

*the magazine for town and parish*

# *your* **Berkhamsted**

A photograph of a snowy forest path. The trees are covered in snow, and the path leads towards a bright light source in the distance, creating a hazy, atmospheric effect.

Berkhamsted in the news  
Dangerous days of Dacorum  
Festival of Light in Berkhamsted  
Simple Christmas recipes

December 2011

50p

## *From the Editor* December 2011



*The Parish Magazine of  
St Peter's  
Great Berkhamsted*

**Welcome to the December issue of *Your Berkhamsted*.**

Another year draws to a close and looking back through the 2011 issues of *Your Berkhamsted* I am reminded of the events that have taken place in our community in the past 12 months. We've celebrated 30 years of the Petertide Fair and 60 years of Ashlyns school, and arrived well and truly in the 21st century with our very own internet television channel. We said an unexpected goodbye to a local landmark when Birtchnell's collapsed one dark night, and were equally surprised when we lost our Royal Mail sorting office. Despite the economic gloom we've welcomed new shops to the town, including two art galleries, showing that even the financial crisis cannot dampen Berkhamsted's enterprising spirit. Whatever 2012 brings, *Your Berkhamsted* will continue its aims to explore the past, reflect the present and look to the future of Berkhamsted and its residents. If you'd like to share your Berkhamsted memories or tell us about news of local events or organisations, we'd be delighted to hear from you.

I'd like to thank everyone who has contributed to *Your Berkhamsted* in 2011, whether by supporting us as a reader, advertiser or sales outlet, or by contributing articles, photos and letters, or by making sure that the magazine is delivered each week to our local sales outlets and subscribers. The *Your Berkhamsted* team wishes you a happy Christmas and all good wishes for the year ahead.

**Ian Skillicorn, Editor**

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## *Your Berkhamsted Leader* by Fr Michael Bowie



Canon Giles Fraser (who I notice I mentioned in last year's December leader) is now big news. It was his intervention and then

resignation, leading to other resignations, which ultimately ensured that St Paul's Cathedral responded credibly to the protesters outside its doors (and reopened those doors). Before he resigned, one of the things he said was that he could imagine Jesus being born in one of the protesters' tents (implication, 'and not in Christopher Wren's magnificent building').

That's a good piece of polemic, a statement you'll notice. Like most such sound bites, you can't push it too far. I doubt that there is a natural link between the poor and insignificant circumstances of Jesus' birth – the real point – and these protesters. But Fraser's *instinct* is as correct as his intuition that the Cathedral's response was misguided. Jesus, in his birth, life, ministry, teaching, death and resurrection did not align himself with the rich and the powerful. Unlike the Dean of St Paul's he didn't have the Prime Minister or leading financiers ringing up to put pressure on him. And when that sort of pressure was applied, before his torture and judicial murder, he ignored or rejected it.

That's where this problem started – listening to power rather than people. Christmas is all about putting people ahead of power: God coming to us in weakness to show us that true kingship resided in a defenceless child. That child,

when grown, urged us to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. When asked the identity of our neighbour he told a story about people meeting a traveller who'd been beaten up: the one who helped him was a neighbour (the Good Samaritan).

Increasingly, we inhabit safe places where we only know people like ourselves. God does the opposite. Christmas is one time when we are reminded to look beyond our closed doors and love those whom he loves.

Have a very happy and holy Christmas.



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## Around the town

The latest news from around Berkhamsted



### World AIDS Day

There will be a Day of Prayer at All Saints' from 9am - 7pm on

Thursday 1st December for World AIDS Day.

### Festival of Light

This year's Festival of Light is on Sunday 4th December. Come along to the High Street for local music and food, and the switching on of the Christmas lights. More information on pages 9 and 30.

### Christmas at Oxfam

Christmas is coming. This year why not resolve to make all your giving give twice – once to the recipient and once to those who benefit from charities like Oxfam who have a splendid range of gifts and cards on offer.

In addition to the excellent selection of new goods, many sourced from Fairtrade projects, the Oxfam shop will feature a special window of donated gifts in mint condition. And of course there is the tempting range of festive foods which make welcome presents as well as easing the catering burden. All its Christmas cards are made of recycled materials and the packaging can be recycled after use. Much more appealing than an e-card.

Still stuck for an idea? Why not give an alternative gift from the Unwrapped catalogue? Giving three specially designed buckets for the drought victims

of East Africa comes much closer to the spirit of the season than more bath salts.

### Events at St Peter's Church presented by the Cowper Society

**Saturday 3rd December at 7.30pm**

CONCERT: Berkhamsted Choral Society + Philharmonia Brass Christmas Concert. Ave Maris Stella Cecilia McDowall.

Works by Lauridsen, Williams, Warlock. Carols for choir and audience. Conductor Graham Wili. Tickets : £13 / £11 U16s FREE from 07500 431643, Cole Flatt, 124 High St., Berkhamsted and at the door.

**Monday 12th December at 8pm**

RECITAL: Organ Recital - Steven Grahl, Director of Music, St Marylebone Church, London. To include parts of Messiaen's La nativité. Free admission – retiring collection.

**Friday 23rd December at 7.30pm**

CONCERT: Chiltern Chamber Choir + Bridgewater Sinfonietta JS Bach Christmas Oratorio with Kathryn Jenkin soprano, Jeanette Ager mezzo-soprano, John-Colyn Geantey tenor, Christopher Foster bass. Conductor Adrian Davis Tickets: £15 / £13 U18s FREE from Cole Flatt, 124 High St., Berkhamsted, choir members and at the door.

### Christian Aid Big Sing

Come and sing carols on Saturday 17th December between 10am and 11.30am outside Tesco. Join voices to help the world's poorest communities lift themselves out of poverty.

