

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham'

ANTONY HOPKINS

Besides 'Talking About Music' to radio listeners in 45 countries, conducting orchestras, composing, lecturing and giving recitals, Antony Hopkins is a very prolific writer. His twelfth book has just been published, and 'Beating Time' is the title of an autobiography which has much to say about Berkhamsted and Ashridge.

Antony Reynolds was very young when his father died, and was formally adopted by Major and Mrs Hopkins, hence the change of name. The major was successively junior master, housemaster and ultimately bursar of Berkhamsted School, and some of Antony's earliest recollections date from the time when he lived at Incent's, the large boarding house in Chesham Road.

As a small boy Antony went to Rothesay School and then, in 1931, to the Berkhamsted School preparatory department at The Hall (demolished over 40 years ago) where he spent the happiest of his school years. Then he became a day boy at Berkhamsted School, journeying each day from the Hopkins' home, the Woodyard, where the Common joins Ashridge Park. It is still the home of Antony and his wife, their animals and their cars.

These few local facts are drawn from a book which is a joy to read; it is candid,

often hilarious, and always interesting. For good measure there are photographs of Antony as a boy, as a student, and, of course, as a conductor who is never happier than when lots of young people are present. The book, 'Beating Time', is published by Michael Joseph at £8.95.

SIX LITTLE PIGS

A little more than three miles (as the crow flies) from the town centre is the hilltop village of Hawridge, and when I was there a short time ago, walking along the short road which leads to the church, I was told that it is unique in having a stained glass window featuring six little pigs.

One should always be wary of anything said to be unique, but I cannot recall seeing representations of pigs in any other church. Have you?

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

On May 14th a very well-known townsman celebrated his 80th birthday. Mr Basil Cole looks much younger than his years, doubtless because he keeps active and good humoured and is never happier than when working in and around St Peter's Church. Sidesman, caretaker, and guide to visitors, he is busy with his hands if anything deteriorates, takes steps (lots of them) if the tower clock isn't

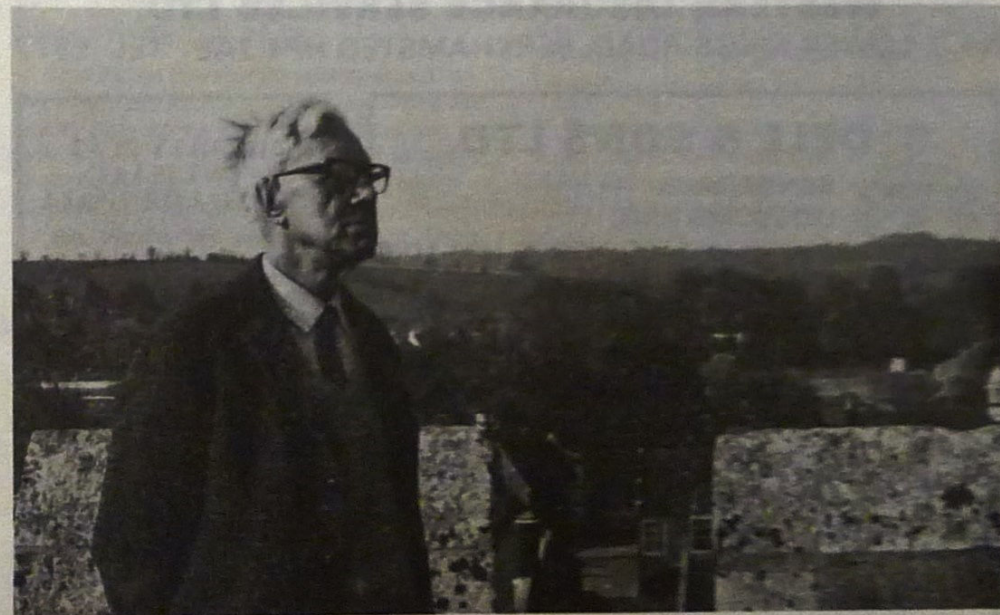
quite right, and keeps an eye on the Court House. All this for love, not money.

