this noble Princess thus devideth the howers to his high pleasure.'

WELFARE STATE

Cicely's Rules of the House give details of the times and menus for 'eatynge' and 'fastynge' days, information about the wages that were paid to her servants, and show that some sort of welfare state existed within the castle walls. Sick men were to have 'all such thinges as may be to their ease,' and 'if any man fall impotente, he hath styll the same wages that he had when he might doe his best service, during my ladyes lyfe.'

References to the dean of the chapel,

the almoner, the gentlemen ushers, the carvers, cupbearers, cofferer, clerk of the kitchen, marshal and 'all the gentlemen within the house' show that right to the end there was a large household staff. But shortly after Cicely's death in 1495, all the servants departed. The closing of the castle was a blow not only to the pride of Royal Berkhamsted but also to the prosperity of the town.

(To be continued.)

DECIMAL PRICES

In ten months time, on 15th February next we go over to a decimal currency. How can you work out the equivalent of present day prices in decimal terms? Well it's really quite easy, and to make it even easier we are publishing a Shoppers Table to show you how shopkeepers are being recommended to change their prices to the new currency. Of course, for amounts in round shillings you just multiply by 5 to get to new pence.

There is however no exact equivalent in the decimal system of any £sd sum which is not a multiple of 6d. All retail prices ending in £sd odd have to be changed—the decimal price will be either higher or lower. To meet this situation, the Decimal Currency Board—the body responsible for helping to organise the changeover—has produced the table which we print below. The table gives an approximate decimal equivalent, to nearest ½ p, for £sd penny amounts, 6d and 1s. 0d. have exact equivalents, but of the other ten amounts between a penny and a shilling five are rounded up and five down. In this way you should, in theory, neither gain nor lose over a range of purchases.

Old Currency	New Currency
£sd	£p
1d.	½ p
2d.	1 p
3d.	1½ p
4d.	2 p
5d.	2½ p
6d.	3 p
7d.	3½ p
8d.	4 p
9d.	4½ p
10d.	5 p
11d.	5½ p
12d.	6 p

This table will not be laid down by law but most shopkeepers are expected to follow it next February.

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WEDNESDAY	"	MEN	"	"	WOMEN
THURSDAY	"	WOMEN	"	"	MEN
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