

## Village Echoes

130 years ago an article appeared in the December 1883 issue of the Argosy magazine entitled "Round about Goudhurst". The author, Charles Wood, described Goudhurst as "a straggling village in a richly timbered landscape on one of the highest hills in the Weald of Kent where the air was pure and bracing". At the same time, however, he implied that the village was but a shadow of its former 17th century glory when the cloth trade had been at its height, and that the memory of the villagers' victory in the battle with the Hawkhurst gang in 1747 had given way to the "humdrum life of agricultural interests". Contrary to this rather downbeat appraisal, Goudhurst at the beginning of the 1880s was a bustling village on a well-established turnpike road structure. It had a weekly market and numerous shopkeepers from grocers to butchers, together with craftsmen from blacksmiths to wheelwrights, several schools, inns, churches, gasworks and a small lunatic asylum. Beyond this centre, Goudhurst remained a largely rural parish where the main "crops were hops, fruit and cereals".

The 1881 census records that Goudhurst parish contained 555 inhabited and 51 uninhabited dwellings with a population of 2,764, consisting of a nearly equal number of males (1384) and females (1380). Among this number, 1,243 (45%) had been born beyond the parish boundary with birth-places ranging from parishes in Kent and Sussex and other parts of England and Wales to places as distant as Scotland, Ireland and even Brazil. Some may have moved here when they married or, if they were children, with their parents or to attend school, but the majority of outsiders had moved to Goudhurst for economic reasons.

Many of these in-comers were employed in domestic service, either indoors (e.g. butler, housekeeper, maid, footman) or outdoors (e.g., coachman, gardener, groom, gamekeeper). Some occupations attracted the long-distance migrant to fill professional posts in education, religion, law and medicine. For instance the vicar, James Sanderson Clarke, originally came from London and his wife from Hungerford, Berkshire, while Arthur King, the manager of the gasworks, came from Buckland in Surrey via Battle where some of his children were born.

Among the tradesmen resident in Goudhurst at this time were the Burgess family whose head, William Burgess, had moved to Goudhurst from Ewhurst, Surrey in 1832 to take over the store run by his father-in-law. Tradesmen like Burgess, whose descendants continued to run the store until 1971, were the most likely (along with locally born skilled tradesmen such as wheelwrights, carpenters and so on) to be the most settled inhabitants of the parish: the nature of their business made them familiar with the needs of the local residents which, in turn, encouraged and stimulated trade, thus making it unnecessary for them to move away.

Most censuses include a number of people who can only be considered itinerant - they were unlikely to be in the parish in the next week or even the next day. Among these in April 1881 were a group of adults and 13 children whom the census enumerator failed to name even though he recorded their ages and places of birth. The fact that they are described as "tramps in hoppers' home" may account for their reticence in divulging their names.

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