

No history of a family would ever be complete without a short description of the place in which they were born and brought up, especially somewhere as historical as Berkeley. Most tourists will know Berkeley for two things: its Castle and the Jenner connection. The almost perfect Castle was started in 1117 and is still a Stately Home today, lived in by the Earl of Berkeley and his family.

Berkeley, although more the size of a large village, has had the status of a Town for many centuries and was granted a Charter to hold a Market there in 1394. However, apart from the Castle, the Church and The Chantry, very few other buildings from the 17th Century or earlier seem to have survived - at least from the outside view. There are remains of old construction in some of the houses in High Street. The layout and geography of Berkeley is fairly simple as shown in the map below right. Its 4 main streets cross at Market

Square. Salter Street runs out in a westerly direction, Marybrook Street in a northerly direction, Canonbury Street easterly and High Street southwards, with the Church and the Castle at its southern extremity, but the road continues on for about a mile towards the village of HAM.

The Castle has been the seat of the Berkeley Family since the Norman Conquest and is still in their possession. It's most notorious historical event was the murder there of King Edward II in 1327. In more recent times it has had happier connections; Royalty and many Monarchs have stayed there. The Castle has, remarkably, remained in the hands of one family for 900 years (apart from a short spell between 1485 and 1553 when the Berkeleys gave it to the King of England.) This has been achieved by clever politics, i.e. either managing to choose the right cause or by keeping a low profile in difficult times. (More on pages 2 and 3)



The Berkeley Hunt is well known, having kept a Pack of Hounds continuously since Norman times. The Hunt riders wear Yellow Jackets - quite unique. Until the Nuclear Power Station opened there in 1962, Berkeley's main economic influence was Agricultural. Although Salmon fishing was of significant importance, river pollution and other things had virtually killed off this industry by the turn of the 20th Century. So while it had a very rural background and economy, the local population provided strong Royalist support and the Earl of Berkeley, his family and Estate must have had a considerable influence on the inhabitants of such a compact community.

Berkeley's ecclesiastical history is recorded as far back as 759 A.D. although most of the Anglo-Norman building was destroyed in the 13th Century. The present Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, much dating back to the 13th and 14th Century is very interesting and warrants a visit - although when Gillian, Clive, Julie and I visited it in 1989, it was in need of much restoration, particularly the Medieval wall paintings which were rapidly decaying. (In 1998 they appeared to be in a better state of preservation.) Its Bell Tower is quite unusual in that it is

separately located about 50 yards from the Church at opposite sides of the Churchyard. The bullet holes and axe marks, on the main door of the Church within the West Porch, are relics of the Cromwellian Siege of 1645. Much more is said later in extracts from early books.

Dr. Edward Jenner is known as the Father of Smallpox vaccination; the Jenner Museum occupies The Chantry, which was where the Jenners lived in the 18th Century. I'm not putting anything here about the history of the Chantry House, where Edward was born and is now the Jenner Museum because you'll find the following websites more interesting!

www.jennermuseum.com/visit.html

and

www.historylearningsite.co.uk/edward_jenner.htm

Regarding Stephen Jenner's "William Cope" picture it may also interest you to go to the following website:-

<http://images.wellcome.ac.uk/indexplus/result.html>
and then make a search for Stephen Jenner and a number of his sketches/paintings are shown.

There are a number of old books that give interesting extracts about Berkeley:-

In 1779 Samuel Rudder in "**A New History of Gloucestershire**" describes the place as a very large Parish in the lower level of the Vale of Gloucestershire. It lies within the Hundred of the same name, which took denomination from the town or Borough of Berkeley, situate about the middle of the Parish, 5 miles distant west from Dursley, 7 north from Thornbury and 18 south westward from Gloucester. The Parish is bounded on the north

west by the great River Severn. He estimated the population in 1779 as about 1,854 persons.

