

THE CHARM OF HISTORIC ALDBURY

By "BEORCHAM"

Asked to name the most picturesque village in West Herts, eight out of ten persons would probably answer "Aldbury". The writer's preference is divided between Great Gaddesden and Nettledean, but that is another matter. Aldbury's fame is so well established that most people instinctively think of it when beauty spots and places of interest are discussed.

From the time when the Bridgewater Monument first attracted visitors to the neighbourhood—and that was long before the days of motoring—Aldbury has never lacked admirers. The weather-worn stocks and whipping post beside the village pond, dwarfed by a lofty elm beneath which John Bunyan is said to have preached, must be one of the most photographed scenes in the county. This is the heart of the hill-hemmed village—the meeting place of four little streets of warm old cottages and houses, some of them straw-thatched, with gay gardens in front and wooded heights towering up behind.

Not all of Aldbury is ancient, of course. Almost with a shock one realises how many houses belong to the late 19th and 20th centuries, but old and new blend so well that Aldbury still seems to be a living illustration of the rustic English village that romantic writers like to write about. Indeed, one novelist has written about it. If you can still find a copy of "Bessie Costrell", a once-popular romance by the late Mrs. Humphry Ward, you may recognise "Clinton Magna" as the novelist's home village of Aldbury.

Links with Ashridge Monastery

Aldbury was too near Akeman Street and the Icknield Way to be forgotten by the Romans; one of their villas has yet to be properly excavated on Moneybury Hill, so called after a hoard of coins said to have been found near the Bridgewater Monument. The Domesday Book mentions the village, and even in days when Normans used such a delightful spelling as "Aldeberie" it is possible that a tiny church stood in the valley.

But why speculate on that possibility when it is known beyond doubt that the handsome church of St. John has more than 700 years' authentic history? The first rector, Robert de Wighul, began his ministry there in 1219, three years before Robert de Tuardo headed Berkhamsted's long list of rectors.

As the Rev. H. T. Wood, a former rector of Aldbury, tells us in a scholarly little book, St. John's Church has many interesting features. First to catch the eye are the beautiful paintings over the chancel arch, copies of Andrea del Sarto's frescoes in the Chiostrò del Scalzo at Florence. The memorials, some centuries old, tell their own story, but visitors may like to be reminded of the curious little priest's chamber over

the porch; the old pitch pipe used for giving the note for singing before an organ was installed; the "leper's window" in the south wall; and the "squint" into the Harcourt (or Verney) Chapel. This tiny chapel was removed almost intact from Ashridge after the monastery was suppressed 400 years ago. The Whittinghams, squires of Pendley, had their family vault at Ashridge, and when the monastery became a royal residence their successors, the Verneys, had the tomb and stone enclosing screen brought nearer home.

That is why, in Aldbury church, you can pass under the shoulder-high arched entrance that was known to the grey monks of Ashridge. From the walls of the chapel two ancient helmets look down on an immense marble tomb, which, as in the days when it rested at Ashridge, bears life-size effigies of Sir Robert and Lady Whittingham. Purely for "fun", some trippers once broke off Sir Robert's nose—a senseless act, even if he was accused of high treason. In his day Sir Robert was also regarded as a hero; a doughty fighter for the Lancastrians in the Wars of the Roses, he was slain in the Battle of Tewkesbury. His big estate at Pendley was confiscated, but returned to the family when his daughter and heiress married Sir John Verney, son of a famous Yorkist.

In the Pillory

A monument in another part of the church is probably unique in that it was made from the black marble top of a table. John Duncombe, who died in 1728, desired that his monument should be "decent, but not costly", and directed that the marble slab of a table at his house ("Stocks") should be used for the purpose. The manor of "Stocks" had been in the Duncombe family from 1341 until the early part of the 19th century, and their name is perpetuated in Duncombe Terrace, well known to rambles between the Monument and Ivinghoe Beacon.

The name of the house and manor of "Stocks" has nothing to do with the ancient instrument of punishment preserved beside the village pond. Plenty of stories could probably be told of the stocks, but the most famous one concerns a prisoner who found himself treated as a martyr. Not for him the rotten eggs, decayed fruit and sneering epithets usually hurled at wrong-doers exposed to public view. Instead, the housewives of Aldbury gathered around to sympathise with the victim, making him more comfortable by improvising a seat out of a truss of hay.

That, so tradition goes, was the last occasion the stocks were used at Aldbury. There wasn't much point in pillorying the bad lads of the village if they only met with sympathy!

Phone: BERKHAMSTED 43

WATTS' STORES

Proprietor: — H. A. RATCLIFF

For

CHINA, GLASS &
HARDWARE
BULB BOWLS
OVEN GLASS

NOW OPEN:

FURNITURE RENOVATING
DEPARTMENT
ENQUIRIES SOLICITED

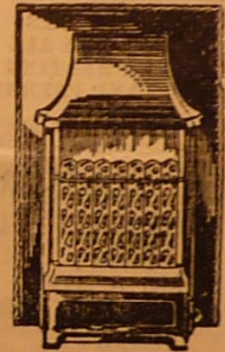
127 HIGH STREET,
BERKHAMSTED

COSY—

but never stuffy

"BEAM" GAS FIRES

In attractive colour finishes



Berkhamstead Gas Co.

PHONE 90

The Best Value for Coupons

Your Coupons will go
further if you

**BUY
GOOD SHOES**

OUR REPAIRS ARE
NOTED FOR
SMARTNESS AND
DURABILITY

WHITE & SON

THE FOOTWEAR SPECIALISTS

High St., Berkhamsted

Phone 63

Also at Hemel Hempstead
& Chorley Wood