

## Village Echoes

Although forgotten now, the village fete held at Gore Court in June 1921 was still remembered with pride some thirty years later when John Druce, the owner of Gore Court and the man behind the arrangements, died. Like today the fete, while providing enjoyment for those attending, was organised for a purpose – in this case to raise money for the restoration of the tower of St Mary's Church. This was not the first time the tower had been restored. A lightning strike on the spire of the original tower in 1637 caused considerable damage, and the tower was eventually rebuilt in the form we see today.

However, by the beginning of the twentieth century it was already becoming apparent that the tower was in need of repairs although, with the advent of the First World War, nothing was done until 1920. Restoration work commenced in July that year as, in the words of Hubert Benians, Goudhurst's architect in charge, *"the stones of the parapet having become loose and quite unsafe, and the vegetation flourishing on the South side, necessitated immediate attention, not only to avoid an accident, but to save the structure from serious dilapidation."* At this stage the total cost of repair, including scaffolding, was expected to be no more than £336. Unfortunately, once the scaffolding was in place, a closer inspection revealed that the condition of the tower was much worse than could be seen from ground level. Not only were stones of the upper part of the tower loose, meaning they had to be removed and then rebuilt, but other sections needed more remedial work than the simple re-pointing originally estimated. For instance, the stonework of the south window to the bell chamber was beyond repair and some masonry was in danger of falling through the vestry roof. The entire parapet had to be taken down and new oak beams inserted to replace the rotten oak joists in the roof, all of which then had to be renewed with expensive lead and slate. The clock frame, parts of which were rotten, also needed repair before it could be repainted and re-gilded. By the time the work was due to be finished, the estimated cost was over £600.

The £377 5s 1d already raised by the parishioners and the Diocese was no longer sufficient, so in December 1920 a small pamphlet was published announcing that a garden fete would be held in June 1921 to raise the extra money needed and in the meantime more contributions and suggestions were welcomed. The day of the "Grand Fete", as it became known, duly arrived, held not on a Saturday but during the afternoon and evening of Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1921. The weather was excellent and the ladies of the parish had excelled themselves in organising the seven stalls from which a variety of goods and produce were for sale; there were also a tea tent and competitions from cake-guessing to coconut shies. The fete began with a procession at 2pm and was formally opened by Viscountess Hardinge. The local MP, Major Strang-Steel, was also in attendance. Business was brisk for the next five hours, with intervals for tea and exhibitions of country and eurythmic dancing by pupils of the Goudhurst Ladies College. At 7pm the band, which had been playing in the background all afternoon, took centre stage when it provided the music for an evening of dancing on one of the lawns. After a vote of thanks to the Druces by Canon Raikes at 8pm, the fete finally closed an hour later. Apart from enjoying the fete itself, visitors were also given the opportunity to go inside Gore Court to view Druce's large collection of military medals, buttons, uniforms, Kent hop tokens and many other items of local interest.

Writing in the July issue of the parish magazine, Canon Raikes noted that it was hoped that the amount raised would be £500. This was a significant under-estimate as, when the final accounts were signed by Benians in August 1921, the total amount raised came to a phenomenal £681 2s 6d.

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