

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

by Townsman

CANAL MILEPOSTS

I HAVE BEEN ASKED (a) what purpose was served by the 'Lock Distance' posts on the canal towpath and (b) why the name Braunston appears on the few canal mileposts which still survive.

'Lock distance' posts were intended to stop quarrelling between rival barges, who were not unknown to use rather picturesque language. If two boats were approaching a lock from opposite directions, it was the boat which first passed the 'Lock distance' post which had the right to use the lock first, even if it had to be emptied or filled.

Braunston is the name of a Northamptonshire village where the Grand Junction Canal, as it was originally called, joins other canals. A 'Braunston 60 miles' post may be seen near Billet Lane bridge; the '62 miles' post is near Bull-beggar's Lane bridge. Here and there a few quarter, half and three-quarter mile posts, which omit the name Braunston, may be seen.

There are 102 locks on the canal's 100-mile route; 56 locks on the way up from the Thames to the Cow Roast, 24 down to Bletchley, then 11 miles without locks until the canal crosses rising ground to Braunston.

DANGEROUS CURVES?

Several people have told me that they wish more consideration had been shown for pedestrians when St. John's Well Lane was given a very wide, curving entrance from the High Street. The complaint is that one has to keep on looking back to make sure vehicles are not sweeping round the bend. A similar hazard to pedestrians calls for extra vigilance at the entrance to another car park, Water Lane.

But it pays to be careful wherever one goes. To my mind a wide-angle view is better than a blind spot such as the junction of Chesham Road with the High Street.

SUNNYSIDE PLAYGROUND

I am pleased to hear that the Council is to improve the children's playground in George Street. It has been called an eyesore and a shambles. Perhaps the Council will also make the adjoining footbridge over the canal look a little more presentable.

Both the recreation ground and bridge figured in a bitter controversy. In 1926, Mr. Edward Greene, of The Hall, offered land for a permanent playing field following the loss of a narrow strip between the canal and the railway, which had been converted into allotments and then built upon. Mr. Greene's offer was conditional upon the Council building a bridge to connect George Street with the High Street, but various objections were

made to the scheme, and other sites for a playground were suggested.

Eventually the Council bought the site of a disused sawmill for £700, and a fund was started to equip the playground. Sir Richard Cooper defrayed the cost of the bridge, and Mr. Greene gave land to provide a wide approach from the High Street. An unexpected extra was a demand from the Grand Junction Canal Company for £120 to strengthen the banks of the canal before the bridge was built. The work was completed in 1930.

A little track from George Street to the canal, on the west side of the playground, was known as Great Smith Street, and a little road on the east side was Hampton Court Road. The latter is now called Little Bridge Road. A road over the former recreation ground, from George Street to Bank Mill Bridge, was known as 'Great Charles Street, George Street', but Great Charles was soon forgotten.

SMALLEST HOUSE

Next time you go to Aldbury, be sure to arm yourself with a little guide-book which has been written by Mr. B. Weedon and Mr. A. Soper, with illustrations by Mrs. G. Collins.

The booklet tells you what to see and supplies as much information as is necessary for a short tour of the village. There is much to see besides the very fine church and that much-photographed pond with the stocks and whipping post. On the way round the village one learns a great deal about houses of many periods. It was news to me that a tiny extension to a house was once separate and had the distinction of being the smallest house in Hertfordshire.

Every old village should have the equivalent of the 'Aldbury Guide'.

HILLTOP VILLAGES

Just as I was finishing this month's notes, Group-Captain David Hay brought along a copy of a new book which he has just written in collaboration with his wife Joan. 'Hilltop Villages of the Chilterns' (Phillimore, £2.50) tells the story of four of our Buckinghamshire neighbours, Cholesbury, Hawridge, St. Leonards and Buckland Common, and the 246 pages include many illustrations and maps.

The book is unusual in that it devotes the first fifty or so pages to pre-Roman times. But the Hays have a good story to tell, and they tell it in a most interesting way. Later chapters show how deeply they have delved into documents ancient and modern.

There are several references to Berkhamsted. It is nice to know that in early times Hawridge seems to have been more closely linked with Berkhamsted and

Bellingdon than with Cholesbury and Chesham. And I note that in 1810 Stephen Dwight, of Potten End, made an encroachment in Hawridge for breeding and keeping pheasants—an indication that a very old family business was not confined to one part of the district.

DANIEL'S TRUDGE

Several readers have requested suggestions for walks beyond, say, a five miles' radius of the town. Apparently familiar routes are sometimes a little too familiar.

Well, here is a ramble which is not too short, not too long, in what is sometimes called 'Little Switzerland'. The views are magnificent.

First, some notes for readers who have their own transport. Drive to the foot of Tring Hill, turn left along the Wendover road (A4011) for about a mile, then left along the road signposted St. Leonard's, Cholesbury, Chesham. In half a mile or so you will see, left, a small parking place, opposite a house called Aston Hill Lodge.

Below the parking place, in a clearing, the Forestry Commission has provided a map showing a route for walkers known as 'Daniel's Trudge'. This is a forest walk with posts indicating the direction and giving interesting information about the trees, soil, and an ancient fortification. For part of the way you walk along wide clearings; there are also zig-zag stepped paths, some rather steep.

Even if you linger, as I did, to admire the views and read the notes, you should manage the walk comfortably in 50 minutes. And if you want to eat up more miles, cross the road and sample the way-marked paths in the woods above Halton. There can be no pleasanter way to Wendover.

WALKER'S CHOICE

Now for some notes for readers who, from choice or necessity, use public transport. Bus or coach to Buckland Wharf; walk the short distance back to the canal bridge and go along the towpath. I prefer this way to the busy A4011, though it is a little longer. At the first bridge go along the road, left, uphill, and where it joins the A4011, keep straight ahead along the signposted footpath, which continues past the Golf Club house. Keep straight on, more or less parallel with the road, until you come to the start of 'Daniel's Trudge'.

Instead of returning via Buckland Wharf, I hope you will walk the somewhat longer distance to Tring. Rewalk the first, short part of 'Daniel's Trudge', but instead of turning left at the first clearing, *keep straight on* to a road (unmetalled), in which turn left. Do not be deterred by a 'Private' notice at the end of the road; go over the stile, and almost immediately you will see a 'Public Footpath' sign. The path runs downhill (beyond the wood, fine views on your left) to a road, in which turn right for about 80 yards; then go left, along a narrow path which starts between hedges and continues straight on beside and over fields to Tring. It's wonderful, wonderful, all the way.