

VILLAGE ECHOES

“Adam and Eve and the Soup Tureen”, so runs the nickname of the trio of figures adorning the outside of the Old Lime House in Church Road opposite the junction with Back Lane. To the casual eye they look very old, and visitors to the village could be forgiven for thinking that they are contemporary with the age of the house. Many locals, of course, know that this is not the case and that, in age, they are mere striplings compared with the surrounding buildings. They were, in fact, placed there by John Apps during the early 19th century as examples of his work as a builder and stonemason. Apps, who had converted two cottages to form the single one we see today, lived and worked from the premises.

He was succeeded in his business by his son, William, whose earlier occupations as listed by him in the 1851 and 1861 censuses included being a wholesale cigar maker and then a tea dealer. However, by 1871 William had ceased dabbling in unlikely occupations and had taken charge of a building business which employed 6 men and 6 labourers. Anyone who has encountered builders knows that their materials take up lot of space, and space for William was obviously a problem as he became notorious for keeping a stack of bricks, pipes and other building paraphernalia on the grass bordering the churchyard wall (in those days a fence) opposite his premises. As if that was not enough, he also kept a collection of firebacks on display at the same time, a state of affairs which, despite attempts to get him to remove the items, lasted until his death in 1901. William, incidentally, lived nearby at Mill House, and aside from the building firm, worked as an auctioneer, valuer, house and estate agent.

Further along the Cranbrook Road, a succession of small building firms operated from a yard at Holly House, opposite the Chequers Inn, during the late 19th and part of the 20th century. A small firm of 7 men and 2 boys run by William Colvill had been succeeded by James Potter, who in 1871 employed 15 men and 2 boys. Not much is known about these two firms, although there is mention in the 1937 Goudhurst Coronation Book that Colvill built Goldwell in Cranbrook Road for William Burgess, of Burgess Stores. Potter, in his turn was succeeded, albeit briefly, at Holly House by the firm of Norman Player (5 men and 1 boy) who in turn gave way in 1883 to the firm of Davis and Leaney about whom much more is known. Their surviving records provide a detailed account of the day-to-day activities of a provincial building firm from the late 19th century to about 1930, with Whites and the Parish Hall being the largest “new” buildings in the parish which can be attributed to them. Most of their work in Goudhurst involved painting and decorating, mending burst pipes, making cupboards and a large variety of other things as well as general maintenance work for the tradesmen and inhabitants of the parish. They were also, as was usual in those days, the local undertakers.

Local History Society