

# BERKHAMSTED REVIEW



## In and around Berkhamsted by 'BEORCHAM'

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### A Famous Headmaster

Full marks to Mr. Derek Winterbottom, senior history master at Berkhamsted School, for a notable addition to our collection of books of local interest. "Doctor Fry" is a study of Thomas Charles Fry, headmaster of Berkhamsted School from 1888 until 1910, when, at the age of 64, he started what was virtually a new career as Dean of Lincoln.

Many old residents, especially old boys of the school, remember the bearded (and much feared!) headmaster who was on the way to a distinguished scholastic career elsewhere when he fell ill and spent a whole year in convalescence. Then, during a roving holiday in the Chilterns, he stayed a night at the King's Arms and learnt that the headmaster of the Grammar School, as it was then known, had recently resigned and that his post was being advertised. Fry applied for the job and was selected out of over 60 applicants.

### Town and Gown

In the following 22 years Berkhamsted School grew in size and prestige. Not that Dr. Fry got on well with some of the townspeople. He criticised the local authority for neglect. He railed against the smoke and fumes of the central gasworks; he was infuriated by the horrible smells in Mill Street caused by what was virtually an open sewer. And rightly so:

there were several outbreaks of infectious disease, and three boys died of diphtheria. The "powers that be" disliked Fry for his outspokenness and on one occasion he was threatened with a ducking in the horse-trough outside the White Hart.

Some townspeople, quite unreasonably, thought that the school was keeping industries out of the town, but thanks to Fry the rapid enlargement of the school provided much work for builders—including my grandfather, one of the stone-masons who worked on the school chapel, a gift from the Fry family.

Mr. Winterbottom's beautifully written book leaves no doubt that Dr. Fry was one of the worthiest of Berkhamsted worthies.

### On the Right Lines?

Seeing some white lines on a road, indicating an area that was to be given a better surface, an elderly resident was heard to say: "That's a dangerous place for children to play hop-scotch."

### A Cowper Discovery

What have St. Peter's Church and Bath Abbey in common? A silly question, you may think, but it so happens that both churches have memorial tablets to the wife of John Cowper, rector of Berkhamsted from 1722-56 and father of the poet William Cowper.

Not the same wife, I hasten to add. I had always thought that John Cowper remained a widower after the death of his wife Ann in 1737. She was buried, with five children who died in infancy, in St. Peter's Church, and every reader of the *Review* has surely seen the tablet in the Lady Chapel which contains a touching tribute in verse by Ann's friend, Lady Walsingham.

Over to Bath, however, where a wall tablet states: "Near this place lies interred the Body of Mrs. Rebecca Cowper, widow of the late Revd. Dr. John Cowper of Great Berkhamsted, in Hertfordshire. She died on the 1st day of July in the year of Our Lord 1762, aged 63."

John Cowper died in 1756, and a number of people who know a great deal about the Cowper family share my surprise that John had a second wife. Presumably there were no children of the second marriage.

### No Mean City

As I mentioned last month, several American tourists have called to see the English home town of their ancestors. Two more members of the Axtell family have called for a chat, and it was news to me that there are four towns or villages in the United States named Axtell, after the descendants of a Berkhamsted man who emigrated to America in the 17th century.

From another American visitor I have just received the following letter: "Everyone we met in your city was so hospitable, kind and generous with their time. We shall always remember with great pleasure our trip to your city, and we hope we can some day return."

City? Well, we have a Citizens' Association, and a cathedral-size parish church!

### A Village Museum?

What a pity there was not more advance publicity in Berkhamsted for the "Old Aldbury" exhibition that was recently staged in Church Farm. It was a perfect complement to the flower festival in the parish church; one could spend hours viewing the well-staged exhibits. I paid two visits, and came away thinking that Aldbury has all the ingredients for a splendid village museum.

One of many interesting exhibits was a handbill for an excursion by train to Liverpool and Chester in 1888. The train left Berkhamsted at 4.35 a.m., there was time for refreshments at Crewe at 8.30 a.m., and the fare was 6s. 6d. (32½p).

### Literary Link

If you are a walker, you may occasionally use the steep, rough lane which runs from Hawridge to Bellingdon. As the crow flies it is only three miles from Berkhamsted.

Near the Bellingdon end of the lane stand three tall cottages of unusual shape and style, a very good subject for artists and photographers. And there is an additional interest: one of the cottages was once the home of D. H. Lawrence, the novelist. He and his wife moved in at the start of the 1914-18 war and remained there until January, 1915. The novelist was ill at this time and grew the beard which he was to wear for the rest of his life.

### BOOK THIS DATE

On Saturday, 1st October, there will be a harvest supper for all the family in the Court House at 7.30 p.m. For further details see the pew leaflet.



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