

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham'

A COWPER TOUR

A reference in last month's *Review* to the 250th anniversary of the birth of William Cowper caused a reader to suggest a 'Cowper tour', starting from Berkhamsted, where the poet was born, and calling at Olney and Huntingdon on the way to East Dereham, where Cowper is buried in the north aisle of the parish church.

Olney, with its excellent Cowper and Newton Museum, has already made plans to commemorate the 250th anniversary, and Mr Gordon Osborn, the Olney local historian, has promised to open the Berkhamsted Local History Society's autumn programme with a talk on the poet. I understand that our local Cowper Society has bright ideas for the autumn.

A friend at Huntingdon, where the poet lived for two years or so, has heard of no local celebrations, but he tells me that for a short time he lived in Cowper's house, which is now the office of the local newspaper, the *Hunts Post*.

As for East Dereham, where Cowper spent his last years, a guide book states that his hymns are frequently sung in the church, and once a year, in May, he is commemorated by a dinner. Incidentally, in May I had the pleasure of meeting the Rev. Samuel Nash, a retired Baptist minister, and his wife, who live near

East Dereham; they hoped to see the Cowper memorials in St Peter's Church, but it was Monday and the church was closed.

A VICTORIAN SQUABBLE

It may surprise you to know that there was some opposition to the installation of the Cowper memorial window in St Peter's Church.

An unexpected source of information is the diary of B. J. Armstrong, a Norfolk man who married Ann Rebecca, daughter of William Duncombe, of Lagley, Berkhamsted. Many of the entries were published in a book entitled 'A Norfolk Diary', and here is the entry for August 8th, 1978:

'Went to see the new memorial window in Berkhamsted Church to Cowper, and felt some interest in it, because about 20 years ago I tried to get one inserted at Dereham. I failed through the Low Church adherents of the poet, who did not consider this sort of memorial as being with the poet's sentiments... This window, it seems, has caused almost as much squabbling as the proposed one at Dereham.'

I understand that a similar window was afterwards inserted in Dereham Church. If there really was a squabble at Berkhamsted, I have only the Norfolk diarist's word for it.

Our Cowper window, by the way, was inserted in 1872 as the result of an appeal by the Rev. J. W. Cobb, who induced subscribers to come forward soon after his institution as rector. Subjects for this fine east window were chosen with reference to Cowper's poems, and it is a pity that the panel showing the poet at a prayer desk with his pet hares is partially obscured. It posed some problems for the BBC technicians when the 'Songs of Praise' team came to Berkhamsted.

Incidentally, I have a photograph of the interior of St Peter's Church before 1872, showing an east window with rather ordinary symmetrical designs which must have admitted much more daylight than the Cowper window. Another interesting feature of the pre-1872 photograph: the pulpit was on the right, not the left.

AN AMERICAN VISITOR

Over the years I have taken many visitors on a tour of St Peter's Church, and recently I had the pleasure of accompanying an American clergyman on his first visit to England.

The Rev. John Jenkins, of St Paul's Episcopal Church, Albany, Georgia, was greatly impressed by the size and age of the church and its many memorials. Mr Clifford Gossling was present and a brief organ recital added to the pleasure of the visit. Afterwards we went to the Castle, where traditional English rain discouraged a complete circuit of the moats.

LOCAL PRIDE

Every week the *Berkhamsted Gazette* dips into its files to recall events of 25 and 50 years ago. Recently we were reminded that in 1931 a crowded parish meeting at Northchurch

unanimously opposed the Berkhamsted Urban District's plans to extend its boundaries.

Nevertheless the marriage of town and village took place in 1935, and in more recent times we became part of the Dacorum district. That was the end of regular meetings in the town which provided a serial story of great local (and I mean local) interest. This interest slumped as soon as we were part of a much larger authority.

Now, thank goodness, there are several signs of a revival of local pride. The swimming pool question aroused enormous interest, hundreds instead of scores now hope that the Town Hall will be restored, and there is tremendous financial backing for the Hospice of St Francis. What's more, in recent times several local societies report larger audiences at their meetings. That's the spirit!

MOVING AROUND

I am told that in a certain hostelry two senior citizens were involved in an argument whether or not the local Co-operative Society once had a confectionery and tobacco shop in Lower King's Road. Yes! It was opened in 1919 and had a very short life.

In its 98 years the Co-op has opened and closed shops in many parts of the town. First of all provisions were sold at the former Red Lion Inn, opposite the Town Hall. Next came a tiny shop (afterwards Burnham's) on the site of the National Westminster Bank. The next move was to a shop in the High Street (afterwards Verney's), opposite Egerton Terrace.

In 1888 the Co-op built Progress Hall with shops on the ground floor in Cowper Road. Later, shops were acquired on the site of the Outspan building.

In 1912 a branch shop for grocery was opened at the corner of Provident Place; five years later this was transferred to the top of

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Manor Street. Then, in 1919, came the short lived confectionery shop in Lower King's Road. The present High Street store was opened in 1935.

It is interesting to know that in 1933, when the Co-op celebrated its 50th birthday, elderly members could remember when deliveries were made by wheelbarrow. It was proudly stated in 1933 that they had five motors, 18 horse-drawn vehicles and numerous cycles.

CAB, SIR!

Many older readers will remember Mr A. C. Meek, whose livery and hunting stables in

Lower Kings Road were very busy in the days when we had many more horses than cars. Thanks to a member of the family I have been given a card giving Mr Meek's terms for the hire of carriages.

For single-horse Broughams and Victorias, the charge was 5s. 6d. for two hours. Up to 10 p.m. you could be taken to the Town Hall or Progress Hall and back for 5s. A reserved cab to or from the railway station cost 2s. in the town or 2s. 6d. if you lived at Northchurch.

Brakes and wagonettes were available for races and picnics, and if you wanted riding lessons you could have twelve, each lasting one hour, for £3.

How times - and prices - have changed!