

Old guide books and postcards of Cambridge

by ENID PORTER

The tourist season is nearing its height, and up and down the country visitors are poring over guide books and maps, and are purchasing postcards as souvenirs.

While an up-to-date edition of a guide book is, naturally, the most useful, nevertheless it is interesting to refer, occasionally, to earlier guides. These give much interesting comparative information on the growth and history of any town, city or village, while the text, in its style alone quite apart from its actual content, makes fascinating reading.

The earliest guide to Cambridge seems to have been the "Cantabrigia Depicta: A Concise and Accurate Description of the University and Town of Cambridge and its Environs . . ." published in 1761. As in the case of many other guide books, later editions of this work were printed. The book is illustrated with "neat views of the Public Buildings" and contains a map, and although most of the text is devoted to the university and the colleges, the town of Cambridge is also described in a brief history.

At the end of the book, as in later editions of this and other guides, is printed a list of the stage coaches, stage wagons and carriers' carts, with their times of arrival at and departure from the various hotels and public houses.

The importance of the river is reflected in the list of boats coming to and leaving Cambridge. Passenger boats, for example, left King's Lynn every Tuesday morning and returned on Sundays. Groom's boats arrived from Ely at the White Bull in Bridge Street every Tuesday and Friday afternoon and returned on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

The "New Cambridge Guide" appeared early in the 19th century and by 1821 had run into its fifth edition, "enlarged, with a correct plan of Cambridge, and elegant engravings." Much of it is a detailed description of the university buildings and the colleges; indeed, the writer almost apologises for this: "It may be thought that the most trifling object which can boast affinity with genius, possesses a powerful claim to notice . . ."

The town—its churches, fairs, market place, Guildhall and Castle—is described in a much smaller section. Cambridge, we are told, "is less enlivened with public amusements than, perhaps, any town of its size and consequence in the kingdom . . . plays are almost excluded from the town; indeed, the propriety of prohibiting stage performances in an university is obvious." However, the inhabitants, "to compensate for the defect, form numerous private assemblies and entertainments amongst themselves", although "public balls are almost as effectively excluded from the town as plays, though not from a similar prohibition."

The "New Guide" incorporated a brief history of the county and a short description of all the villages, never omitting to name the occupants of the manor houses and other "gentlemen's seats". Three pages are devoted to a description of Ely Cathedral, and a further three to the Earl of Hardwicke's home, Wimpole Park, its furniture and pictures.

In 1853, the "Pictorial Guide to Cambridge" was published by John Hatt, bookseller of Peas Hill; a slim, paperback volume with wood engravings, a street plan and a coloured picture of the east window of King's College Chapel.

The book takes visitors on a tour of the colleges and university, starting from St. John's College and taking in the churches, the market place and Parker's Piece. Nearly two pages are given to the last-named "famous cricket ground", with a colourful account of a Town v. University match. "The Town lost the match and the University invited them to dinner. There was something chivalrous in this on the part of the conquerors". An equally colourful account, taken from the "Cambridge Portfolio", of the May races and the procession of boats is included in the book.

A new edition of "The Railway Traveller's Walk Through Cambridge" was published in 1861 by C. N. Wootton, a stationer of 15 King's Parade. Later editions of this guide were produced up to the

1880s; the 8th edition of 1893 was entitled "The Cambridge Visitor's Guide".

The traveller's walk, starting at the Fitzwilliam Museum and ending at the Royal Albert Homes on the road "leading to our ill-arranged station", was a pretty exhausting one, for it took in all the colleges and all the churches, and included a visit to the university library and the castle mound. The book does, however, asterisk, "for the convenience of those whose time is limited", the places "most deserving a visit".

The 1861 edition of the "Railway Traveller's Walk", containing 75 wood engravings, had little complimentary to say about Downing College:

The buildings already erected have cost about £60,000 and we fear will at once strike the visitor as being quite unworthy of the large sum they cost, and of the spacious grounds they occupy, and of the purpose for which they are intended; the building fund is now rapidly increasing and in a few years will probably suffice for the completion of the quadrangle; it will then rest with the "powers that be" either to carry out the original inappropriate design or adopt one more in accordance with our present improved taste in collegiate architecture.

Similar views were expressed in "Cambridge and Its University", published in c.1869 by Nelson & Sons in their Pictorial Guide Book series. This little book contains a number of charming coloured prints, and a list and description of several villages to which, it is suggested, excursions should be made.

A guide book which ran into many editions was written by Professor Sir George Humphry as an enlargement of the 44-page booklet which he produced for the visit to Cambridge, in 1890, of the British Medical Association. The 234 pages of his "Guide to Cambridge" are packed with information about the town as well as about the colleges and the university, and are profusely illustrated. A condensed edition of the book was published in 1906 and sold for threepence—great value for money. Round about the same time the tourist could buy, for twopence, a 32-page guide to Cambridge in the Corporation Guide series, illustrated by ten excellent photographs.