More details from Margaret Burbidge  
tel: 862139 *yB*

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## *Read all about us!*

**Julian Dawson** takes a look at varied and surprising references to our town on the internet

Another interesting potpourri of topics in this month's Berkhamsted web roundup, which is inevitably dominated by the performance of the local football team. However it is a new initiative which catches the eye of the local press with the launch of Dee TV. Nope, not a Scottish river flowing through our cable TV, or a Welsh one for that matter. D is for Dacorum. And this is a new service for community groups to raise awareness by uploading videos to [www.deetv.tv](http://www.deetv.tv). Incidentally, TV is actually the internet country code for the Pacific nation of Tuvalu. They actually make a million dollars a quarter through leasing the name to organisations such as television broadcasters. And whilst we discuss broadcasting, a court ruling that breaks BSkyB's monopoly over sport broadcasting in pubs has been welcomed by the landlord of the Goat. He had been fined for showing premiership football via a Swedish provider. Surely a victory for the consumer. And talking of pubs, last month I mentioned the Crown's appearance in the Good Beer Guide. Patrons of the Rising Sun will wish me to point out that their pub adorns the front cover of the guide this year. The Daily Mail reports on the latest Halifax property performance, throwing some intriguing stats. Bury is the hottest spot in the kingdom, with sales up 44 per cent in the first six months of 2011. However the worst performing towns are in the south east, with Berkhamsted displaying a 32 per cent drop in property sales over the same period, the third worst in the region. Fellow county town

Hoddesdon had the largest drop in the country.

On a more inspiring note, a former boy of this parish has been named Geek of the Week by GeekWire.Com. Robert Clarke, whose parents were former members of St Peters' choir, founded OmniTechNews with his friends at Redmond Junior High in Washington State where the family now live and work. He just loves technology, advises fellow geeks not to geek out in public, and reckons the important technology of the year is the smart phone. Youngsters like Robert are shaping how technology will map our future. We should pay them every attention! The British Film Institute (BFI) continues to make the news. In bifiwatch, an independent blog about events affecting the institute, we are told that the BFI intends to establish a study centre at its Berkhamsted outpost for 'in depth' research, re-emphasising their commitment to the town.

I can always recommend Wikipedia for a diverting few minutes. It's one of those sites where in attempting to find an answer to some piece of trivia, you are taken down all sorts of byways completely unrelated to where you started. Hence, we learn that Charles Gadsden left Berkhamsted at the end of the nineteenth century enticed by the Montana gold rush where he ended up running a sapphire mine which, until its demise in 1929, recovered an estimated 16 million carats of the gem. And on that gleaming note, if any of the snippets in this month's piece encourage you to put pen to paper we'd love to hear from you. *yB*

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# ***Festival of Light***

**Councillor Carol Green, Mayor of Berkhamsted**, invites you to join an annual Berkhamsted tradition

**W**e are once again approaching that magical time of the year - Berkhamsted Festival of Light will be held on Sunday 4th December. The Festival of Light is an opportunity for local charities to showcase their organisation and a chance to fundraise in one way or another. The charitable organisations and local businesses all support the event and it is this combination of commercial and the voluntary sector merging which makes Berkhamsted such a special place at this poignant Christmas festival.

Highlights include musical entertainment with Berkhamsted School Big Band, Ashlyns School Samba Band, Rock Chorus and Hemel Hempstead Brass Band! There will also be children's fairground rides, Association of Berkhamsted Churches Christmas Carols, lovely winter food and drinks outlets, such as hot chocolate, mulled wine and mince pies.

Many of the local shops will be participating and offering special promotions, and the cafés and restaurants are a great way to sample the wide range of the best of Berkhamsted. The Citizens Association will be presenting the 'Best Shop Window' competition prize just before the all-important 'count-down' for the 'Big Switch On' which is quickly followed by the arrival of Father Christmas (reindeer permitting!).

On conclusion at 6pm, Fr Michael Bowie



invites all for Carols at Christmas in St. Peter's Church, which promises to be a truly magnificent service.

This is a free event in which a huge amount of work is involved and could only be accomplished with the fantastic support of the many volunteers who have worked so hard throughout the year.

I would also like to thank you for coming along to Berkhamsted Festival of Light and supporting our town, I hope you all have a wonderful time and a very happy Christmas. *yB*

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# ***Dangerous Days of Dacorum***

**Dan Parry** delves into our distant and dangerous past

One of the earliest references to Berkhamsted appears in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which tells us that in 1066, after William defeated Harold at Hastings, he was handed the crown of England by a gathering of reluctant Saxon nobles at or near the site of Berkhamsted Castle. It's an important moment in Berkhamsted's history. But even in this condensed version there's evidence of a much bigger story, a disturbing period of murder and destruction that embroiled our town in centuries of bloody warfare and political upheaval, which still resonates today.

The clues are all around us, beginning with the thought that William didn't come here by accident. Heading north from the coast he tried to seize London, but after defeat at Southwark he took his army west to the ancient fortified borough of Wallingford where he crossed the Thames. Instead of trying to attack London again he decided on something else. Whether he planned to pursue a campaign of intimidation by subduing the next significant place in the region, or whether he was simply invited to meet the Saxon nobles at a place of their own choosing, either way William made a decision to come to Berkhamsted.

What made our town significant? One suggestion is that, like Wallingford, it was a fortified position within striking distance of London. Towns like Wallingford had been turned into strongholds by Alfred the Great, in order to withstand attacks by the Vikings, the hordes of Danish warriors who swept into eastern England during the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries. The

Danes journeyed far inland on violent raids that were daring and brutal and which plunged England into the Dark Ages.

