

Berkhamsted Notebook

By TOWNSMAN

Writing on the Wall

I wonder how many parishioners are familiar with the name Robart Clarke? He has a memorial in St. Peter's Church, but it is not among the ones mentioned in the church guide. Robart (he spelt his name that way) cut his own memorial, and if you take a back pew you will see it on the second pillar on the left from the west door. The name, in large, handsome capitals, is enclosed within what seems to be the outline of a church with a tower. There is a fancy design where one would expect to find a clock.

Who was Robart? When did he live? He could have been a mason employed on an early restoration of the church, or a kinsman of Francis Clarke, who was a churchwarden in 1656. His lettering must be centuries old, though not so old as the pre-Reformation inscription in Latin (now difficult to locate) near the base of the tower facing the vestry.

On the various pillars there must be dozens of initials and other small marks, most of them of great antiquity. Carvers were especially busy on the famous oak pillar, and I have a hunch that some of the initials are those of 16th, 17th or 18th century boys of Berkhamsted School, for this part of the church was formerly the school chapel.

Films of Northchurch

It was 'standing room only' when I visited Northchurch Parish Hall to see a film show presented by Mr. George Meager. A newcomer to ciné-photography, he spent many hours last summer recording the everyday life of his village.

First he introduced us to dozens of Northchurch people: leaning on gates, working in their gardens, going to church, passing the time of day, and quaffing pints at the pub. This well-edited documentary was followed by films of the village fete and of Berkhamsted Pageant. Then, best of all, came a half-hour film devoted to St. Mary's Church, with interior and exterior shots, close-ups of memorials, a trip to the belfry, and a bird's eye view from the tower. Wonderful!

Every village, every town, should have a George Meager. I stood at the back of the crowded hall for two hours and a half and enjoyed every minute of the show.

Earlier Start

I was interested to hear a newcomer to the town express surprise that many local meetings (especially lectures) did not start until 8.15 p.m. 'We keep more respectable times in the place I come

from—never after 8 o'clock,' he said.

The late start was adopted for the convenience of commuters, who complained that they could not return home, dine, and attend a function before 8.15 p.m. But this objection is not so valid as it was before we had a speedy train service. For some time, in fact, there has been a trend towards earlier meetings.

Personally, I never mind when a meeting begins provided that it does not go on too long!

Law and Order

In five years' time we are to have a brand new police station at a cost of £110,000. That's a great deal more than the present building cost when it was put up in the gay but also occasionally unlawful 'nineties.

It replaced an earlier police station and a small shop. Most of the townspeople were pleased to see the old home of law and order go, for it was a frightful nuisance, creating a bottleneck at King's Road corner. There was a gap of only 12-ft. between the police station and Sydney House (now Barclay's Bank).

True, there were no cars in those days, but Berkhamsted possessed hundreds of carts and many fine carriages. A crisis was reached when a celebrated printer, Mr. G. F. McCorquodale, of Rossway, lost a train and his temper because his carriage was delayed at the crossroads. The road was widened, the new police station was pushed eastward, and since that time no printer's carriage has loitered with intent or caused an obstruction in King's Road.