



# BERKHAMSTED REVIEW

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## In and around Berkhamsted

by 'BEORCHAM'

### Looking for Cowper

I had just turned the corner to walk up Cowper Road when four Japanese tourists—two men, a woman and a child, with assorted cameras—ran after me and asked if I could point out the house where William Cowper was born. Apparently someone had told them to try Cowper Road.

Certainly there is a Cowper House in Cowper Road, but it has no closer a link with the poet than a house in Gilpin's Ride or anywhere else. The visitors looked very crestfallen when I told them that William Cowper's home was pulled down 150 years ago, the site now being occupied by the present Rectory. I could only recommend a visit to St. Peter's Church to see the memorial to the poet's mother and the great east window, the glass of which was inserted a century ago as a memorial to the poet.

A pity there was no time to take the Japanese visitors on a short conducted tour; it would have been interesting to find out how much they knew about William Cowper.

### Isandula Villas

Why are two houses in Charles Street named Isandula Villas, 1879? This question, raised in the *March Review*, has been answered by Mr. Keith Miles, of Dudswell. He writes:

"Isandula was the site of a disastrous defeat in the Zulu War of 1879, an event largely neglected in people's minds as it was

overshadowed by the much smaller but more glorious action of the following day, Rorke's Drift. Military engagements are a favourite source of names, but the victories are more usually employed—for instance, Alma Road, Northchurch."

Colonel A. L. Wilson points out that in the disastrous battle at Isandula, where a British column was wiped out by Zulu impis, one of the very few survivors of the disaster was Lieutenant (later General Sir) Horace Smith-Dorrien, who was born at Haresfoot. He and the other five officer survivors were fortunate to be wearing dark tunics—not red coats! To escape, Smith-Dorrien had fought, ridden 30 miles, swam a river and walked some 20 miles, shaking off pursuit.

A third correspondent wishes that more houses, like Isandula Villas, bore the building date. As he says, this custom has almost died out.

### Local Artists

As a local historian I am always pleased to see paintings of Berkhamsted interest. Already this year we have had much to see and admire. Mr. Harry Sheldon's beautiful watercolours aroused enormous interest when with Mr. George Sear, he held an exhibition in the Court House. A week later, in the Civic Hall, the Berkhamsted Art Society's spring exhibition gave pride of place to paintings by the late Mr. David

Fricker, a very popular and active member of the society.

New works of art of local interest, besides giving pleasure to all who own them, will be treasured by future generations. I cannot help thinking that a public exhibition of old and not-so-old paintings of local scenes and people would give pleasure to many people and perhaps raise funds for a good cause.

### Over to Lincoln

I am very fond of cathedrals and have seen almost every one in England. But until a month ago I had never been to Lincoln, a fact worth mentioning in this, the centenary year of the Diocese of St. Albans. For centuries, until 1845, we were in the Diocese of Lincoln, and then, until 1877, in the Diocese of Rochester.

Of course, St. Albans is very much in our minds this year, but if you have an opportunity of visiting Lincoln I strongly advise you to see the vast cathedral that stands high above the ancient city.

There is an extra-special reason for Berkhamstedians to go to Lincoln. One of the two Deans after whom Deans' Hall is named was Dr. T. C. Fry, headmaster of Berkhamsted School from 1887 until 1910, when he started a new career as Dean of Lincoln. Be sure to see his memorial—one of only two brasses in the cathedral.

Dean Fry was famous for his great fund-raising efforts, at home and abroad, to restore the cathedral, which is again in urgent need of restoration. Unfortunately, Lincoln is off the tourists' beaten track and the cathedral was almost deserted when I paid a recent visit. But don't miss it—and be prepared for a steep walk up narrow roads in an otherwise flat but very interesting city and county.

### Monk's House

Several readers have pointed out that no part of Monk's House was used as a fish shop as late as 1950. I suppose I must once again take the blame for a printer's error; I wrote, or rather typed, 1905, and have a carbon copy to prove my innocence!

A passing reference to "Billy" Roberts, a former fishmonger and one of the town's most memorable old characters, reminded a reader of his once-famous slogans, beautifully chalked on blackboards. Typical specimens were "No nasty smells" and "Sold out, washed up, cleaned out, all by 5 o'clock."

### Chapel Street

My thanks to a reader for commenting on recent references of mine to Chapel Street. Was I aware that the town's first telephone exchange was in Chapel Street? Yes! And did I know that Bridge House, at the corner of Bridge Street, was built for use as a public house? No!

In fact, it was never licensed, but extensive cellars and certain other features provide reminders of the builder's original intentions. An interesting feature is the front door, at the very corner of the street, angled in exactly the same way as the front doors of two houses (formerly shops) at the junction of Manor Street and Chapel Street.

Incidentally, Bridge House faces a malt-house which was abandoned by Fosters, the brewers, in late Victorian times.



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