

Village Echoes

“Bell-Ringers on Strike at Goudhurst”, claimed the headline in the Kent & Sussex Courier for 5th January 1923. The fact that the bells were silent had been drawn to the attention of the newspaper by letters received from puzzled and disgruntled parishioners, who had “listened in vain” for a peal of bells on Christmas Day 1922.

A reporter despatched to find out the truth discovered that the bells, apart from an “occasional and spasmodic chiming...of an amateur character”, had apparently been silent since the previous July. The problems, however, had started in May when the bell-ringing captain, William Diprose, had left the village and the group failed to appoint a replacement captain. Instead, they left it to one Henry Sales to unofficially and, by inference not very successfully, take on that role.

The ringers concerned were George Styles, George Haylor, Eli Brackfield, Henry Sales, Eric Goodsell, William Weekes, Edward Vousden, Frederick Lindridge, James Forman and James Southon. As their elected spokesman, Goodsell disclosed to the Courier that the main cause of their disgruntlement was the lack of remuneration and the impression that their services went unappreciated. In previous years, normal practice had been to ask the villagers for an annual donation to the group, and they divided the money between them. This, they now felt, was no longer a viable proposition and they wished to put the payment on a more formal footing. To back up their claims they cited the fact that the neighbouring parishes of Horsmonden and Cranbrook each paid their groups of ringers an annual sum of about £12 which the members then shared between them. Letters regarding their grievance had been sent to the Vicar (Canon Raikes) and William Burke, who was one of the churchwardens but no replies had been received. Asked if the Church could afford to pay the ringers, the verger said that it could not; only to be contradicted by other residents who claimed that it should be possible.

Interviewed by the same reporter, the Vicar claimed to know nothing of any strike although he thought that “one or two men had not been ringing lately”. He was also unaware whether the bells had been rung on New Year’s Eve as he was “in bed”. According to the same newspaper report, faced with the prospect of silent bells on that night, Mr Storer the church organist, three members of the Prickett family and Mr Mappleton had attempted to ring the Old Year out and the New Year in, which from a “musical point of view” was less than tuneful.

The upshot of all this publicity was that the Parochial Church Council agreed to discuss the matter at their next meeting. Consequently the Courier for 16th February 1923 carried a report that the PCC had agreed to pay the ringers an annual sum of £2 a bell or £16 a year and had set up a small committee consisting of the Vicar, Mr Lambarde, Mr Gripper, Miss Large and Mrs W Burgess to take the matter in hand. On their part, the bell-ringers had formally elected Edward Vousden as Captain, Frederick Lindridge, Vice-Captain, and Eric Goodsell as Secretary, and had drawn up a set of rules which would be submitted to the committee for approval.

Local History Society

Email: info@goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org

Website: www.goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org