

Berkhamsted Notebook

By TOWNSMAN

THE TARGETS

'Nowadays, if you say you have been over Berkhamsted Common by the Targets, hardly anybody knows what you mean,' remarked an old friend. Well, I do, and so do lots of other Berkhamstedians with long memories.

From Victorian times until the first World War, there was a much-used rifle range on the Common. It was 900 yards long, starting near the Inns of Court war memorial and ending at the targets and butts a short distance beyond the old footpath from the Park to Frithsden Beeches. This was known as 'the path by the Targets,' and beside the stile at the entrance to the Common stood a warning notice, telling walkers to keep out if a red flag was flying.

The targets and butts, just inside the Common, provided endless amusement to children. With imaginary rifles and imaginary cartridges, a good time was had by all. There were two 'Jacob's ladders' to climb, and a high artificial cliff to fall over or roll down. Heads were fairly solid and necks reasonably pliable in those rough-and-tumble days.

But there were times when it was advisable to stay well away from the target area. Local Volunteers regularly used the range before the first World War. Then the Inns of Court Regiment used the Common as a training-ground and made 15,000 yards of trenches.

The range is now much overgrown, and the last time I saw the high earthwork it was crumbling away.

There must be many readers who are able to supplement my scanty information. Please share your knowledge with me.

FROM THE AIR

Many readers have commented appreciatively on the photograph captioned 'Berkhamsted from the air,' reproduced on the front page of last month's *Review*. Happily, it did not show the town, the whole town, and nothing less than the town; I have seen too many aerial photographs which stun the eye by showing too much in too little detail.

Instead, we could concentrate our attention on the ancient heart of the town: church and school basking in the afternoon sun, dominating a scene which

included parts of the High Street, Castle Street and Mill Street, with trees, lawns and gardens everywhere.

As we walk along the older streets of the town, seeing rows of houses and shops and ever conscious of being in a built-up area, we know little of the greenery that flourishes behind the brickwork. If you have retained the January *Review*, take another look at the photograph and you will see what I mean.

I have never seen Berkhamsted from the air—my best bird's eye view to date has been from the church tower—but some time ago, on a flight from Glasgow to Heathrow, I saw the Gade Valley in all its glory. For most of the journey we were above the clouds; then, suddenly, a familiar and unmistakable landmark gave me my bearings: the Whipnade chalk lion. It was fascinating to look down on the fields and lanes I know so well. Great Gaddesden looked wonderful, and so did Water End. A minute later it was Adeyfield and fasten-your-safety-belts-please.

WILLIAM COWPER

Writing from Sussex, a former Berkhamsted resident says he enjoys seeing the *Review* each month. As a great admirer of a famous son of a former Berkhamsted rector, my friend recently re-read the letters of William Cowper and drew my attention to the following extract from a letter written in 1788, when the poet was 57 years old:

'... a paper, called *The County Chronicle*, came hither in the package of some books from London. It contained news from Hertfordshire, and informed me, among other things, that at Great Berkhamstead, the place of my birth, there is hardly a family left of all with whom, in my earlier days, I was so familiar. The houses, no doubt, remain, but the inhabitants are only to be found now by their gravestones; and it is certain that I might pass through a town in which I was once a sort of principal figure, unknowing and unknown.'

MUD, MUD, MUD

Oh, for a spell of dry weather for the especial benefit of walkers. I don't suppose there was much more rain in the past twelve months than in previous

years, but we have had mud and puddles all the time. Some of our footpaths, especially those on the Common, have never before been in such a deplorable state. One sets off hopefully and becomes a muddied oaf in a very short time.

As alternatives to footpaths, lanes appeal to me less and less now that the traffic is so heavy and fast. Motorists seem to be astonished, if not annoyed, that anyone should still use legs instead of wheels.

BOURNE'S CHARITY

A reference in last month's *Review* to Thomas Bourne, founder of a charity school which in a new form continues to benefit 'Bourne scholars,' reminded me that in former times a dinner was given annually to the children, followed by an ascent of the church tower.

In the *Berkhamsted Parish Magazine* for January 1896 I found the following:

'The annual service was held in the church, attended by the school-children at 11.45. The sermon was preached by the Rev. S. Summers, vicar of Potten End. Dinner followed at the King's Arms, according to custom, to which the school, headed by the authorities bearing the well known gilt-headed staves, proceeded in procession. The feast was graced and further rendered memorable by the presence for the first time in the annals of history of a lady governor at the board. The pious memory of Thomas Bourne was duly honoured, and speeches followed from the Rector, Mr. Samuel Timson, and Mr. Peters. Many of the children afterwards made the customary ascent of the church tower.'

AU REVOIR

Readers will, I hope, forgive a personal note. For a time, probably for a very short time, I am discontinuing this Notebook, which has appeared monthly for several years.

What with one spare-time activity after another, I am perpetually having to postpone work on a book of local interest. The time has come to cut down my commitments temporarily and concentrate on the job I am most anxious to complete.

Most readers have guessed that 'Townsmen', under another nom-de-plume, has contributed regularly to these pages for nearly thirty years. It is only one department that is temporarily closing down!

FOR DISPOSAL

Esso Autovector stove, in green, is for disposal, complete with electric fire, for say £5. Ring Berkhamsted 6223.

THANK YOU TOWNSMAN

Our regular contributor on local affairs, geography and history, Townsman, is retiring from his column for a short time so that he can make time to finish the book he has been writing on the history of Berkhamsted.

While we shall all miss his interesting, informative and often amusing articles for a few months, we are sure that the end result will be worth waiting for. It is sure to be a volume whose presence will be essential on the shelves of all who have any civic pride at all. However, our long-term gain is bought at some cost; the Berkhamsted *Review* will hardly be 'Berkhamsted' without Townsman. The columns, which he has written under one guise or another for nearly thirty years, must be literally unique among the contents of parish magazines, in local journalism or in the writing of local history in this country.

Meanwhile readers will be glad to know that this column will be resumed in due course.

This is certainly an opportune time to express a truly heartfelt thank you to Townsman for his staunch and loyal support of three editors of the *Review* in the past years, and for his help in imparting the distinctively 'town' flavour to this parochial magazine.