

# A BERKHAMSTED NOTEBOOK

BY TOWNSMAN

## Hidden Casket

Several people have asked if I know anything about a casket buried under an oak tree at Hall Park. Well, yes and no. Always interested in buried treasure, I set off to find gold in them thar hills. But I couldn't find the casket. I couldn't even find the tree, for it had been felled. A house marked the spot.

I was about to protest to the Urban Council when I met Councillor J. Bandy, who told me that he received a visit, some eighteen months ago, from an elderly lady who spent her girlhood at The Hall. She remembered the ceremonial planting of an evergreen oak in the grounds of the mansion. For good measure a casket containing a specimen of every coin of the Realm, plus some contemporary newspapers, was buried beneath the juvenile oak.

The tree flourished. Then, a year or so ago, it was felled. The workmen were asked to look out for the casket, but they found only roots and soil. A pity, but not an altogether surprising result. It was suspected that someone in the know had dug up the casket soon after the tree was planted.

Moral: there's not much money in gold-digging nowadays.

## Our Parish Registers

From the University of Cambridge the Local History Society has received a request to investigate the church registers, counting births, marriages and deaths in each decade. Rises and falls in numbers will be studied, and the results are expected to throw new light on social and economic history.

Many parishes are taking part in the Cambridge project, and it is good to learn that Berkhamsted has been asked to get on with the work quickly because our registers are thought to be of especial interest and importance. The Registers were started in 1538, when William Johnson and Ales (Alice) Myles were married at St. Peter's.

## Local Time Signal

A friend tells me he was surprised to hear the chimes of St. Peter's Church clock while walking over the Common. But that's nothing! I have heard the local time signal at the Ashley Green end of Hockeridge Wood, two miles away. Positively no mistake; I was born within the sound of St. Peter's bells and know a good chime when I hear one.

When commoners used their right to cut furze and fern, there was an unwritten

law that activities should not start until the 1st September. Men set off for Berkhamsted Common the previous night and, on hearing the midnight chimes from the church down in the valley, cut rings around the areas they wished to claim for themselves.

## The New Library

Such good progress has been made with the new County Library that the opening ceremony, I hear, will probably take place in March. The staff will have a hectic time transferring stock from the old quarters in Prince Edward Street.

I wonder how many hundreds of thousands of books have been issued (and how many fines for late returns have been imposed) since the County Library was opened in the Town Hall Committee room in October, 1930? At first the library was open for just one hour a week—on Thursday evenings.

## The Flint Cottage

It is necessary to patrol the town regularly to keep one's local knowledge up to date. Walking up Swing Gate Lane the other day, I was surprised *not* to see the old flint house which, when I was a boy, was the only building in the lane between the High Street and the cottages near Bottom Farm. It was occupied by the head gardener at The Hall, which was pulled down before the war.

Now there are houses and side-roads all the way up the hill, though beyond Velvet Lawn the lane still keeps its truly rural character.

Aren't we lucky to live in a town where, with little energy, we can quickly find unspoilt countryside?

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