Apart from village sections in

some of the Cambridge guide books already mentioned, separate guides to Cambridgeshire appeared at a later date than did those to Cambridge itself. For any information he needed the tourist had to turn to the Cambridgeshire chapter of such volumes as "The Beauties of England and Wales," for example, or to Pigot's "Directory and Topography" of the 1830s.

Among the first pocket-size county guides was a little paper-covered book, "Rambles in Cambridgeshire", published in Soham in c.1875 at the very reasonable price of fourpence. It directed rambles from Soham to Ely, to Wicken, Upware and Waterbeach, to Cambridge, to Newmarket and to Burwell. Admittedly written in the rather flowery language so popular with the Victorians, the book contains, for all that, a great deal of interesting historical information.

Arthur Hill's "Tourist's Guide to Cambridgeshire", published in 1888, was written for the railway traveller in the happy days when it was possible to reach most Cambridgeshire villages by train. The book is noteworthy for the fact that it contains what should be in every good guide book, namely a list of books on the history and topography of the county. Hill's guide was republished in 1892, revised and enlarged by the Rev. Edward Conybeare who, however, omitted the useful book list.

To modern readers, an interesting feature of old guide books is provided by the pages of advertisements which many of them contain. These not only give us information on, and sometimes illustrations of, now vanished shops and inns, but they also give us an idea of contemporary prices. Thus we gather from the "Pictorial Guide" of 1853 that gentlemen's "best calf, elastic-sided boots" could be purchased in Market Street for from 10s. 6d. to 15s. 6d. a pair. The "Railway Traveller's Walk" tells us that, in 1861, eighteen gallons of Ind Coope's Romford Pale Ale could be obtained from John Lee, wine merchant of Benet Street, for £1 2s., with a discount of 2s. for cash. A weekend return railway ticket from Liverpool Street to Hunstanton could be bought, according to Jarrold's "Guide to Cambridge and Neighbourhood", published in 1890, for the sum of 9s. 6d.

When it comes to postcards, the



This postcard shows Mill Road in 1906.

shops offer the visitor to Cambridge today but a meagre selection of views, and those almost wholly of the exteriors of the colleges. It was a very different state of affairs for his predecessor in the early years of this century, when the "picture postcard craze" was at its height.

With firms such as Frith, Valentine, Judge, Tuck, Stengel, Boots the Chemists and others, to say nothing of local firms, all producing cards, the tourist in Cambridge could buy a dozen or more views, glossy, matt-finished or coloured, of each one of the colleges—its courts, chapel, hall and combination room. He could buy postcards of all the windows in King's and Jesus College chapels, of all the statues in Trinity, of college crews, of the May races, of all the churches and chapels in Cambridge. He could add to his postcard album views of the observatory, of the interiors of the Senate House and the Union, of the Leys and Perse Schools, even of the "new schools" in Milton Road.

He could buy, too, views of many of the streets in Cambridge—not just of those in the centre of the town but of those in the suburbs as well. Then there were the humorous cards to choose from—cartoons by Frank Keene or Harry Moden—illustrating, for the most part, such events in undergraduate life as rags, arrests by the Proctor, or mock funerals. Up to c.1920 he could, if he wished, buy a card of which the "picture" side was a solid black rectangle surrounded by a narrow white border, on the bottom of which was the title: "Cambridge at Night".

In the village stores or post offices,

the early 20th century tourist was certain to find postcard views, not only of the church but of the village streets and pond, the village shop, perhaps with its owners posed proudly in the doorway, and even, sometimes, of the local almshouses with their inhabitants. In Ely, of course, there was a wide range of cards on sale, picturing the exterior of the cathedral from every angle, every nook and cranny of the interior, and numerous details of the stonework and the carvings on the miserere seats.

Many of these old postcard views of Cambridge and Cambridgeshire have been destroyed, but many, fortunately, survive to provide us with an interesting photographic record of the city and the county in the past. The street scenes are, naturally, the most interesting, for they show not only the buildings, of which some may now have disappeared, but also the costume and the traffic of a more leisurely age.

The local publishers seem to have produced the best of such views, whether of a village street with a passing horse-drawn cart and a group of children playing, or of, say, Cambridge's Peas Hill crowded with Saturday shoppers. But Judge of Hastings also published some excellent photographic views, many taken at night, of now vanished courts and passages as well as of better-known areas of Cambridge.

It was this firm's photographer who managed to add interest to the front of Pembroke College by including in his picture a steam roller which was at work on the roadway between the tram lines and the footpath.