In pushing west, the Vikings followed ancient roads including the Icknield Way and Akeman Street. The former is a track leading from the east coast down to south-west England, the latter is the Roman road to Cirencester and both pass through Berkhamsted. It's recorded that in 869 the Danes 'rode across Mercia' from York to Thetford using the Icknield Way. From their camp at Thetford, they attacked Reading in 871, again using the same route, and in 878 they followed Akeman Street to the Icknield Way when returning to Thetford from Cirencester.

When heading inland from eastern shores, the upland and lowland tracks of the Icknield Way approach Berkhamsted from Dunstable to the north. Marauding Vikings would have crossed our valley somewhere between Berko and Tring, where they would have stumbled across Akeman Street - better known to us today as the High Street. This made the north side of the town vulnerable to attack. Our castle, protecting the north side, stands at the junction of the main valley that runs through Berkhamsted and a smaller valley that leads out towards Aldbury and the Icknield Way. This second valley extends north beyond the cricket pitch and the fields that host the annual firework display. Today, one side is crowned by Berkhamsted Common while the other is farmland.

*(continues on page 12)*

*(continued from previous page)*

The Viking attacks began in earnest in the 860s but in later years Alfred took the initiative, and around 880 he forced the Viking king Guthrum out of Wessex and back towards the east. There the Danes were held beyond something similar to a political border, the Danelaw. This ran north along the Lea Valley to Leagrave before heading up to Bedford, then swinging north-west to Chester. Less a political border than a line in the sand, there were no walls or fences and Vikings held land either side of it. It's believed they occupied sites directly east of Berkhamsted, in an area simply known as 'Danish', (historically spelt as Danais). Vikings in this area later swapped pillaging and pagan gods for farming and Christianity (it's known that three noble Danes granted lands to St. Albans Abbey), but for many years our town found itself on the borders of a frontier teeming with the most warlike people ever to invade our country.

After Alfred's death in 899, his son Edward the Elder ruled much of southern England. But it was Edward's sister Ethelfleda, 'the Lady of the Mercians', who between 911 and 918 effectively ruled Mercia, which at the time included Berkhamsted. Following the strategy adopted by her father and brother, Ethelfleda built forts in strategically important places to contain the Danes, and by 918 she and her brother had pushed the Vikings all the way up to the Humber. Whether during the period of Albert, Edward (who built the fortress at Hertford) or Ethelfleda, it's probable that a wooden fort of some description was built in Berkhamsted by a Saxon noble in

order to strengthen the border and help contain the Viking threat. More than 150 years later it appears the fort was both significant enough to attract William's attention and well known to the Saxon nobles who set out to meet him there.

When William arrived, the 'hundred', or district, to the east of the town was still known as Danais. Meanwhile we here in Berkhamsted - on the Saxon side of the old frontier - were included in another district, the Tring Hundred. Although both are identified in the Domesday Book, by 1200 Tring Hundred had been swallowed up by its eastern neighbour, whose name by that time had evolved from Danais to a grander, latinised translation meaning 'of the Danes' - ie, Dacorum. To us in my house at least, Dacorum once meant local facilities and bin collections. But since discovering the history of pillaging behind us, we now find it hard to look upon Dacorum without a new sense of pride.

*yB*

### **Your Berkhamsted Needs You!**

The editorial team of Your Berkhamsted is actively seeking new contributors for the magazine.

Did you know that everyone who works on bringing Your Berkhamsted to you each month is a volunteer? We would extend a warm welcome to anyone who would like to join us, whether you would like to contribute on a regular basis or just write a one-off article.

### **Features**

We are always interested in discussing ideas for features about Berkhamsted life. These could be about the town's history, interesting modern day developments or local people of note (past or present).

## *Christmas Recipes*

**Joanne Lloyd-Evans** has some simple and tasty recipes for this Christmas



crumbs into a mixing bowl and mix in the cocoa powder and around 130g of dessicated coconut. Next, pour the sweetened condensed milk and rum (if using) into the mixing bowl. Pour some of the remaining dessicated coconut onto a saucer or shallow bowl and start making small balls with the mixture by rolling in your palms. Roll each ball in the coconut and set aside on a plate. This mixture can be

### **Rumballs**

Rumballs are a delicious treat (with or without the rum!) and are very quick and easy to make. They do not require any cooking and can be kept in the fridge for at least a week. Your fingers will get extremely sticky, but licking them is all part of the fun. These quantities make 25-30 rumballs.

200g packet of rich tea biscuits  
30g (1 oz) cocoa powder  
200g packet dessicated coconut: 130g (4oz) for the mixture, 70g (3oz) for rolling  
397g tin sweetened condensed milk  
1 tbsp rum (optional – if you use this, use a little less condensed milk)

Crush the biscuits by whizzing them in a food processor, or alternatively pop them in a bag and crush with a rolling pin or wine bottle. Put the biscuit

a little sticky, so if you are finding it difficult, you can either add a little more coconut or put it in the fridge for a short while to firm up.

When you have finished making the rumballs, cover them with cling film and put them in the fridge to firm up. It is best (but not essential) to keep them in the fridge and they will be good for at least a week.

*(continues on page 14)*





## *Christmas Recipes continued*

### **Seville mince pies**

Homemade mince pies do take a little time, but are so much better than even the best supermarket versions. This version has a fresh and citrusy fruit mince that is less sweet and more interesting than the usual. You can always buy shortcrust pastry, but I do think that homemade is best if you have the time. To cook the pies, you will need a bun tray or yorkshire pudding tray. If you don't have anything suitable, type "mince pie tray" into Amazon and you'll be able to buy one for a few pounds.

