

Village Echoes

Many of the readers of Village Echoes will be familiar with references to the Goudhurst Jubilee Book and the Goudhurst Coronation Book but the name of Amos Mercer might be less familiar to them. However, it is in a great part thanks to the memories of Amos Mercer that those books are such a source of information to the Local History Society. Who, then, was Amos Mercer and why did he have so many recollections of life in Goudhurst?

Amos was born in 1852 and was one of the four children of Amos Mercer Snr, who had a boot-making business at the front of Well House, Iden Green on the Cranbrook Road. One of his earliest memories was being held up by his mother so that he could watch the soldiers, who were on their way to the Crimean War, passing by (see Village Echoes November 2016). Unusually for those times, he stayed at school until he was 16 or 17 years old, spending three years at the Rev Kendon's school at Curtisden Green. Being kept at school for such a long time was probably due to the fact that he was the youngest of Amos's children and, possibly, because he contracted scarlet fever when he was about eight years old. In those days scarlet fever was a leading cause of death in children and, in Amos's case, left him with no sense of taste or smell.

The census returns show us that Amos continued to live with his parents at Well House until at least 1881 and probably until he got married to Agnes Dungey in 1887. Like his father, he was a bootmaker but was clearly also an active member of the local community. Amos Snr had been a bugler in the Kent Rifle Volunteers and Amos Jnr joined them in about 1876. Apart from being a volunteer, he was also a member of the Oddfellows and of the Fire Brigade. In addition, he found time, until his marriage, to be a Sunday School teacher for 17 years at the Wesleyan Chapel in North Road.

Following his marriage, Amos became a licensed victualler and ran the Peacock Inn until the early 1890s. He then moved away from Goudhurst and ran a small shop in Maidstone. However, because of problems with his health, after just a few years he and his wife decided to move back to Goudhurst. Although, on their return, they first lived with his parents at Well House, they then moved to Hunts Lane. By the time of the 1901 census they were living at Cliffe Cottages in North Road and, at the time of the 1911 census, in Church Road.

Amos was obviously 'a man of many parts' and, although he continued his shoe-making business from a small hut on The Plain, he also acted as a relief postman while the postman was fighting in the Boer War. He was also the agent for various steamship companies and he calculated that, while in that role, he had arranged passage 'to the colonies' for more than 50 local residents.

The shoe-making business on The Plain continued until about 1922, at which point Amos, then aged 70, appears to have retired. He and Agnes continued living at Church Road until Agnes's death in 1938. At that point, Amos moved to Brighton and lived with the daughter of his brother James, who had also been a shoe-maker. He died in Brighton in December 1940, having seen the Crimean War, the Boer War, WW1 and the start of WW2.

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