

Berkhamsted Notebook

By TOWNSMAN

Potten End Centenary

I have enjoyed reading a booklet which has appeared in good time for the 100th anniversary on 14th January of the consecration of Holy Trinity Church, Potten End.

It is more than a church history; it tells us a great deal about a village which, unlike the Gaddesdens or even tiny Nettleden, has very little early history.

The Strict Baptist Chapel (1836) was the only place of worship until the Church of England School (built in 1854 and now likely to be demolished) was licensed for divine worship and baptisms in 1861.

That the parish of Berkhamsted St. Peter had underestimated the needs of its outpost beyond the Common was proved by the fact that by 1864 the number of children attending Sunday School was 100 out of a total population of 400.

The total cost of building and furnishing Holy Trinity Church, levelling the churchyard and building an 80-yard wall was £845, of which £350 was contributed by Lord Brownlow.

The church was consecrated on 14th January, 1867, by the Bishop of Rochester, and gold coins to the value

of £18 provided slightly more than half of the collection (£35 17s. 1½d).

This is the start of the story told in the centenary booklet, a very interesting half-crown's worth. I especially enjoyed reading about the drum and fife band, the sprat suppers (humble but tasty forerunners of the modern barbecue), and the annual gift from Ashridge of a doe to the Vicarage.

Kitsbury New Town

This is the centenary year of another important event: much more important than it seemed to the people who attended a property sale at the King's Arms Inn, which wasn't called a hotel in 1868.

Before that year there was scarcely a house on the whole of the area west of King's Road and south of the High Street. Then came an announcement of the sale of 'meadow, pasture and arable land' on which new streets would be 'laid out, formed and gravelled.'

At first sixty plots of land were available, the smaller ones on both sides of a farm track which became Kitsbury Road, and on the east side of Gillam's Lane (now Cross Oak Road). Higher up the hill larger plots were offered for sale.

This was the start of a development

which at first created a small hamlet, with fields on three sides and the High Street providing a link with the shopping centre. Charles Street was just a little green lane.

Now almost the entire hillside is a built-up area. And it all started at that property sale in 1868.

Nursery Slopes

By a happy coincidence the growth of the town's West End was mentioned by an old friend a short time ago. We met on a snowy day, and the sight of a boy tugging a sledge reminded him of the time when he, too, enjoyed playing in the snow.

'People hardly credit it when I tell them I sledged down a field where Shrublands Avenue stands today,' he said. 'There was no Queen's Road, either. We had a free run all the way down to the High Street. There was a holly tree halfway down the hill, and when we set off from the top we would say to our mates: "Shall we make for the tree or go right on to East's?"'

He referred, of course, to the saw-mill. Even if Queen's Road were not a one-way street, I would not recommend sledging down it today!

Watersplash

Every time it rains we have a wretched pool of dirty water in the roadway, sometimes swirling over the kerb, at the very point where thousands of people cross the High Street daily—the traffic lights at Mayo's corner.

It's time we had an extra drain.