

A BERKHAMSTED NOTEBOOK

BY TOWNSMAN

Spoiling the View

Despite the criticisms one hears of changes in the High Street, it is still one of the most handsome main shopping streets in the Home Counties. Familiar scenes are apt to be taken for granted, but now and again I like to stand and stare, and did so a few evenings ago.

It was half-past seven, and in the temporary absence of heavy traffic I appreciated anew the rare spaciousness of the road and footpaths. Even the most ordinary buildings looked nice in the warm, golden light. And there, high above the shop roofs, glowed the top of the tower of the oldest building in the town, St. Peter's Church.

A lovely view—but what's this huge, faded lettering in front of the tower? It is an advertisement for a grocer's shop which closed its doors a couple of years ago! The lettering covers the west wall of one of the tallest buildings in the High Street and should have been obliterated long ago. There is no higher, bigger, or more outdated advertisement in the whole town.

The High Street is supposed to have had a face-lift. What about paying attention to one very, very prominent forehead?

No Happy Returns

I don't like snarling at British Railways, but it is really vexatious to find that one can no longer buy a period return ticket to Euston.

Returning from a short holiday, I had just a few minutes to spare before boarding a train at Euston. But first it was necessary to buy a single ticket to Berkhamsted. I went to the little ticket office opposite the Underground stairs and found it closed for business, although two young men were still in the glass-house. Then began the long trek, with heavy suitcase, to the main booking office, which is situated somewhere on the way towards Warren Street. Dodging trucks, cases, fellow travellers and idlers, I eventually bought my ticket. Then there was another obstacle race, sharp corners and all, to platform 7. I just managed to catch my train, which was delayed at Watford Junction for twenty minutes with no word of comfort from the loudspeakers.

I suppose there must be a reason for not issuing period return tickets from Berkhamsted to such a remote, unfrequented whistle stop as Euston. Perhaps the resourceful public relations boys of British Railways will supply an explanation.

Breaking the Glass

A friend of mine, very well known in Potten End, is familiar with the minute that seems a year. After the institution and induction of the new vicar on 14th July, he had the task of opening the door of the Church Room. The procession drew nearer and nearer, but the key just wouldn't turn in the lock.

It was almost as dramatic as a count-down. Five seconds, four, three, two, one, zero—but still the door would not budge. In the presence of the Bishop, Vicar, and very many parishioners, my friend had to break a pane of glass and open the door from within. Never before had so many people witnessed a break-in.

Everybody had a good laugh about the incident. But I am quite sure there is one induction service which will never be forgotten by a certain parishioner.

Swinging the Gate

Looking at a poster in the High Street the other day, I was surprised to see a reference to 'Swinggate Lane'. Being old-fashioned, though not old enough to remember the swing gate which named the lane, I didn't care for the way the two words had been telescoped into one. I still write 'Swing Gate Lane.'

Still, the same thing is happening to Dell Field, which is now often written Dellfield. Very nice if you are sending a telegram, of course. I'm all in favour of Doctorscommonsroad if it saves money.

Besides, if someone living near St. Mary's Church hadn't coined 'North-church' centuries ago, I suppose we would still be writing 'North Church.'

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