

## VILLAGE ECHOES

In 1886, the clergy, farmers and tradesmen of Goudhurst successfully petitioned the government to abolish the Goudhurst annual fair by revoking the village's licence to hold one. The fair had always been held on 26<sup>th</sup> August and represented a tradition which stretched back 600 years. Because fairs were held on a fixed date and in a fixed place, they were originally a means of attracting visitors and stallholders from far and wide, and provided not only an outlet for local trade and commerce but also served as a place to exchange news, garner new ideas and have some fun in the way of entertainment. By the time of the petition, the advent of the railway and an efficient postal service had made the necessity for such events less relevant as traders and customers could obtain goods and materials more readily and frequently by these new means.

Progress may have made the fair less relevant from a commercial point of view, but what actually prompted the inhabitants of Goudhurst to petition for its abolition? Amos Mercer, recalling the fair for Alfred Tiffin to record in the Goudhurst Jubilee Book of 1935, considered that 26<sup>th</sup> August was a poor date on which to hold it as it coincided with the start of the hop-picking season and for this reason attracted a large number of, in his view, undesirable characters who had come for the hop-picking but who were not averse to partaking in the "fun" part of the fair, with the result that the police had frequently to be called in to keep order. The petitioners were obviously of the same mind as, apart from stating that they thought it was no longer necessary for trade, they also considered that the fair had become "*the cause of grievous immorality and very injurious to the inhabitants of the town and parish of Goudhurst*".

On the other hand, Miss Emma Harvey of Bray's Cottages, in recounting her memories of the fair for inclusion in the Goudhurst Coronation Book, was more positive or perhaps more nostalgic. She recalled enjoying such delights as donkey rides, the gingerbread stall, numerous, but unspecified, side shows, and "*old Andrews who displayed toys on a sheet on the ground*". The successor to the fair, the Goudhurst Village Fete, has come a long way since then, but still boasts numerous stalls, and aims to provide both entertainment and fun as well as raising money for local causes.

Local History Society