Mincemeat ingredients (enough for at least 36 mince pies and will keep in the fridge for a month)

500g (1lb) cooking apples

150g (5oz) muscovado sugar

½ tsp mixed spice

½ tsp cinnamon

Juice and zest of 2 oranges

400g (14oz) chopped dried fruit (e.g. raisins, apricots, pears, prunes, dates)

125ml (4oz) brandy, rum or sherry

60g (2oz) roast chopped hazelnuts

125g (4oz) good quality marmalade

Method for the mincemeat

Chop the apples into small dice and put them in a large pan with all ingredients apart from the hazelnuts and marmalade. Bring to the boil, then simmer slowly, uncovered, for 30-40 minutes until it has thickened. Stir in the hazelnuts and marmalade and set aside to cool. When cool, it should not be runny at all, or it will make the pastry soggy. If you think that the mincemeat is too liquid, just cook it for a bit longer to reduce it further.

Pastry ingredients (enough for 12-15 mince pies)

225g (8oz) plain flour

50g (2oz) ground almonds

140g (5oz) cold butter, cut into small pieces

Grated zest of 1 orange

40g icing sugar

1 egg yolk

2 tsp lemon juice

Method for the pastry and assembly

Put the flour, almonds, butter, orange zest and icing sugar in a food processor and whizz until it is like fine breadcrumbs.

Add the egg yolk and two teaspoons of lemon juice while pulsing the food processor. The mixture should just be starting to come together and you can take it out of the food processor and form the dough with your hands. If it still looks too crumbly, add a small amount of cold water and pulse the dough again (be careful not to add too much or it will be hard to roll and will be hard and tough when cooked).

Split the dough in half and form two flattened discs, then wrap them in cling film and put them in the fridge to chill for at least 30 minutes (the purpose of making the two flattened discs is to make the pastry easy to roll after chilling). Don't skip this chilling step or your pastry will have a poor texture and will shrink too much in the oven. If you are short on time, put the pastry in the freezer for a shorter period of time. Preheat the oven to 200C (conventional) or 190C (fan) and grease the bun tray. Working quickly and trying not to handle the pastry too much, take one disc of pastry from the fridge and roll it thinly on a lightly floured work surface.

Cut out rounds of pastry with a 3 inch not to handle the pastry too much, take one disc of pastry from the fridge and roll it thinly on a lightly floured work surface. Cut out rounds of pastry with a 3 inch diameter circular cutter and line each hole of the bun tray. Ensure that the pastry comes up over the edge, as the pastry will still shrink a little. Place a heaped teaspoonful of cool mincemeat into each pastry case.

Take the second disc of pastry from the fridge and roll out again to create the lids. This time use a slightly smaller cutter (about 2.5 inch diameter) and place the lids on top of each pie. Pinch down with your fingers to create a seal around each pie. Brush the tops with egg white and sprinkle with a little caster sugar. Ideally, rest your pies in the fridge again for 10-15 minutes before cooking. Bake in the oven for 12-15 minutes until the pastry is crisp and golden. Cool in the tins for 10 minutes before gently transferring to a wire rack. Dust with icing sugar before serving. yB

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# *Celebrating 200 Years of Church Schools*

By **Rob Halls**

The Church of England was the pioneer in popular education. In October 1811, the National Society was founded with the aim of providing a church school in every parish in England and Wales. This was well before 1870 when the government began to provide non-denominational schools.

The four church schools in and around Berkhamsted – Victoria First School & The Thomas Coram Middle School, Berkhamsted; St Mary's First School, Northchurch, and Potten End First School created four events to celebrate this anniversary in 2011.

We began with a Big Sing on the afternoon of Sunday 20 March. Each of the schools contributed a couple of items, and we opened and closed with two 'massed choir' items: 'All authority and power' by Christopher Idle and David Wilson and the first performance of a new item – 'Two hundred years of learning,' which was composed especially for us to celebrate NATSOC 200 and can be downloaded from the 'Helping you celebrate' page of their website [www.natsoc200.org.uk](http://www.natsoc200.org.uk).

It's our values that make us what we are, and this was a very central message as all the schools thought about their values and created some excellent pieces of work to reflect or exemplify these. Our work is on display at [www.thomascoram.herts.sch.uk/values](http://www.thomascoram.herts.sch.uk/values).

Please go and take a look and find out



*Our local banner made a quarter each by our local church schools*

more about what our values are and what they mean to us.

Church schools do one thing well: big services! And how could we end our school year, and our own local celebrations without a giant service? We were fortunate to be offered a marquee fit to hold 1000 people at Berkhamsted School, which was a perfect venue for us

to reflect on our membership of a community celebrating its 200th birthday. All four church schools took part in leading aspects of our worship with Fr Michael and Rev Penny.

It was at this service that our fourth initiative was presented and displayed: a huge banner created in four panels, one by each school, and brought together for the event.

**From Berkhamsted to diocesan!** On

11&12 October, Church schools from all over the diocese gathered for one of three services in St Albans Cathedral to mark the 200th anniversary at which Rob Halls (deputy headteacher at Thomas Coram) played the organ. Victoria First and Thomas Coram Middle representatives attended the same service at Potten End representatives – and around 500 other pupils!

In addition to taking our banner from our four local church schools, we were also honoured to be asked to not only carry the Diocesan ‘200 years’ Banner, but also to make it! Sue Gilchrist and Sarah Brightman – two teaching assistants at Thomas Coram Middle - created a truly outstanding front to the diocesan banner and attached the back made by pupils at St Swithun’s Lower School, Sandy, Bedfordshire, also in our diocese.

**To national!** Mrs Brightman was also able to go to the national service of celebration in Westminster Abbey to see the banner used there with that from every other diocese.

Celebrating our past and looking backwards is fun; looking forward into a new and exciting future is something else!

