

VILLAGE ECHOES

In last month's Village Echoes about Goudhurst Gas Works, the Local History Society was unsure if the works were purchased out of bankruptcy by Davis and Leaney in 1907, or at a later date. It has now been confirmed that they did indeed buy them in that year for the grand sum of £1,250.

The Gas Works were not the only Goudhurst business to go bankrupt in the early part of the 20th century. Newspaper reports in the society's archives indicate that being a pub landlord was also a road to possible bankruptcy. In December 1901, Thomas Bathgate, a farm bailiff, decided he also fancied life as a pub landlord and duly invested £350 of his savings in taking over the running of the Chequers Hotel, while continuing with his day job at the same time. Newspaper reports of his subsequent bankruptcy give no particular reason as to why his venture should have failed – was it bad management on his part, or lack of custom? We may never know. What we do know is that by November 1910 he was in serious trouble financially. He was behind with his rent, owed the brewery money for beer, and was also unable to afford the interest payments on a loan he had taken out three or four years earlier. He resolved to leave the pub trade and hand over to a new tenant, thus enabling him to pay the rent and the money he owed to the brewery. Unfortunately, he seems to have failed to seek legal advice until it was too late – by which time he had signed binding documents without, on his own admission, reading them and thus understanding their contents; neither did he tell the brewery that he had other creditors or tell his other creditors that he had paid off the brewery. By the time he did seek legal advice in December 1910, it was too late to do more than try and sell off any furniture from the pub, which was not wanted by the incoming landlord, to try and mitigate his losses. Unfortunately the total amount raised (£83 3s) was far short of the £120 he expected. One can only hope that he was more successful in his job as a farm bailiff.

44 years earlier, in 1866, Charles Humphrey, landlord of the Bricklayers Arms, found himself in a similar position. The business had been run successfully as a beer shop by William Penfold, a bricklayer, hence the name. Humphrey married Mr Penfold's daughter and took over from him as landlord when he retired so, by rights, he should have had a flourishing business. Exact details of the reason for his bankruptcy are unknown, but could it have had something to do with the fact that he was described in the bankruptcy notice published in the London Gazette as a beer retailer, fruiterer and carrier – taking on more than he could handle, perhaps?

Local History Society