"Robson's Commercial Directory of Berkeley & Newport 1837." A market town, 15 miles S.W. from Gloucester, 20 miles N. from Bristol, and 114 miles from London, is pleasantly situated on the Little Avon, in the midst of a fertile vale of Berkeley, and about one mile E. from the river Severn. The entire parish, which includes several populous townships, contained, in 1831, 3899 inhabitants, and the annual value of assessed property, in 1813, was 1600*l*. Berkeley is an ancient corporate town, under a mayor and twelve aldermen, and a court for the recovery of small debts is held every three weeks. The name is possibly derived from *Berk*, a beech, and *Lea*, a pasture; the adjacent country, consisting chiefly of rich meadow lands, is noted for its excellent cheese, in which, together with timber, coal, and malt, a considerable trade is carried on. The market is on Wednesday, and there is an animal fair on May 14th, for cattle and pigs. The Gloster and Berkeley canal, one of the finest in the kingdom, admits vessels of 500 tons burden, and enters the Severn near this place at Berkeley Pill, whence it passes Slimbridge, Frampton, Wheatenhurst, or Whitminster, Hardwick and Quedgley, and terminates on the south side of the city of Gloucester being 18 and 1/4 miles in length. The church dedicated to St. Mary is a large and handsome building; the living is a vicarage in the patronage of Lord Segrave. Southward of the town is Berkeley castle, the ancient baronial residence of the Lords Berkeley; it stands on rising ground, commanding a delightful view of the surrounding country and the river Severn, and is supposed from its structure to be of Norman origin. It was granted by King Henry II to Robert



A picture of Berkeley Parish Church. The most unusual part about this church is the absence of a bell tower, which has been built separately just behind the photographer's back.

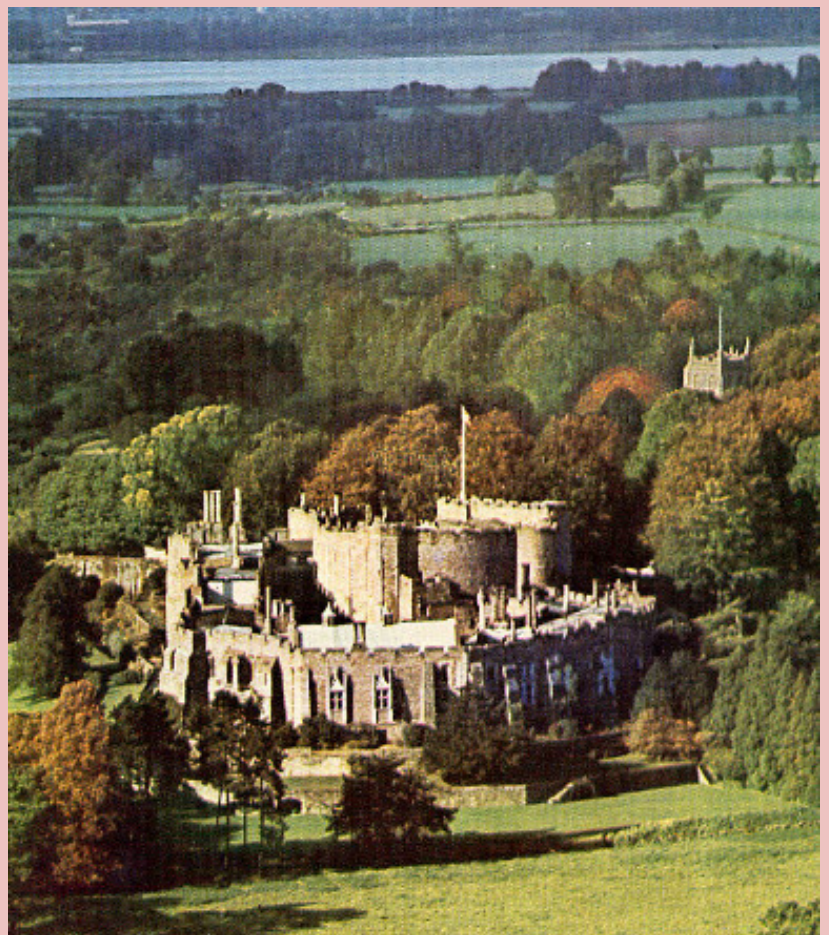
Fitzhardings, with power to enlarge and strengthen it, about 1150. The ground plan of the edifice is very compact, consisting of an irregular court, having on the south and east sides an extensive range of buildings. The Donjon Keep is built on a mount, and rises above the rest of the castle; it is flanked by three semicircular towers, and a square one of later date, all embattled. Berkeley Castle is rendered memorable in history by the murder of King Edward II, in 1327.

(Extracted from SAMUEL LEWIS'S "Topographical Dictionary of England 1859.")

