




Berkhamsted Notebook



By TOWNSMAN



GENERAL DE GAULLE

Sometimes it is harder to write recent than ancient history, a fact known to anyone who has tried to piece together the story of General de Gaulle's residence in this district during the war. But the *Sunday Times* made a pretty good job of it recently, apart from misnaming the Roman Catholic Church in Park View Road St. Peter's.

In 1941 top secrets were indeed top secrets. Hardly anyone was aware that the leader of the Free French was a near neighbour; at the Church of the Sacred Heart many of the congregation did not know the identity of the tall soldier who preferred to stand. Anyway, his international fame was new, and there were many other people and things to think about.

The General's home, incidentally, was Rodinghead, near the Berkhamsted lodge in Ashridge Park, and a picture of this house, and another of the General and Madame de Gaulle near the door, appeared in the *Sunday Times Magazine*

on 5th May. A double-page photograph showed 'our guest and sometime friend' taking the salute at a Home Guard parade at Potten End in November 1941. He was angry because no French flag could be found and was obliged to stand under the Union Jack. Surprisingly, the official history of the 7th Hertfordshire Battalion Home Guard does not mention the event at all. Another slight!

FLYING HIGH

Many protests have been made about night training flights, says the *Berkhamsted Gazette*. Complaining of the noise, an angry Hemel Hempstead resident suggested in a letter that less flying was done over Berkhamsted because there were some wealthy people living there who had more influence than the new town residents.

It may not be widely known—indeed, it may not be known at all—that airmen avoid Berkhamsted for fear of being hit by the many champagne corks which are forever popping high into the air above this prosperous town.

Fortunately, Berkhamsted is easily recognised from the air by the distinctive glow of the headlamps of the town's 3,000 Rolls-Royce cars, provided that dense clouds of rich Havana cigar smoke do not reduce visibility.

A LARGER HALL

That was a bright, happy, youthful, zippy production we had of 'Finian's Rainbow'. It's wonderful what can be done on (and off) small stages such as the one in St. Peter's Hall.

On the way out, a friend recalled the days when 'Oklahoma!' and 'Annie Get Your Gun' filled the large stage and packed the large auditorium of the Court Theatre. 'What a pity we never saved the "Court"', he said, to which I replied 'What a pity we haven't a hall twice as big as St. Peter's and half as big as the old Court Theatre.'

A good stage, ample dressing rooms and seating for 400 to 500 people—that's what Berkhamsted wants!

WAY TO THE CASTLE

A friend tells me he has a theory that Chesham Road (the ancient way from Windsor) originally continued straight to the Castle, and that Castle Street may not have been made until after St. Peter's Church was built.

A sensational theory! It's too late to prove or disprove it, but I would like to have readers' observations.