

Village Echoes

A browse through the internet on the recent Election Day turned up a book published in 1857 naming the Goudhurst men eligible to vote at that time. This publication was called “The Poll for the Knights of the Shire to represent the Western Division of the County of Kent”. It listed all the men of West Kent, according to parish, who took part in the election to replace Sir Edmund Filmer MP, who had died suddenly. It was to be held on the 6th April. There were 71 Goudhurst voters listed, mostly living in Goudhurst, but as eligibility depended on land ownership, some people lived as far away as Hampshire and Devon. Names listed such as Springett, Wickham, Lindredge, Hussey and Burgess remain familiar to us. What seems remarkable to us is that against each name was who they had voted for. Secret ballots were only introduced in 1872.

Two early MPs of Goudhurst were father and son William and Henry Campion of Combwell who are commemorated on elaborate memorials near the altar of St Mary’s Church. William’s father, also a William, was killed in the Civil War fighting for the Royalists. In 1689 at the age of 50, William junior was elected as a Whig representing Seaford in Sussex, the county where he largely grew up. He remained in post until his death in 1702 and was buried in Goudhurst.



William Campion in Goudhurst Church



Henry Campion

Unlike his father, Henry Campion was initially elected as a Tory for East Grinstead in 1708. Two of his early actions were to encourage the Government to naturalize all foreign Protestants conditional on immigrants becoming communicating Anglicans. He also sat on a committee which drafted a bill to prevent bribery at elections. At the next general election he stood and was successful in Bossiney in Cornwall. In May 1713 he worked on a bill to suspend the duties on French wines, a sure vote winner. He continued to play a very active role in parliament amongst other things, working on a bill to curb wool smuggling along the south coast. After 1715 Campion became a Jacobite, helping to organize the

intended rising in the West in that year. Although never arrested, he spent much of the next few years abroad, only returning to England by 1720. In 1725 he inherited Danny Park, a few miles north of Brighton, where he lived until his death on 17 April 1761.

Bringing our election history into the 20th century, we record a long-time resident of Kilndown and most famous recent MP Patrick Mayhew, who died in 2016. He was elected for Tunbridge Wells in 1974, and in June 1983 was created Solicitor General by Margaret Thatcher, which carried a knighthood, and in 1987 became Attorney General. He was pleased to be appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in 1992 during the height of the 'troubles' feeling that his Anglo-Irish roots would give him a special understanding. At this period of his life it was not unusual for Kilndown residents to be confronted by armed soldiers on security duty in the quiet country lanes; and the presence of his armed guards swelled the congregation at Christ Church services on Sunday. In 2001 he was made Deputy Lieutenant for Kent and only retired from the Lords in 2015 as Lord Mayhew of Twysden.

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