(The Parish Church is St. MARY the VIRGIN). Berkeley is a market-town and parish, in the union of THORNBURY, Upper division of the hundred of BERKELEY, W. division of the county of GLOUCESTER, 17 miles (8. W.) from Gloucester, 19 (N. E.) from Bristol, and 114 (W. by N.) from London; comprising the tythings of Alkington, Breadstone, Ham, Hamfallow, and Hinton, and the chapelry of Stone; and containing 4405 inhabitants. This place, according to Sir Robert Atkyns, the historian of Gloucestershire, derives its name from the Saxon Beorc, a birch-tree, and Leas, a pasture; whence it has been inferred that the parish was formerly remarkable for the growth of birch-trees. From the fertility of the

soil, and its contiguity to the river Seyern, it was always a place of considerable importance; and at a very early period it gave name to the great manor of Berkeley, which during the heptarchy was held of the crown, at £500.17.8. per annum, by ROGER de BERKLEY, a near relative of Edward the Confessor, and lord of Dursley, from whom the earliest authentic pedigree of the Berkeley family is deduced. Berkeley, notwithstanding the residence of the oldest branches of the family in their castle at Dursley, was a market-town; and had a nunnery endowed with the large manor. The time of the foundation of this establishment, and the name of the founder, are not known; but its suppression, prior to the Conquest, was effected by the perfidious avarice of Earl

Godwin, who, in order to obtain its ample revenues, introduced his nephew into the convent for the purpose of seducing the sisterhood, and, on the accomplishment of the design, artfully reporting to his sovereign the state of the establishment, procured its dissolution, and was rewarded for his treachery with a grant of its lands. A few years afterwards, William the Conqueror, professing high regard for all the relatives of Edward the Confessor, granted the manor of Berkeley to Roger Berkeley, of Dursley, by whose descendants it was held till the reign of Henry II, when, refusing to pay the feefarm rent, and also taking part with Stephen, they were dispossessed by the former monarch, who bestowed the manor upon Robert Fitzhardinge, the descendant of a younger son of the king of Denmark, and at that time mayor of Bristol, who, being a man of great wealth, materially assisted Henry in his contest with Stephen. Fitz-Hardinge, however, was so greatly annoyed in his new possession by the Berkeleys of Dursley, that Henry II interfered to make peace, which he ultimately effected by arranging a marriage between Maurice, son of Robert FitzHardinge, and the daughter of Roger de Berkeley, upon which the former assumed the name of Berkeley. From this union descended the



The is an aerial picture of Berkeley Castle with the top of the Bell Tower of the parish church just visible at right centre above the trees.

present family of Berkeley; the male issue of the Berkeleys of Dursley became extinct in 1389.

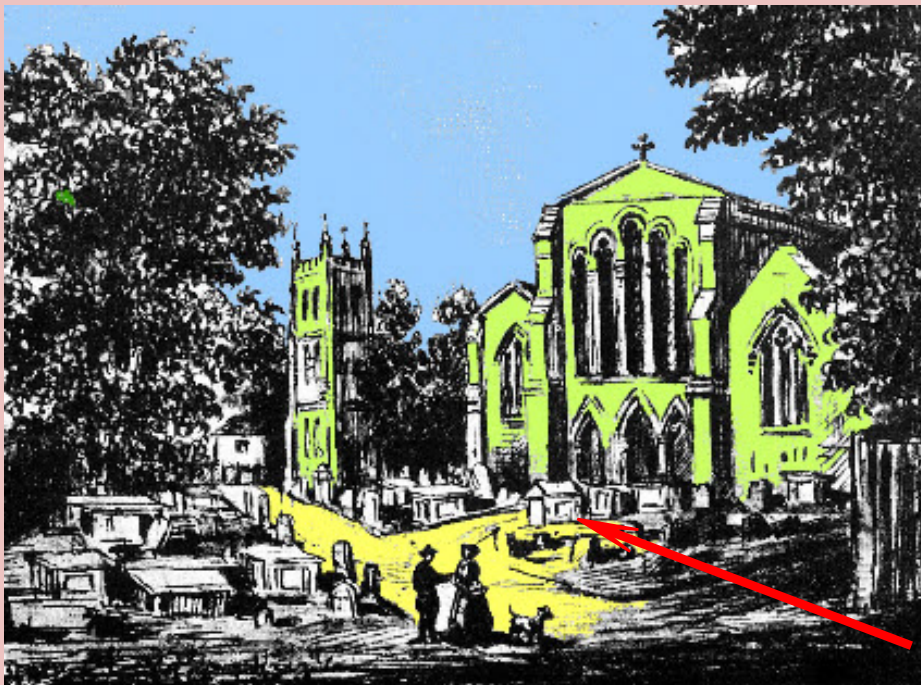
The **CASTLE**, erected during this reign, at the south east end of the town, out of the ruins of the ancient nunnery, was considerably enlarged by successive proprietors in the reigns of Edward II and III., and became one of the principal baronial seats in the kingdom. It has been connected with many transactions of intense political interest, and in the reign of John was one of the places of rendezvous for the confederate barons, who extorted from that monarch the grant of Magna Charta. Edward II after his deposition was detained a prisoner in the castle under the alternate custody of Lords Berkeley, Montravers, and Goumay; and, during the illness of the first, by whom he had always been treated with kindness and humanity, was barbarously murdered by the two latter: the room and bed in which the murder was perpetrated are still shown to persons visiting the castle. During the reigns of Henry VI and Edward IV the town suffered materially from the attacks of the Earl of Warwick, who, in right of his wife, laid claim to the castle, of which he endeavoured to obtain possession by force; and in the civil war of the 17th century, being garrisoned for the king, it was besieged by the parliamentarians, to whom, after a vigorous resistance of nine days, it was compelled to surrender. The castle and estates are now the property of Earl Fitz-Hardinge, to whom they were devised by his father, the late Earl of Berkeley. The castle occupies a site nearly circular in form. The entrance from the outer into the inner court is through a massive arched portal, on the left of which is the keep, a fine specimen of Norman military architecture, containing the dungeon chamber, without either window or chimney, in which Edward II was confined; in the floor is an opening to the dungeon, which is twenty-eight feet deep. The great hall was built in the reign of Edward III. The **TOWN** is situated on a gentle eminence in the beautiful vale of Berkeley, at the distance of two miles from the river Severn, the tides of which, flowing up the Berkeley Avon, render it navigable to the town for vessels of forty or fifty tons' burthen. At present, the place consists only of two streets irregularly built, the principal of which is well paved and contains a few good houses: the surrounding scenery is pleasing; and the ancient castle, which has been partly modernised as the residence of Earl Fitz-Hardinge, forms an interesting feature in the landscape. The trade is principally in coal, which is brought from the

