

Berkhamsted Notebook

By TOWNSMAN

The Town Hall

I was not overjoyed by the Citizens' Association's public opinion poll, which denigrated the Town Hall to the status of the town's greatest eyesore.

Mind you, it was a minority vote. Three-quarters of the people who took dim views did *not* say the Town Hall was our chief eyesore. And thousands of people, myself among them, did not vote at all.

I have known the Town Hall, inside and out, all my life, and familiarity has not bred contempt. It is not a beautiful building, but at least it is an interesting period piece.

I would not go so far as to join those who suggest that in the event of rebuilding, the facade should be preserved. But it will be a very long time before we have a replacement, and I think the time is ripe to improve the building and stop slanging it.

The Town Hall's greatest asset is its site. It is central. Watford didn't put its fairly new Town Hall on the banks of the Colne, and Hemel Hempstead did not build its new Town Hall and Pavilion on the far side of a footbridge over the Gade. The place for Berkhamsted's new Town Hall and/or Social Centre is in the heart of the town.

The Yew Tree

In last month's *Review* I mentioned that the yew tree at Castle Street corner was not planted on the mound, which consists of church and churchyard debris which was piled round the trunk.

A friend disputes this story, saying that roots visible high above the general level of the churchyard suggest that the tree was planted on the mound. He wonders whether the mound dates from early times, marking a point beside the highway where one turned off for the much greater earthworks of the Castle.

An interesting theory. It may be unsporting to drag in someone else to take the blame for a possible error on my part, but my information came from the late Mr. R. A. Norris's 'History of Berkhamsted St. Peter' (1922), and Mr. Norris was not a man to write without great knowledge.

Where are the Bridges?

Here's a question from a schoolboy: Where are the bridges in Bridge Street and North Bridge Road? He could not find any.

Well, there is one in, or rather under, Bridge Street, but few people other than residents are aware that the Bulbourne

runs under the far end of the street. North Bridge Road, which has no bridge, is so called because it was started near the north bridge in Billet Lane. Remarkable!

Pepys and the Headmaster

A reference in last month's *Review* to Samuel Pepys' drinking session with John Sayer reminded me that the great diarist was also a drinking pal of another local man.

He was John Fossan, rector of Little Gaddesden from 1660 to 1682 and master of the Free School at Berkhamsted for a much shorter period. As a schoolmaster he was most unsatisfactory and neglectful of his duties, and pressure was put upon him by the parishioners of Berkhamsted to resign, which he did in 1668.

The reference to Fossan in Pepys' Diary? Here it is: 'I was called on by Mr. Fossan, my fellow pupil at Cambridge, and took him to the Swan in the Palace Yard, and drank together our morning draft.'

A New 'History'

The 'Short History of Berkhamsted' has been out of print for over a year, and many people have been asking if there will be a second edition. Yes—and a much larger edition!

A delaying factor is the vast amount of material which has been collected since the 'Short History' appeared in 1960. It would be much easier—but prohibitively expensive—to produce an 800-page book than one of 150 or so pages, but the author is doing his best to condense without slaughtering.