

A BERKHAMSTED NOTEBOOK

BY TOWNSMAN

Visitors' Views

August is never an eventful month, but in the absence of public meetings one has all the more time for private meetings with former Berkhamstedians who return for a short holiday.

Some of our ex-residents are astonished to see so many developments. A new shop here, a change of name there, a gap where there was once a row of cottages, a large library going up in King's Road, a traffic jam in the High Street . . . dear, dear, dear.

Yet some visitors say the town doesn't change very much. 'In any case', said an old friend of mine, 'Berkhamsted is still as nice as it has always been.'

Then why did he ever go away?

From the Continent

A small invasion of students from the Continent, many of them on exchange visits, added to the liveliness of Berkhamsted in August. One year your son or daughter sets off for foreign parts, and the next year the pen friend comes to Berkhamsted.

I have seen young Frenchmen taking a free look at *Le Figaro* outside W. H. Smith's, noticed German boys photographing St. Peter's Church, and over-

heard young Italians gossiping in the High Street. The United Nations get along splendidly in Berkhamsted, and even enthuse about our coffee.

A friend who played host to a French girl was delighted to be complimented upon her cooking. Her guest said that Berkhamsted must be a very rich place to have so many detached houses with front gardens. And the weather! Not a fog in sight, scarcely a drop of that famous incessant rain. Really, Berkhamsted was most un-English in being sunny.

A German boy to whom I was introduced was fascinated by our chimneys. Now, that's a tourist attraction I had never thought of exploiting. We now know what to illustrate when we scatter 'Come to Berkhamsted' brochures all over the Continent.

Aldbury Double Murder

Asked to name a beautiful village, most local people would probably put Aldbury at the top or very near the top of the list. I was there the other day to admire the lovely old houses, the beautiful front gardens, the ancient church and the much-photographed pond and stocks. It was strange to think that such a pleasant village was once the scene of a double murder.

A newly-published booklet tells the

story of this crime. A macabre tale? Of course; but it is told by someone with a deep knowledge and understanding of the village, and opens with an intensely readable account of life in Aldbury towards the end of the 19th century.

It was an uneventful little village, blessed with peace and good neighbourliness, until a December night in 1891 when two keepers were murdered, a crime for which two poachers paid the death penalty, and a third was sentenced to life imprisonment.

But to tell more of the story here would be unfair to Mrs. Ruth Craufurd, who has written the booklet. If you buy a copy (ask your local bookseller), you will have the added pleasure of helping a village church fund.

Same Name

As a glance at the visitors' book shows, people from all over the world call to see St. Peter's Church. As a rule the entries in the book are limited to names and addresses, but a lady from Balham added the words 'On the track of poet Cowper.' She was literally on the track, for young William attended church when his father was rector of Berkhamsted over 200 years ago.

Among recent visitors to the church were people who live in Vancouver, Fiji, and South Africa. I was intrigued by the address given by Lesley and Paul Hart—Swing Gate Farm, Johannesburg.

There must be thousands of swing gates in the world, but it is rare to find anything named after such a useful piece of woodwork or ironmongery as a swing gate. I wonder if the South African farmers have some connection with our Swing Gate Lane?

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