

Berkhamsted Notebook

By TOWNSMAN

Lock-gates or weirs?

Although workmen continue to re-new lock-gates and repair the towpath, the commercial value of the Grand Union Canal is declining so rapidly that there is talk of drastic economies. It could be reduced to the status of an 'amenity waterway', with locks replaced by weirs.

This possibility—still a remote one, I hope—encouraged me to go with a number of other Berkhamsted residents to Watford in May, when fishermen, boaters, rambles and towpath strollers from many towns and villages formed the Grand Union Canal Society. Among its aims are the safeguarding, maintenance and improvement of the amenities of the canal, and I am delighted to hear that the society will hold a public meeting in Berkhamsted on 12th July.

I enjoy towpath walks for the views—often beautiful, sometimes ugly, but never uninteresting. And what lovely gardens one sees from the towpath, especially at Northchurch and Bourne End!

Hemel Hempstead, I hear, has been crowing about its treatment of the canal at Boxmoor, claiming favourable comparisons with the position at Berkhamsted. This is a challenge we must take up,

and a very good start could be made west of Lower Kings Road.

American Compliment

Some very nice things are said about Berkhamsted in a book which has just been published in Baltimore, U.S.A. It is 'The Wethered Book,' a family history which recalls some former owners of Ashlyns, notably Francis Wethered, who gave to St. Peter's Church the 17th century font which is now in All Saints'.

A copy of the book is on the way to me, and I hope to say a little more about it later on.

Snakes Alive

Not for years had I heard of anyone seeing a snake in the district until a month or so ago, when one was found in a building near the railway station. It was not the first that had been seen there, I was told, but my informant was unable to say whether it was a grass snake or a slow-worm, which is really a lizard.

A friend with a profound knowledge of local natural history tells me that she has never seen a snake in the district, though she has heard of the discovery of lone specimens at very rare intervals.

They were non-poisonous; an adder has never been reported locally.

Freedom from snakes gave rise to a legend that St. Paul visited Berkhamsted and cast out serpents and thunderstorms for ever. As J. W. Cobb, our Victorian historian commented, 'the latter part of this tradition is utterly falsified by experience.' Nevertheless, it is surprising that we have no snakes in the grass while areas very similar to ours have both grass snakes and adders.

Frittidsen Prayer Book

The Vicar of Nettleden with Potten End, the Rev. A. Llewellyn Jones, has just shown me a Book of Common Prayer, printed in 1845, with the words 'The Hamlet of Frittidsen, Great Berkhamstead,' gold-blocked on the cover. On the fly-leaf the following is pencilled: 'The Church of the Holy Trinity, Potten End, 1878. H. J. Wilcox, curate-in-charge.'

Frittidsen is a mis-spelling of Frithsden, the first out-of-town part of the parish of Berkhamsted St. Peter to be given its own facilities for worship. The prayer book was almost certainly used by Henry Twells, the Victorian hymn-writer, when he conducted services in a cottage at Frithsden in the early 1850s. The hamlet declined in size, and when the time came to provide a church it was built in up-and-coming Potten End, a mile from the Frithsden cottage.

Holy Trinity, Potten End, will celebrate its centenary next year. It is young compared with the Rev. Llewellyn Jones' other church at Nettleden, which was in Buckinghamshire until the boundaries were adjusted in 1895.

CALLAGHANS

FOR



TELEPHONE

BERKHAMSTED 5473