

Village Echoes

In February 1927 the Kent & Sussex Courier printed a long and sad report on an inquest held in Goudhurst Parish Hall into the death of 52-year-old George Dibley of 2, Hillside, Goudhurst. He had been found dead in the office adjoining his workshop at Rope Walk, on the corner of Church Road, on 27th January by his younger daughter Phyllis. A six-chamber service revolver, which had been fired twice, was found at his side. His daughter gave evidence that, although trade had been slack, he had no financial worries; however, he had been ill with a cold and influenza for two or three weeks and “seemed beaten down”. Perhaps most significantly, he had been worried about his elder daughter Olive, who had sailed for Gibraltar in rough weather earlier in January, and he had also recently been notified that the mental condition of his wife, Mabel, after five years in Barming mental hospital, showed no sign of improvement. All this led the coroner to conclude that Dibley had committed suicide when he “was not of sound mind at the time”.

George Dibley had been born in or near Goudhurst in 1874, and he went on to have a modestly successful working-life. The 1901 census gave his occupation as a “journeyman cycle engineer” and it seems likely that, at that time, he was employed in the cycle business started in Goudhurst by William Rootes, who later opened a second site in Hawkhurst and ultimately went on to found the Rootes Motor Group.

In 1903 Rootes purchased or, more probably, built a cycle repair shed, made of corrugated iron and glass, at the top of Rope Walk, next to the property now named “Old Saddlers”. George Dibley managed this business for some years before taking it over around 1915. Advertisements for the “Raleigh all steel bicycle” listing “G. Dibley, Goudhurst” as an outlet appeared in the local newspapers before and after the Great War. By then it was known as G Dibley cycle works and the building itself was adorned with the signage “G. Dibley: Cycle Agent and Repairs”.

According to the Courier report, George Dibley was “well known and highly respected as a capable, quiet, industrious tradesman” and his death had “cast quite a gloom over the village”. His funeral service was conducted by Canon Raikes, the vicar of St. Mary’s, and the burial took place in the new burial ground in Back Lane. It was attended by many people from the village as well as by his immediate family.

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