*yB*



*One of the three school services in St Albans Abbey. A bible was presented to each school.*

# *Regular Church Activities*

3rd Mon	Pastoral Network, 7:45pm, The Court House. Contact Philippa Seldon 871534
Tue	Chuckles Parent & Toddler Group, 10-11:30am. All Saints Church Hall. Song Time or short service as announced. Contact Jenny Wells, 870981
Tue	St Peter's Choir, Children 5:15-6:15pm. St Peter's. Adrian Davis 875674 or Jean Wild 866859
1st Tue	Tuesday Club, 7:45pm A lively women's group with guest speaker. The Court House. Contact Barbara McKenna 871159
3rd Tue	Mothers' Union, meet in members' houses at 2.30pm. New members always welcome. Contact Kathie Lally, 863526
4th Tue	Mothers' Union Prayer Group, 2:30pm. 17 Shaftesbury Court. Tell us if anyone needs your prayers. Contact Jenny Wells 870981
Wed	Julian Meeting, meets about twice a month. 11:30am. All welcome. At Jenny Wells, 57 Meadow Rd, 870981 or at Ruth Treves Brown, 1 Montague Rd, 863268
Thu	Home Group, 8pm on 2nd and 4th Thurs.
Thu	Bellringing, 8pm, St Peters. Contact Helen Ruberry, 890949
Fri	Little Fishes Parent & Toddler Group 9:30-11:30am. The Court House. Weekly, with short service on 1st Friday in St Peter's (10am). Tracy Robinson 863559
Fri	St Peter's Choir, Children 7-8:30pm, Adults 7:30—8:30pm. St Peter's. Adrian Davis 875674 or Jean Wild 866859
1st Sun	Sundays Together Lunches, contact Liz Jackson on 864382
3rd Sat	ABC Prayer Breakfast, 8am for breakfast & prayers. Various local churches.

Sunday Services	St Peter's	All Saints'—December	
	8:00am Eucharist	4th	10:00am Morning Worship
	9:30am Sung Eucharist & Sunday School	11th	10:00am Holy Communion
	6:00pm Evensong	18th	10:00am All Age Worship (Nativity)
	<i>For Christmas services please see the St Peter's Christmas Service leaflet.</i>		4:00pm Carol Service
		24th	4:00pm Crib Service
	<i>First Sunday in month Family Service at 9:30am</i>		11.30pm Midnight Holy Communion
		25th	10:00am All Age Holy Communion



# December Parish Diary

Fri 2nd	8:15pm	Petertide Wine Tasting in the Court House, <i>St Peter's</i>
Sat 3rd	7:30pm	Cowper Society presents Berkhamsted Choral Society concert, <i>St Peter's</i>
Tue 6th	8:00pm	PCC meeting, Court House, <i>St Peter's</i>
Mon 12th	8:00pm	Cowper Society presents Organ Recital, Stephen Grahl (Directory of Music, St Marylebone Church, London)
Fri 23rd	7:30pm	Cowper Society presents Chiltern Chamber Choir Christmas Concert, <i>St Peter's</i>

*Parish Diary information can be found at [www.stpetersberkhamsted.org.uk](http://www.stpetersberkhamsted.org.uk)*

## Baptisms

- 16 Oct** Joshua George Swansborough (*All Saints'*)
- 23 Oct** Amelia Lily Bird; Albert Reginald Charles Gray; Joshua James Williams; Isabella Mai Williams; Amelia Grace Spademan (*St Peter's*)
- 30 Oct** Sophia Elizabeth Liddle; Laycie Rose Miller; Madison-Tayla Rose Cutts; Daniel Paul Michael Marsh (*St Peter's*)

## Funerals

- 3 Oct** Dorothy Madge Purton (*St Peter's*)
- 5 Oct** Julian Michael Birch (*St Peter's*)
- 15 Oct** Christopher John Easton Morris (*St Peter's*)

## Key Church Contacts

Parish Office, Hilary Armstrong and Kate Perera, Court House, 878227.  
Fr Michael Bowie, 864194 (day off Fri). Team Rector, St Peter's.  
The Revd Rachael Hawkins, All Saints'.

Further information available from our church websites:  
  
[www.stpetersberkhamsted.org.uk](http://www.stpetersberkhamsted.org.uk) and at [www.allsaintsberkhamsted.org.uk](http://www.allsaintsberkhamsted.org.uk)

## *Come down to the woods*

**Ann Lang** tells us about the work of the Friends of Ashridge

**I**s your favourite Sunday outing a ramble through the National Trust's Ashridge Estate? Berkhamsted is so lucky to have wonderful stretches of woodland and common land right on its doorstep, and all with totally free access. Because it is free of charge to explore, that does bring its own problems though – the National Trust undertakes the management and upkeep of the huge Estate but needs a positive army of volunteers to supplement the work of paid staff.

This is where the Friends of Ashridge make themselves useful. We have a two-fold purpose: first, to encourage people to volunteer; and second, to raise funds to provide often essential 'extras' for the running of the Estate. There must be something in the volunteer tasks to suit almost anyone – retired engineers might enjoy maintaining the mobility buggies; desk-bound workers may have a yearning to learn how to build a stone wall or to turn woodsman with one of the two conservation groups; if the great outdoors is just too chilly for you, working in the splendidly-refurbished NT shop might appeal, or perhaps helping with children's craft activities in school holidays.

If you'd like to know more about all the volunteer opportunities, give the Visitor Centre a ring on 01442 851227. You can volunteer for as often or as occasionally as suits your life, from every week to one-



off help at special events. And don't forget the Friends' committee itself! - we welcome your involvement, especially at the moment if you have MS Excel competence or website maintenance experience. We have only

four meetings a year, so will not occupy too much of your time.