Born in Harpenden, Basil came to Berkhamsted at the age of five when his father was licensee of the White Hart, which stood next door to the Town Hall until it was pulled down in 1973. Basil went to the Victoria School and attended Sunday School at the Court House when the Rev. Hart Davies was rector.

At the age of 20 he went to Paris for 18 months, decoding cablegrams for a firm which eventually went out of business. Returning to Berkhamsted, Basil was a band-

knife cutter at the Bulbourne Factory in Lower Kings Road, where as many as 750 women and girls were employed making women's clothing. He stayed at the factory in the 1939-45 War when it was largely devoted to assembling aeroplanes. Finally he worked in the despatch department of the Clunbury Press, handling many thousands of copies of the Review when it was printed in Berkhamsted.

Basil has lived in Castle Street for over 50 years. He is a widower, and his only son, Rowland, was killed in Israel in 1947.



BASIL COLE, St Peter's General Factotum, was 80 in May. Here he stands, photographed by Harry Sheldon, on top of St Peter's Tower built in the reign of Henry VIII, with the Tudor school below and Berkhamsted Common on the skyline. 'Monarch of all he surveys'? Long may he reign!

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IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

By 'Beorcham' (continued)

PRINTER'S INK

In last month's Review I mentioned that the **Berkhamsted Times** was printed in Holliday Street on a press which was driven by a timber merchant's steam engine next door. That was about a century ago.

A resident tells me that when decorating her house she comes across splotches of what was thought to be some very tenacious black paint. It now seems that it is printer's ink!

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

One of the town's oldest inhabitants has been talking to me about the days when the gentry (a word we never hear nowadays) graciously allowed fetes to be held in their spacious gardens. She recalled fetes and garden parties at Berkhamsted Place, New Lodge, The Hall, Millfield, Haresfoot, Cross Oak, Lagley and other mansions, most of which have been demolished. St Peter's Band or the Excelsior Band played for dancing on the lawn and a good time was had by all, weather permitting.

Nowadays fetes are sometimes held in the grounds of local schools or, once a year, in the Castle grounds, where the attendance may run into thousands if the weather is fine. But there were just as large crowds in Victorian times, when special trains were run for the Oddfellows' annual fete in the Castle grounds. People from neighbouring towns and villages arrived in every conceivable vehicle, from pony traps to wagonettes. And many people thought nothing of a walk of five or more miles each way.

The fetes opened with a procession through the town, and some of London's most celebrated music hall artistes, 'secured at enormous

expense' according to the posters, gave afternoon and evening performances.

One side of the Castle arena smelt like Brighton fish-market. One could buy fried fish, winkles, oysters, cockles and whelks, and as fish, heat, dust and lusty singing induced no small degree of thirstiness, frequent visits were paid to neighbouring tents where beer was dispensed at twopence a pint. Long before 'God save the Queen' was played, the atmosphere was lively, not to say rowdy, with free fights providing off-the-programme attractions.

DOWN IN THE VALLEY

For many years Berkhamsted and Northchurch have been extending on the hill-sides, and now there is much activity in the valley. At Northchurch there are many signs of development between the Bulborne and the highway. Hundreds of tons of earth and old bricks have been shifted to raise the low-lying land east of New Road, and there are signs of larger developments west of that road.

In Berkhamsted, builders have been busy between St John's Well Lane and Part Street, and there has been a major re-development in George Street, where a row of mid-Victorian houses was pulled down for new homes best seen from the canal towpath. Incidentally, a former resident, paying her first visit to Berkhamsted for over 20 years, was astounded to find that new houses and flats had replaced a corner shop and a row of cottages in Provident Place, or Foggy Bottom, as it was usually called. She was also surprised to see so many changes in Chapel Street, where the very large Congregational Church has been replaced by Fiske House.