

Village Echoes

Newspapers are a good – and largely untapped – source of historical material in which to find news of Goudhurst from previous centuries. All of the local newspapers published in Kent and Sussex had a section they called “District News”, making it relatively easy to pick out items of local interest. One such report appeared in the Sussex Advertiser in August 1856 and concerned the return of troops from the Crimean War.

In 1856 the Crimean War was finally over and the army was able to return home. This was a time of much rejoicing, and the returning troops were feted wherever they went. The inhabitants of Goudhurst were as keen as any to take part in celebrations. Nowadays when the village organises an event, there is usually a lengthy lead-in time in which to plan every detail. On this occasion in 1856, however, the village had just one day’s notice that a squadron of the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons was due to pass through Goudhurst on Saturday 2nd August on their way to their base at Shorncliffe. The Inniskillings were a cavalry regiment and had been part of the Heavy Brigade which took part in the Battle of Balaclava in 1854.

A committee was quickly formed to organise a welcome in which the whole village joined with considerable enthusiasm. On the day, a deputation on horseback headed off from Goudhurst to meet the squadron and conduct it to the village while the rest of the population were busy erecting a triumphal arch as well as tables laden with food on The Plain. The squadron arrived about 10.30 that morning to the sound of enthusiastic cheers from the crowds and the ringing of the church bells. After a few words of welcome, the rank and file were offered ale, bread, cheese and tobacco, all of which was extremely welcome after their 13 mile long and dusty ride from Tonbridge. The officers, meanwhile, were entertained at the Vine Inn. The “visit” lasted about an hour and, after a speech of appreciation by the commanding officer and three hearty cheers from the men, the squadron headed off for Cranbrook where a similar welcome awaited them. One wonders what state they were in by the time they reached Shorncliffe.

However, the village found it had no time to spare on learning that another squadron was due to arrive on Monday. This time the arrangements were more detailed. It was also particularly noticeable (according to the newspaper report) that more of the gentry of the parish were present on this occasion, as well as a larger number of the female population waving handkerchiefs. The main banner said “Welcome Home”, and there were many small but similar banners and streamers on display and all was accompanied by the sound of cheers and the church bells as before. Similar refreshments were served and bouquets presented by the ladies present. Again the officers were entertained at the Vine Inn, after which hearty cheers once again resounded around the Plain before the squadron was waved on its way.

Local History Society
Email: info@goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org
Website: www.goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org