The fundraising side of our activities sees two major events in particular being organised near the Visitor Centre on Monument Drive: the Christmas Fair (Sunday 4th December this year) which hosts a large gathering of local craftspeople and producers selling all things festive, and the Spring Plant Fair (Sunday 13th May 2012) when thousands of plants from private gardens as well as commercial growers are sold at very good prices. These two events raise thousands of pounds, which are then used to buy vital equipment and fund special projects, solely for Ashridge.

Membership of the Friends is an easy way to help the Estate's work: it's very affordable (£8 per person per year) and we reward you with a discount on NT walks and talks events at Ashridge and keep you informed by our twice-yearly full colour newsletter. If you'd like to join the Friends or our committee, do email the Chair Mike Bean: [chairman@friendsofashridge.org.uk](mailto:chairman@friendsofashridge.org.uk). Find out more about us and about the Ashridge Estate at [www.friendsofashridge.org.uk](http://www.friendsofashridge.org.uk)

# *Maurice Pring*

**Joydeep Sircar** looks back on the life of a local war hero

**M**aurice Pring, a Berkhamsted boy, became a hero to Calcutta (now Kolkata) in the dark and distant days of World War II, and lies buried there. In these times when heroes are so few, we should remember the heroes we had. This is the story of Maurice Pring, who would have turned 90 on November 1, 2011.

By April 1942 Burma had fallen: wearing seven-league boots, the Japanese had incredibly arrived at the Eastern border of India in just five months. Calcutta, well within reach of their bombers, enjoyed a reprieve till December 20th, 1942, when eight bombers hit the city, causing minor damage but major panic. As the raids continued, the Commander-in-Chief India, General Archibald Wavell, sent a request for night-fighters to London.

In response to Wavell's request, eight Beaufighters and their crews from 89 Squadron arrived at Dum Dum airfield in Calcutta on January

14th, 1943, and found themselves renamed as a new RAF squadron, no.176. 176 became India's first night-fighter unit with the motto *Nocte custodimus* – 'We keep the night watch'. 176 may have been new, but its aircrew were old hands at night-fighting. The Australian Charles Crombie had nine victories. Another rising star was a slim, six foot tall

Englishman with a boyish, smiling face, born in Ealing, West London to Arthur Benjamin and Doris Lilian Pring (nee Garrett) on November 1st, 1921. He was Flight Sergeant Arthur Maurice Owers Pring.

Pring's father was an electrical engineer who spent many years working in South America and Canada. The Pring family returned to England in 1936, and settled at Berkhamsted, first at 22, Boxwell Road and later at 38, Ashlyns Road. Maurice Pring joined Berkhamsted School in April 1936 as a day boy and passed out in 1939.

Pring was studying at Chelsea Polytechnic when he was called



*Flight Sergeant Maurice Pring by JA O'Neill, courtesy of Andy Thomas*

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*(continued from page 21)*

up in 1940 and selected for night fighter pilot training. He served in 604 and 125 Squadrons before joining 89 in Egypt early in 1942. Flying with Warrant Officer Phillips as his observer, Pring achieved his first victory in July 1942. Posted to Malta, he destroyed three more enemy bombers in October 1942. A pilot who has five or more victories in aerial combat is called an 'ace': on 14th January 1943, Pring was just one victory away from becoming an ace.

The Japanese returned to Calcutta on 15th January. When the raid warning came Pring and Phillips headed towards their Beaufighter together with armourer LAC Carl Morgan. They were brought up short by a sharp 'Halt!' from an African soldier guarding the aircraft. Asked for the password, the bewildered trio realized they did not know it, and prudently retreated when the guard operated the rifle bolt. Luckily they found the guard commander just in time to scramble! Pring intercepted the three unpainted Sallys which seemed to 'gleam like silver fishes' in the brilliant moonlight, and destroyed all three in just four minutes.

The story broke worldwide. Pring was immediately decorated with the Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) and Phillips with the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) – Pring did not get the DFC because class-conscious Britain gave DFCs only to Warrant and Commissioned Officers! Ironically, he was commissioned as Pilot Officer effective 21st January.

Pring cannot have anticipated his instant fame. He featured in a full page war loan advertisement and was chosen to appear on an Air Force recruiting poster. He became the toast of Calcutta, much in demand at dinners, and gained a fan following among children and teenagers.

Carl Morgan recounts an illustrative anecdote. Pring went to a gunshop and found a .22 rifle he liked. On hearing the price, he regretfully remarked it was beyond his budget. A well-dressed Indian gentleman present in the shop then asked him if he was the Sergeant Pring who had shot down three Japanese bombers. On Pring answering in the affirmative, the gentleman bought the weapon and 2000 rounds of .22 ammunition for Pring, and took him in his Rolls-Royce to Firpo's, Calcutta's finest restaurant, for a terrific meal.

In February 1943, 176 Squadron moved to Baigachi, a new airstrip some 25 miles North East of Calcutta, where they were honoured by a visit from the Governor of Bengal. The grateful British residents treated 176 Squadron to an all-ranks dance at Firpo's.

In June 1943 the squadron received a dozen single-seater Hawker Hurricanes equipped with pilot-operated AI Mark 6 radar. Fought against the Luftwaffe, these had been sent to India to try their luck against the Japanese. Pring, keen pilot that he was, learnt to fly the Hurricanes, although as a Beaufighter pilot he need not have done so...

*Read the conclusion of Maurice Pring's story in our next issue... yB*





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## *O Sing Joyfully!*

**Jonathan Lee** gives us a behind-the-scenes look at the recording of a local CD

Churches present unique challenges as recording venues: unlike a modern studio, they are creaky, not sound-proofed, and have various bits of noisy machinery (clocks, bells, doors etc.). Take a large medieval church next to a high street (with a fair number of boy racers in noisy cars) on one side, and emergency services on the other side, and you begin to see the challenge of making a recording in St Peter's Church. Oh, and there are advantages, too: the sound, the organ, the seemingly unusual medieval holes and spaces where cables can drop...

