

A BERKHAMSTED NOTEBOOK

BY TOWNSMAN

Canal Museum

The canal may no longer be an important trade route, but it gives pleasure to more people than ever before. I cannot remember a time when so many anglers have lined the towpath or so many pleasure craft have passed through the town.

And the friendliness of the new breed of canal-farers! I was walking along the towpath at Dudswell the other day when three men in a boat cheerfully called out: 'Would you like a lift?' Ever fearful of being shanghai'd, I politely declined the offer and overtook the boat at the next lock.

Children are especially fond of the canal, and before the school holidays are over some parents may welcome a suggestion for a family outing. Drive to Stoke Bruerne, near Towcester, where there is a Waterways Museum which will keep the children happy for a couple of hours. And adults, too. I was reluctant to tear myself away from the traditional clothing and cabinware, the brasses, paintings, photographs and documents, some of which are of Berkhamsted interest.

Be sure to take your camera, for Stoke Bruerne is as lovely as its name,

with a hump-back bridge, canal-side pub, picturesque lock and, within easy walking distance, a canal tunnel.

In the Wilds

Some dote on caviare, some prefer pheasant and port, but the speciality of the *maison* I like most of all is a slice of bread and butter smothered with wild raspberry jam. Wild, I insist, with concentrated flavour and mini pips. Lovely!

But where are the masses of wild raspberries which could once be picked by the basketful? This year's safari was literally a wash-out. Raspberries were few, the flies were biting, and then came the deluge. Perhaps I was hunting in the wrong place on the wrong day.

And where have all the wooders gone? You know, the people who, once upon a time, returned from lanes and woods with trucks and old prams loaded high with free firewood. Not so very many years ago wooding was a favourite pastime, but it seems that those tired old prams and trucks have themselves been smashed up for firewood.

I suppose it is all that central heating which has stopped the gathering of free winter fuel.

What we lack

A holiday visitor tells me that he is disappointed that Berkhamsted lacks public gardens where young and old may wander or rest in pleasant surroundings. He lauded the 'wonderful' transformation of the land bordering the Gade at Hemel Hempstead, and thought that Berkhamsted should see if anything could be done to beautify a stretch of the Bulbourne.

Well, what do you think?

In the absence of a large public garden, private enterprise is doing nicely. I have never seen so many lovely front gardens; if there were a competition we would need hundreds of first prizes.

A particularly fine blaze of colour may be seen in Raven's Lane where the narrow gardens flanking the entrance to Cooper's courtyard are well worth a visit.

Dated Buildings

Last month I introduced a little observation test, quoting the dates shown on various unnamed buildings in the High Street and inviting readers to identify them.

Here are the answers: 1619, 1712, 1854—all on the National Provincial Bank. 1684—Sayer Almshouses. 1762 Sharlands. 1863—Coalbrook House (shop opposite Goat Inn). 1933—Co-operative Stores. 1938—Civic Centre. 1958—Post Office.

You need good eyesight to see the date on Sharlands' building. The figures are on the four corners of an ornamental tile between the first floor windows of the centre building.

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