

BERKHAMSTED REVIEW



In and around Berkhamsted by 'BEORCHAM'

Songs of Praise

Many people have told me that after the "Songs of Praise" broadcast they received appreciative letters and telephone calls from relations, friends and former neighbours. One ex-Berkhamstedian, I hear, was so overcome that she cried all through the broadcast!

I received several letters. A Yorkshire correspondent said that St. Peter's Church must have had a face-lift since she worshipped there many years ago. Mr. Jack Bath, who played the piano at the Court Theatre before the days of talking pictures, sent words of praise from Bournemouth, saying that he was especially impressed by the conductor, the organist, and the organ. From Coventry came a letter asking if I could trace an old school friend. Apparently they had not met since 1928!

Locally, reaction to the broadcast was varied. Almost everybody agreed that the singing was excellent, but inevitably other features of the programme were criticised. The *Radio Times* reference to "the commuter town" was not popular, neither was the choice of some rather bleak views of the Castle, the canal and a train leaving the station with no commuters in sight. The view of St. Peter's from the churchyard was good, but surely we could also have had a brief shot of Berkhamsted School, Ashlyns School and the High Street to show that Berkhamsted is a real, live town.

Memo. to Mr. Michael Barratt: We do not stress the "ham" in Berkhamsted.

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Kitsbury Village

Times when the Kitsbury district had a "villagey" character were recalled at a recent and very happy social gathering at All Saints.

West of King's Road there was very little housing development until builders started work in Park Street, Cross Oak Road, Middle Road and Kitsbury Road. Many people living in the old town regarded the Kitsbury area as a suburb, and this feeling persisted long after the gap between King's Road and Kitsbury Road was filled in by Cowper Road, Boxwell Road, and finally Park View Road.

Anyway, by 1890 it was agreed that Kitsbury should have its own church — an iron one to start with, and then, in 1906, the high, large, red-brick church which was specially designed so that it could be made even larger as the population increased.

Rich and Poor

Very little has been said or written about the iron church which, after many more years as a church hall, was demolished not so very long ago. Right from the start it was known as a temporary church, and it may surprise present-day residents to know that the congregation was "chiefly composed of the poor", who deserved "some help from those who may feel that Kitsbury Church has no strong claim on their charity".

A report of a Harvest Festival in 1896 claimed that "one advantage of a plain building

like All Saints is that it well repays decoration. . . The music was fairly well rendered, but doubtless the quantity of music to be learned on every Festival taxes the capabilities of a small choir. However, too much must not be made of this point; it is not the perfect rendering of music that makes it acceptable, but the heartiness of those who offer it in worship".

A little-known fact is that before the first Kitsbury church was opened, Sunday afternoon services were held in a schoolroom at Gossoms End.

Local Colour

I understand that the film rights have been sold of Graham Greene's novel, "The Human Factor", which was published a year ago. As it has a local setting, I wonder if some of the scenes will be shot here?

The book, incidentally, has been translated into at least sixteen languages. What will the Serbo-Croats think of Berkhamsted?

The Halsey Diaries

My thanks to a large number of readers who said that they enjoyed reading, in the February issue, extracts from a Victorian diary. It was compiled by Frederica Halsey, who, with her husband (Thomas Halsey, M.P.) and two sons, lived at The Hall from 1845-54.

Here are a few more extracts. "Tom at the Bench from 11 o'clock till 6, appealing against the new parish rating, and he gained his cause most triumphantly, his rating being lowered above £60 and costs allowed. Colonel Finch, Mr. Hyde and the other churchwardens very savage at the whole business, and Tom highly delighted".

On October 24th, 1848, "we all went to the Berkhamsted Ball in the evening, it went off most famously. The most remarkable figure I saw was Mrs. Beefeater Lane or whatever her name is, who wore a gold Greek cap projecting from one side of her head, and stuck in its place an enormous gold pin like a skewer. The Ball was kept up most merrily till 3 o'clock in the morning".

On New Year's Day, 1851, "I went to Church in the morning and was driven almost wild by the awfully out of tune chanting".

The Halseys were not averse to a little betting. "I hope we may make a fortune as it is much wanted," Frederica wrote when, in 1849, "Tom took a bet for himself of £1 and two of

10s. for me at the Racing Office in the Strand for the Derby." Two years earlier, Frederica recorded: "When I woke Tom put an envelope containing bank notes to the amount of £30 in my hand, as a present, being half of a lottery he won yesterday."

General Election

Just one more extract from the Halsey diaries. A General Election was held in 1852 and "Mr. Smith-Dorrien came before ¼ to 9 and took Tom, Papa and Frederick up to the polling place . . . Tom and Frederick came back so as to meet the really splendid Tring Procession returning to poll; they had come down as far as this House to make a show."

In the afternoon Frederica and others went to Mr. Hilder's house and "sat in a window and saw everything, there was a great row, and some people a good deal beat about." Later, a man

continued overleaf



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