Making a disc is a hugely beneficial process for any musical group – it forces performers to perform knowing that every nuance is being picked up, and then to listen to a producer who identifies areas for improvement (usually the same areas identified by the director previously, and not always believed!). St Peter's Choir had two full days of recording experience – learning how the process works, and seeing how lots of pieces of jigsaw are created, and understanding that the producers and engineer must patch everything together at a later stage. The result will show the choir in a different light to live performance: a 'studio' recording should show their abilities in archive form as they would want their 'sound' to be remembered – an archive of what is achieved on a weekly basis in that building, except without events (coughing fits, natural human error etc.) that might impact a live performance.

The choristers and adults in the choir sang



brilliantly and coped with the challenges presented – even seeming to maintain the excitement throughout the long sessions. Our disc is now in the process of being edited together, and the preliminary results sound excellent; it will be a disc that, firstly, will record the beautiful English parish church combination of a youthful treble line and adult lower lines, and secondly be a disc that is enjoyable for all to listen to. Those who attend St Peter's regularly, for a special service, or even just for Christmas and Easter, will know what a thrilling sound we are proud to maintain.

*O Sing Joyfully!* is a disc funded through advance orders – the disc itself will be available for Christmas. Before that point, we will have more invoices to pay. If you are thinking of buying one at £10 a copy – almost how much a pint costs now – you should contact the Parish Office on 878227 or by e-mail: [churchoffice@greatberkhamsted.org.uk](mailto:churchoffice@greatberkhamsted.org.uk) Further information, including the track list, is available at [www.stpetersberkhamsted.org.uk/music/](http://www.stpetersberkhamsted.org.uk/music/)

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## *Days out for Christmas*

**Joanne Lloyd-Evans** and **John Gerry** have some suggestions for days out with children over the Christmas holidays

**W**hen the days are dark and dreary, holidays at home can try the patience of the calmest parent, but there are lots of fun indoor activities to do in and around Berkhamsted. There are several indoor soft play venues in the area which are great for burning off kids' excess energy on a rainy day. They are good from about 12 months up to around 10 years of age and usually have separate sections for younger children so they are not trampled by the older ones.

**Kidzone** (Northbridge Rd, Berkhamsted, HP4 1EH) is conveniently located – loads of climbing/scrambling; can leave kids to get on with it whilst having a cuppa! They are running two Christmas discos this year – from 4pm to 5.30pm on Friday 16th Dec and Wednesday 21st Dec for £5 per child. Closed 24th-26th Dec and New Years Day. See [www.thekidzone.co.uk](http://www.thekidzone.co.uk) for more details.

Slightly further afield are **Big Space** (Southdown Industrial Estate, Harpenden AL5 1PW) [www.bigspace.biz](http://www.bigspace.biz) and **Gambado** (Woodside Leisure Park, North Orbital Road, Watford, WD25 7JZ) [www.gambado.com/clubs/watford](http://www.gambado.com/clubs/watford)

**The Pottery Project** (Northbridge Rd, Berkhamsted, HP4 1EH), where you can paint a wide variety of ceramic objects, such as Christmas tree decorations, plates, mugs, egg cups, money boxes, decorative animals, etc. These make great Christmas presents for grandparents. Good for all age ranges from 2 year olds up to adults. There is a cafe, so you can have a drink, snack or hot food while painting. Closed

24th-27th Dec and New Years Day. See [www.thepotteryproject.co.uk](http://www.thepotteryproject.co.uk).

**The Tring Natural History Museum** (Akeman Street, Tring) is a great rainy day activity for younger children and entrance is free. The museum essentially consists of displays of a very wide range of stuffed animals arranged over several floors. Small children seem very excited about coming face to face with a gorilla or anaconda! There is also a room with interactive activities and a small cafe in the basement. Closed 24th-26th December. See <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/tring>.

**Winter Wonderland at World's End Garden centre** (£1.50 entrance per adult or child, Aylesbury Road, Wendover, HP22 6BD) is fantastic for younger children. If you pay £7 per child, it includes a visit to Father Christmas and a present, but I went with a group of 2 and 3 year olds last year and they absolutely loved it without a visit to Father Christmas. Older children may be wiser! While you're there, there is also a free soft play area adjoining the cafe.

**Mead Open Farm** (Stanbridge Road, Billington, LU7 9JH) can easily be a full day outing. There is a schedule of animal petting and feeding throughout the day which most kids love, so it's worth checking the timings of things when you arrive. There is also a large adventure playground, go karts, crazy golf, digger village, tractor and trailer rides, and indoor soft play area (with terrifying drop slides for older children!). See

## ***Christopher Morris 1926-2011***

### **David Pearce remembers Christopher Morris**

Christopher John Easton Morris died on 27th September. He had been ill with cancer for a long time, but to the very last day he could be found rejoicing in the company of his Berkhamsted friends whom he met and talked to after church service. Such was his bravery and spirit. This town he loved and served with the wisdom of his experience and with the passion of his care. He was a very distinguished man.

The Morris family came to Berkhamsted in 1937, and Christopher was educated first at Berkhamsted School and then at King's College, Cambridge, where he read Engineering. He joined the Company of Atkins, Consulting Engineers, and was made responsible for projects ranging from steelworks, power stations and hospitals to commercial properties. In the early 1960s he spent time in India setting up a branch of the company there. Those were post-colonial days and for an expatriate they were often lonely ones, but

he was able to build up relationships of trust and friendship with Indian colleagues. His work in India enabled him to travel widely there, but he knew full well that it was impossible ever fully to know the country.

