

## Village Echoes

### The Alfred Drake Panel

At the end of January 2018 the Archdeacon of Maidstone, the Venerable Stephen Taylor, came to dedicate the new kitchen installed at the rear of Christ Church Kilndown. The smart units fit very well with the interior of the church and especially striking is the carved oak panel at the end of the range.



It had been carved by an amateur woodworker called Alfred Oliver Drake who lived at Shernfold, Kilndown for 43 years until his death in 1943. He had been born in 1865 in Dagenham, Essex, the eighth of nine children born to William Drake, a miller and baker. In 1881 Alfred himself had become a baker, part of the family business based at Marks Gate Mill, Dagenham. By 1891 he had married his Wiltshire born wife Lilian and ran his own baker's shop in Chadwell Heath High Street where their eldest child William was born. By 1901 they had five children aged between four and ten; the three youngest, Lilian (1894), Alfred junior (1900) and Hilda (1905) were born in Kilndown. It isn't known why Alfred moved to Kent or why he had a complete change of profession because now he was working as an Assurance Agent. Even stranger was that in the 1911 census he had become a self-employed bootmaker.

The eldest son, William Stanley (born 1890), was living with the family in Kilndown in 1901 but by 1911 he was working as a shop assistant in Marylebone, London and boarding at his place of work. There is some confusion about the circumstances of his death in the Far East during the Second World War in about 1942, and he is the subject of next month's Village Echoes. His mother died in 1940 and his father in 1943.

In 1937 Alfred (junior) moved to a cottage in Lidwells Lane, Goudhurst, which he shared with his youngest sister until he died 1970. Hilda stayed in Goudhurst, which is where David Denton went to visit in the mid 1990s accompanied by Lay Reader Cyril Wood. She gave him the oak panel for the church, which at that time was in three planks. David assumed it was intended for a table top and joined the pieces together and kept it for a future use. John Farley, the Kilndown church kitchen carpenter, has now mounted it in an oak frame at the end of the largest units, leaving the back exposed so that the pencil writing is still visible. It is astonishing that so long after his death, and by a rather circuitous route, Alfred's lovely carving has at last taken pride of place in the church. It is recommended that visitors to Christ Church should make a point of looking for it.

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