

Berkhamsted Notebook

By TOWNSMAN

TUNNEL FIELD

The Tunnel Field controversy reminds me of a story that the building of Northchurch tunnel was forced upon the London and Birmingham Railway Company by a landowner who refused to allow the line to run through his property.

To the best of my knowledge there is no documentary evidence to support this story. I imagine that it arose from a belief that the cutting could have been extended all the way from Billet Lane to New Road, Northchurch, without the necessity of boring a tunnel.

But an extension of the cutting would have been a very deep one, and I am quite sure that Robert Stephenson, son of the great George, knew what he was doing. No doubt he weighed the possibility of taking the line nearer the canal, thereby eliminating the need for such a deep cutting.

One advantage of the tunnel is the existence of one short section of the line where road widening would not involve enormous expense in widening existing bridges either under or over the railway. I refer, of course, to New Road.

OVERHEARD

'I waited so long to cross the High Street that I was afraid of being taken for a hitch-hiker trying his luck.'

NO COMMENT

Last month's issue contained a criticism of a criticism. A correspondent complained about a *Review* review of 'Finian's Rainbow'.

Similar letters are received from time to time by most editors, especially local newspaper editors. Say something unfavourable and you get a sharp answer. Say something favourable—as I did in describing 'Finian's Rainbow' as a bright, happy, youthful, zippy production—and nobody makes a comment.

But then, I've known for a long, long time that the way to attract notice is not to hand out compliments.

BERKHAMSTED SCHOOL

Congratulations to A. L. W., author of a newly-published booklet entitled 'Berkhamsted School from 1842'. The sub-title, 'A summary of progress,' could not be more appropriate. We are taken through a century and a quarter of astonishing growth and change in which the school (born in the 16th century) was steered to ever greater successes by nine of its 27 headmasters.

John Incent's had 144 scholars in mind when he founded the school. Today the number is 735.

Everybody interested in old and new Berkhamsted (and that means nearly all of us) should read and keep A. L. W.'s admirable, fact-filled booklet. I hope it will be the forerunner of a complete history of Berkhamsted School.

WHITEHILL

One of the nicest short walks near the town centre, if you don't mind a steep climb, is Whitehill. Its conversion into a one-way road seems to be the only 20th century innovation, and I doubt whether its appearance will be altered very much by the building development which is now in progress between Whitehill and Gravel Path.

The house at the top of the hill, though much altered in the course of time, is still very attractive, and so is the lodge, dated 1867, which has a faintly Swiss appearance.

Seen through the trees from the newly-cleared site, the railway station, too, has a faintly Swiss look! But already it may be too late to enjoy a view which will soon be limited to a few householders.

Near the top of Whitehill, by the way, someone with more strength than sense has been playing about with the stone railway sleepers (vintage 1837) which for generations have stood beside the wall to serve as mounting blocks for horse-riders. At the time of writing one of the sleepers is lying flat on the road. I abstain from making an all-too-obvious joke.

CHAPEL CONVERSION

Turn a chapel into a public-house? Tut-tut! The idea would never have entered my head but for the fact that recently I saw No. 1 of the *St. Alban's Times*, dated 7th July, 1855.

On the front page Messrs. Page and Cameron announced the sale by auction of 'a substantial modern brick built and slated lofty and well lighted building, at present used as a Wesleyan Chapel, but capable of easy conversion either into a Public House or several cottages . . . possessing a frontage of 38 ft. to Prospect Street, with a depth of 97 ft. more or less, in a populous neighbourhood . . . especially worthy the attention of Brewers, builders, and others. Possession may be had on completing the purchase.'

Prospect Place was the former name of Highfield Road (earlier still it was The Pightle), and the chapel stands to this day on the east side of the road, easily distinguished by its ecclesiastical features. But it never became a pub. It was converted into two cottages.

The Rodent Operative in the employ of the Berkhamsted Urban Council has attended a 'refresher course' at Chess-hunt, and the Public Health Committee are now awaiting evidence as to what extent it is proving refreshing to the rats.

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