Christopher eventually became a director of the Company, and when he returned to the United Kingdom he ran an appointment from the Department of Energy to provide assistance and expertise for the wind-energy research and development programme. His feasibility studies resulted in experimental land turbines being set up in the Orkneys.

Sometimes these engineering projects created a conflict of interest with his own love of the countryside and his desire to protect the beauty of the landscape. He realised that the two were often incompatible. On his returning from India, Christopher read in a local paper an advertisement seeking support for the setting up of a Society for the protection of the Chiltern Hills. This had been placed by Christopher Hall, and it led to the founding of the very significant Chiltern Society. Christopher was immediately recruited and became Treasurer, and then, for two terms of office, the Chairman. When he eventually retired from active commitment he was appointed one of the Vice-Presidents. He also served on the National Trust committee at Ashridge.

In the early 1950s Christopher was asked to become the Secretary for the Berkhamsted Parochial Church Council,





and that office, broken only by his time in India, he held for over thirty years. This was a considerable job that involved looking after the properties of two churches – St Peter's and All Saints', the clergy houses, the church halls and the Court House. The Court House and its state of dilapidation became a special project and took up much time. Funds were short and Christopher realised that the only way forward was to sell St Peter's Hall and renovate the Court House. It was a difficult decision, and not one that was unanimous, but Christopher believed it to be the right one. Much of the designing of the restored Court House was done by him personally and in accord with Percy Mark, the architect. He was proud of what he considered one of his most notable achievements. The project received a Civic Trust award.



St Peter's church building needed constant attention, and schemes for the care of structure and fabric were devised by Christopher who was much troubled that he was not going to live long enough to stabilise the Lady Chapel walls.

In the 1990s he became one of the trustees of the Berkhamsted Town Hall Trust and, with his professional background, he became fully involved in the last major phase which was the restoration and bringing into use of the front part of the building, now called The Clock Room.

There was much else that absorbed Christopher Morris's time and interest. He was the last surviving founding committee member of the Berkhamsted Music

Society to live in the town, and he was a golfer and member of the Berkhamsted Club. He was much sought after as a public speaker, especially for after-dinner occasions. He noted that the Chairman of his Company always declined the invitation when he knew that Christopher was speaking, fearing that Christopher might make mischievous remarks. That was a measure of our man: thoughtful, self-effacing, mightily competent, but with an engaging sense of humour and warmth.

In his enterprises and activities he has been supported by Angela, just as he has lovingly supported her good works. Together they have formed a partnership that has conferred on the town so much that is true, honourable and of good

# ***Timetable for the Festival of Light***

## **Sunday 4th December**

1pm	Closure of the High Street
3.30pm	Festival of Lights to begin with Berkhamsted School Big Band
4pm	Rock Chorus
4.35pm	Hemel Hempstead Brass Band
5.05pm	Best Dressed Shop Window announcement
5.10pm	Blessing of the Town by Fr Michael Bowie
5.15pm	Switch on of the lights by the Mayor
5.25pm	Father Christmas to arrive with Ashlyns School Samba Band. Elves to deliver messages to Father Christmas from the children.
On cue	Berkhamsted School Big Band
5.30pm	Hemel Hempstead Brass Band (positioned by St, Peter's Church now) to play carols as people gather for the Festival of Carols Service
6pm	Conclusion of Festival of Lights Festival of Carols at St. Peter's Church High Street to re-open

$$x^2 - 7x + 12 = 0$$

$$\int x^3 dx$$

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*Marc Hubbard invites readers to join him in planning a new resource for the town*

Already we are at the beginning of December, a particularly busy time of the year, with the lead up to Christmas. As a public holiday many will have some time off; the opportunity to be together and share. December is also the time when many of us will reflect on what kind of year 2011 has been, in both our own lives and those of our families and friends. We also remember those who have departed over the year. It can also provide us with an opportunity to consider what has been happening in our immediate community of Berkhamsted and its surrounding villages, especially regarding services to the poorer and more vulnerable members of our community.

Services within the town are starting to be reduced. A few years ago the Elderly Care Centre closed, the hours that Dacorum Borough staff are available in the Civic Centre reduced a considerable time ago. This year, the opening hours of the library reduced significantly in July. This curtailed access to all services, for all residents, including the frequency of access to the internet for those not fortunate enough to have such provision at home. This is happening against the backdrop of gloomy economic news, the increasing cost of public transport and spiralling energy costs. These reductions in service availability are occurring when the population of the town is increasing and further development is planned.

So what should we do? In my few years in

the town, I can see that Berkhamsted has a history of community activity and local provision and solutions to local needs. I believe that now would be an appropriate time to consider how we as a community could go about planning to create a Drop In Centre/Community Neighbourhood Centre. Such a Centre could provide a hot meal, newspapers to read, access to PCs and the internet. It could also host advice sessions, for example completing CVs, financial advice and debt counselling, advice on self-employment and business creation. These are just a few initial ideas; no doubt many others in our town and the surrounding area will have equally valid ideas for the use of such a Centre.

This December many of us will be hurrying around trying to get everything ready for Christmas, concerned about the cost and worried about what the future holds for our town. Perhaps, as well as sharing with family and friends, we could spare a moment to think about how we could share and develop provision that could benefit the whole community.

If you would be interested in moving the idea of a Community Centre forward in 2012, then please email me on: [march1958@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:march1958@hotmail.co.uk).

*yB*

*The last word is available for readers to send in approx. 500 - 800 words on a topic of their choice, and one that may stimulate debate in further issues. All opinions are*

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***Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year  
from the Your Berkhamsted Team***