

A BERKHAMSTED NOTEBOOK

BY TOWNSMAN

The Electrified Line

Full marks to Berkhamsted Citizens' Association for holding two really good public meetings—an 'all-party' election meeting and an evening of films and discussion on the railway electrification.

At the British Rail meeting I was not surprised to hear criticism of the seats in the new trains, which could certainly be a little more accommodating. But British Rail cannot please everybody, as witness a number of complaints about the new times. Commuters to Apsley had a very strong axe to grind.

Not mentioned at the meeting was the withdrawal of the passenger train parcels service from Berkhamsted Station. In future it will be limited in this area to Hemel Hempstead station, and the collection and delivery of parcels in the Berkhamsted area will be performed by road vehicles based on Hemel Hempstead.

So we shall see no more watercress, no more cut flowers, no more parcels on the platforms at Berkhamsted—unless we carry them ourselves. The reason is that the new, intensified service will no longer permit trains to stop at all stations for the time required to load and unload parcels.

By the Wayside

One local businessman who protested to British Rail about the change in the passenger train parcel service was surprised to receive a reply referring to Berkhamsted as a wayside station.

Well, yes, I suppose this is a fair description. Even Crewe is a wayside station. But to my old-fashioned mind 'wayside' suggests something like Beaumont Halt on the old Harpenden—Heath Park Halt line. You know the sort of thing: a short wooden platform decorated with a couple of milk churns, instructions to notify the guard if you want the train to stop, and miles and miles of buttercups and daisies in every direction.

Have you a Crowbar?

The centenary of the fight to stop the enclosure of Berkhamsted Common reminded a reader that he possessed a crow-bar used by one of the London navvies who smashed down the railings.

This family heirloom was acquired only a few hours after the famous night raid. The navvies wandered down to Berkhamsted in search of beer, and to raise extra cash some of them sold their crow-bars for a shilling. A large number

was acquired by Mr. Nash, the blacksmith, who distributed them to various friends and relations.

No doubt several Common crow-bars are still extant. After all, these are not implements to be lightly thrown away.

Incidentally, as the smashed fences were restored and erected elsewhere on the Ashridge estate, I wonder if any of this historic ironwork is still standing?

New Generation

In just over two months' time a new generation of knights, barons, peasants, princes and ladies-in-waiting will be stalking the arena of Berkhamsted Castle. There will be a new generation of Pageant programme sellers, too; people who, in years to come, will tell their children how William conquered Berkhamsted in 1966. No, I haven't got the date wrong; history—via pageants—repeats itself in Berkhamsted.

There must be hundreds of people who remember the pageants of 1922 and 1931. I still see some of the performers in my travels. A certain prehistoric boy, 1922 vintage, now has grey hair instead of a hair-do which anticipated the Beatles by over 40 years. I know ladies who do not claim Norman descent; they *were* Norman ladies in 1931.

The man who produced both pageants, Mr. Gilbert Hudson, passed on many years ago, but his words still ring in the still-burning ears of those who served under him. His homily was brutally frank, but effective. He saved the Pageant from lapsing into a very slow, namby-pamby affair.

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