

IN AND AROUND BERKHAMSTED

by Townsman

NOWHERE TO GO

Not surprisingly, the Town Hall question is again generating a great deal of heat. And while our councillors talk, talk, talk, the activities of the town's larger societies run the risk of grinding to a halt. For the first time in 112 years the Town Hall, which was used regularly until a few months ago, is shut. Bookings for another large local hall are not being accepted for dates after 31st December.

The Council has had nearly thirty years to sit up and do something. The provision of a social or arts centre was one of the main recommendations of a war-time committee. Millions of words later, we have Gable Hall!

Whether the Town Hall frontage is beautiful or ugly is beside the point. We cannot possibly afford to lose, at a time like this, a building with several halls and rooms of different sizes. It would take a long time and cost a fortune to replace it by a new building with accommodation for four or five different meetings.

So let's give the old Town Hall an expectation of life of, say, ten years, put it in a fair state of repair, and open it as soon as the fire escapes are provided.

The cost of this work would surely not exceed the site value of the Town Hall, which, let it not be forgotten, was a free gift to the Council. Rare is a local authority which receives a prize of this size, plus market rights, which the Town Hall Committee, not the Council, had the sagacity to acquire many years ago.

Now's the time for action, and now's the time to build a hall elsewhere capable of seating 300 to 400 people. What about the Park View School site?

It will be a great pity if the Council ends its career in a fog of indecision.

THE POST CODE

Sooner or later the Post Office was bound to sort us out. Locally, the post code era will dawn on January 22,

1973. We shall then have letters and figures to add to our addresses, so find out yours now if you are having letter-headings reprinted.

I (and, doubtless, a number of neighbours) will be identified by the code HP4 1AD. It looks rather like the number-plate of a Roman chariot on which four monthly instalments are still due. But at least the model is AD, not BC.

A few months ago, at the Pavilion, Hemel Hempstead, Joyce Grenfell drew one of the loudest rounds of applause by railing against the post code. I find it child's play compared with those fifteen-figure numbers cooked up by computers.

LOCAL PRIDE

Congratulations to the Citizens' Association on its autumn programme. Besides arranging worth-while meetings and walks, it is keeping a close eye on local government reorganisation. Good!

I don't think Berkhamsted will ever lose its identity as a town; on the contrary, it is likely that the new authority will create an upsurge of interest in local affairs. And the Citizens' Association is in the strongest position to encourage this interest.

BACK LANE

Much as I hate to see familiar bits of old Berkhamsted disappear, I could not shed a tear when a little row of cottages in Back Lane was demolished a week or two ago.

Back Lane isn't the quaint way it was in years gone by. I suppose the rot set in when some Elizabethan cottages, converted into shops, were pulled down in 1916 to clear the site for the Court Theatre.

Once upon a time the lane was noted for its smells. Next door to the sexton, a tallow-chandler treated passers-by to some acrid whiffs. On the way to Water Lane one passed slaughter-houses and

then enjoyed the spicy smell of Cheeld's, the grocers. Finally, Locke and Smith's brewery made its presence smelt. For good measure the gasworks at the bottom of the Wilderness added to the variety of odours if the wind was in the wrong direction.

IT'S THAT NAME AGAIN

I keep on receiving letters and parcels addressed to a town with a funny name. The latest version is Berkhamster. I cannot help thinking of that curious creature with outsize cheek-pouches. Ask your pet shop for the Berk variety.

And here is a letter from a reader who cannot understand why I rail against the 'barking' of our town's name. 'If we say Darby, Hartford, Barkshire, Barkeley, etc., surely we can say Barkhamsted, which consider a very nice pronunciation,' he writes.

Well, I did hear a BBC disc jockey bark the name the other morning. But the BBC's recommendation to its announcers is the version that is used by all good Berkhamstedians.

THE MUSEUM QUESTION

Having a rather special interest in the 'Bygone Berkhamsted' exhibition, I should leave others to sing its praises. But the attendance certainly exceeded expectations, and many people said they were sorry the exhibits could not be kept on permanent public show.

'Why cannot we have a museum?' was an oft-repeated question. Well, we may have one—some day! It wasn't easy to launch the Archaeological Society, but already it is a great success, and its splendid display of local 'finds' was one of the great attractions of the exhibition.

Apologies to those who did not know that the show had been retimed. We did our best to spread the news, but it was too late to mount a big publicity campaign. We would have continued the exhibition all through the week had the hall not been required for a flower show. But on the whole I think we gained by starting 'Bygone Berkhamsted' on the last day of the Festival of Flowers.

Charity Cards

The combined charities Christmas Card sale will be held in the Court House this year on Friday 20th and Saturday 21st October from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.