

## Village Echoes

### Daniel West and the 1811 Census

The first population census of England and Wales was undertaken in 1801 and, apart from 1941, one has been taken every ten years since then. The censuses from 1801 to 1831 were only intended as a count of the population and did not record details of individuals or their addresses. The information was then published as statistical tables, and the original forms returned to the government were destroyed. Just occasionally, however, local material collected by individuals tasked with counting their population survived, and such is the case in Goudhurst in 1811.

The date of the census was set at 27<sup>th</sup> May and the enumerator had until 20<sup>th</sup> July to send the results to the relevant authority. In addition to the population count the authorities also requested the number of baptisms, burials and marriages which had taken place in the parish for each year between 1801 and 1810 inclusive. While the Vicar and other officiating ministers were expected to provide the latter figures by checking their registers, the more onerous task of enumerating the population was the responsibility of the Overseer of the Poor in the parish.

In 1973 the original notebook used by Daniel West to record answers for the 1811 census forms was discovered in the parish chest of St Mary's, Goudhurst inscribed: *Daniel West, Census Return for 1811*. Besides requesting counts of males and females and the total population of Goudhurst parish which included Kilndown, the Government also requested answers to specific questions: i.e. the number of families employed in agriculture, trade, manufacturing and handicrafts; the number of inhabited houses, uninhabited houses and those being built; and the number of families occupying the houses. To work all this out, West divided each page in the notebook into columns headed as follows:

Inhabited houses, Number of families, Number of families employed in agriculture, in Trade, Other [occupations], Males, Females, and Total (numbers of males and females). In his first column West also noted the surname(s) of the families inhabiting each property. By this method he eventually arrived at the figures he submitted to the government.

Males: 1021	Families employed in agriculture: 273
Females: 1061	Families employed in Trade etc: 94
Total Population: 2082	Families employed in other occupations: 19
Number of inhabited houses: 273	Number of families: 386
Houses not inhabited: 4	Houses now building: 1

Daniel West appears to have been born in Sussex in 1773 and the first reference to him in Goudhurst is his marriage to the widowed Mary Weston in 1804, when his occupation is given as a wheelwright. By 1818 Mary had died, and in October that year Daniel married Mary Ann Dowthwaite, the daughter of the then Vicar of St Mary's. He had now established himself as a timber merchant with a dozen sawpits at Lidwells and one on The Plain. According to an anecdote on page 130 of the Goudhurst Coronation Book, he had gained the nickname of "Smuggler West" because (so the story goes) he smuggled wood! He died suddenly in April 1847 aged 73 when he was driving his carriage to a meeting in Marden and was buried in

the churchyard on 24<sup>th</sup> April leaving a widow and two daughters. Following his death, his substantial freehold estate, which included farms, cottages and woodland, was auctioned in 22 lots, comprising property in Goudhurst, Marden, Frittenden, Biddenden, Stone, Strood and Mayfield. In Goudhurst, (13 lots) this consisted of his main residence of Lidwells and surrounding estate, several properties in the High Street, and cottages at Curtisden Green and Trowswell among others.

The notebook he left behind in St Mary's is now in the archives at the Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone (ref: P157/18/1). More information can be seen on the Goudhurst and Kildown Local History Society website.

Local History Society

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