Forest of Dean, by the rivers Severn and Avon, for the supply of the neighbourhood. The Berkeley and Gloucester ship canal, joins the Severn at Sharpness Point, in the parish, at the distance of two miles from the town, where are the harbour and entrance locks, esteemed one of the finest pieces of masonry in the kingdom; the canal, for nearly a mile, is separated from the rapid flow of the Severn only by a high and massive wall. The Gloucester and Bristol railway passes near the town, on the east, where a station is fixed. The parish is the largest in the county, being twenty-seven miles in circumference, and comprising about 14,000 acres; it contains some fine pasture, and there are extensive dairies, from which is produced the celebrated Berkeley cheese: an act for inclosing the waste lands, was passed in 1839. The market, which is inconsiderable, is on Tuesday; and fairs are held on May 14th and Dec. 1st.: a handsome market-house was erected in 1895. The corporation still exists, by prescription, but has scarcely any municipal functions; it consists of a mayor and twelve aldermen, who appoint a serjeant-at-mace, constables, and other officers. The county magistrates hold a petty-session every alternate Tuesday.

The **LIVING** is a vicarage, valued in the king's books at £32. 15. 7½d; patron, Earl Fitz-Hardinge; appropriators, the Dean and Chapter of Bristol. The great tithes have been commuted for £985. 10., and the vicarial for £749. 10/-; there are 7 acres of glebe annexed to the vicarage, and one acre belonging to the Dean and Chapter. The Church is a spacious structure, partly in the later Norman and partly in the early English style, and though greatly altered, still retains some portion of its original character; the tower, which is detached, has been rebuilt within the last century. There is a place of worship for Wesleyans. The free school was founded in 1696, by Samuel Turner, who endowed it with land producing a rental of £38: which endowment was augmented with lands purchased with money given by Mr. John Smith and the Countess of Berkeley, in 1717, and now let for £17 per annum. John Attwood, in 1636, bequeathed to the poor some land, which, together with three acres given by Thomas Machin in 1630, yields a rental of £40; and there are various other charitable benefactions. Edward Jenner, M.D. and F.R.S., who introduced the practice of vaccination, was born here in 1749; and his remains were deposited in the church.



(Left) An old picture postcard of the “White Lion Hotel” in Berkeley High Street with the “Swan Inn a bit farther down the street (sign above horse and cart).



(Left)
This is a doctored version of a sketch by Stephen Jenner of St. Mary the Virgin Church in Berkeley (the parish church). The arrow has been added by me because I think the grave at the point of it is that of my 2 times Great grandparents. It certainly is that shape and is a few yards west of the West door of the Church, which shows some damage caused by Cromwells men during the Civil War.