

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

by Townsman

TOURIST ATTRACTION

When a Tourist Board for our part of the country was proposed a short time ago, local reaction was rather lukewarm. Not that we underrate the very considerable attractions of the Chilterns; it so happens that we do not think of visitors as tourists, whether they come for a short or a long stay.

Tourism means many things; it can be big business at the seaside and in scenic areas far enough from London to require lots of hotels and boarding houses.

But we are very near London, and, not surprisingly, overnight accommodation in the Chilterns is limited; it is also increasingly difficult to find a village with a tea-shop. That pre-war favourite of walkers and cyclists, a farmhouse tea, is almost a thing of the past. Most of the visitors are motorists who come for a few hours and bring their own food and drink.

It is the picnicker who puts tremendous pressure on Ashridge Park all the way to Ivinghoe Beacon. There are similar crowds at Coombe Hill, Wendover, where the first of Britain's 200-

plus nature trails was devised as an experiment only nine years ago. (Incidentally, 3,000 copies are sold annually of the booklet which describes the nature trail near the Bridgewater monument).

Most foreign visitors see the Chilterns only from busy roads as they hurry to Stratford-on-Avon; on the return journey they are usually asleep in their coaches. But motorists who make day trips to the Chilterns are beginning to use their legs and take new interest in the countryside. Whether or not we have a Tourist Board, I fancy that more and more people will visit and enjoy one of Britain's great scenic treasures, the Chilterns.

OLD COURT GREEN

Was there an ancient court at Potten End? A reader put this question to me on seeing a crescent of houses named Old Court Green.

It is a pun on the name Courtauld. Between the wars a prominent resident was Miss Sidney Courtauld, a member of the famous textile firm. For some years she lived in Gravel Path; then she built a large house at Little Heath. Originally

called Bocking, the house was subsequently named Bullbeggars and is now known as Little Heath Park.

Miss Courtauld, who devoted much time and money to good causes, is perhaps best remembered for her gift of a very distinctive village hall to Potten End. She also provided houses to let at very low rentals at a time when the Rural District Council had exhausted its quota. Resisting a suggestion that the crescent should be named after her, Miss Courtauld sportingly allowed her name to be punned, hence the name Old Court Green. Many years later the houses were sold to the Rural District Council on the understanding that the rents were not to be raised for at least ten years.

I can think of no happier inscription than the one on the village hall: From a friend to friends.

MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

It is not necessary to leave the town for the countryside to know that squirrels are having a good year. Thanks to a mild summer and the absence of gales, they are very numerous, very playful, and sometimes very tame.

Like deer, squirrels can be a pest, but I enjoy watching them. A pity, though, that the grey variety superseded the native red squirrel, which was smaller, rather fussy in its eating habits, and too pretty to be dubbed a tree-rat.

A funny thing happened on my way to Buckland Common in October. I was walking along a lane little used by motor traffic and saw a grey squirrel about 75

yards ahead. On noticing me he ran forward, keeping to the middle of the road. Every 75 yards or so he stopped, looked, and then went ahead again. This happened at least half a dozen times. As there were hedges and trees on both sides, I was surprised the squirrel pursued a middle-of-the-road route for over a quarter of a mile.

ON THE TABLE

A friend tells me that on a table in the Civic Centre she noticed a booklet entitled 'Human Rights'. It was prominently rubber-stamped: 'Not to be taken away'.

Quite.

STAG LANE

'I heard an old man talking about a Stag Lane in Berkhamsted. Does it still exist, and, if so, where is it?'

In answer to this enquiry, Stag Lane is a little turning off Gossoms End. It starts between the old school and the row of derelict cottages on the south side of the highway.

The corner cottage was a public-house, the Stag, kept by Mr. T. Ward until it lost its licence in the early 1920s, when the Boot in Castle Street, the Edward VI in Mill Street, and the Pheasant at Northchurch also became private houses.

VILLAGE LIFE

We often hear about the large number of societies in Berkhamsted. Not that variety is limited to the town. Some of our villages have lots of activities, too.

I have just been reading the autumn number of a Little Gaddesden quarterly, *The Gaddesden Diary*. It starts off with an impressive list of the addresses of club secretaries. A dozen? No, twenty! Drama, art, music, cricket, football, golf, Royal British Legion, Women's Institute, Village Produce Association . . . no wonder there are nearly sixty events listed in the calendar for October, November and December.

The publication comes from the Gaddesden Society, which was created when the Home Guard 'stood down' in 1945. The Home Guard had two assets:

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a sum of money that was due for distribution among its members, and the habit of working together for the benefit of the whole community. And so the Gaddesden Society was formed, offering its members, 'in return for their annual subscription, nothing else but the chance to work for the general good'.

WARM COUNTY

I have just been shown an envelope addressed to a friend in 'Heatfordshire'.

NEEDLEWORK GUILD

If you don't already know about the excellent work done by the Church Army you will have an opportunity to hear Sister Shaw talk on this subject at a Coffee Morning to be held in the Court House on Tuesday, 9th November from 10 a.m.-12 noon. It is hoped that as many people as possible will come along—and please bring your friends too. There will be a Bring-and-Buy Stall.