

Village Echoes

With the current high level of interest in the future of the Glebe Field in Church Road, this seems an appropriate time to look back at some of the many and varied uses made of the field in earlier times.

The oldest reference found in the material held in the Local History Society's archives appears on the 1842 tithe map and its accompanying documentation, known as an apportionment. While the map delineates the buildings, fields and roads of the parish, it is the apportionment which provides the detailed information concerning the ownership, occupier, acreage and usage of each plot of land (e.g. house and garden, wood, hop garden, etc). For example, we know that in the year when the tithe map was drawn up, the Glebe Field was then owned by the Dean and Chapter of Rochester Cathedral and leased by a Samuel Shepherd. In his turn, Shepherd evidently sub-let the field, as the occupier is named as Richard Austen, who was the landlord of the Star and Crown Inn (nowadays the Star and Eagle). Austen, who probably used the field as grazing land, "occupied" other pieces of land in the vicinity, including a garden in Back Lane, which were also owned by the Dean and Chapter of Rochester. The field is described as mead, i.e. meadow, and went by the name of the "Cricketing Field" with the obvious implications of its other use at – or before - this time.

A Goudhurst football team also used the field on occasion, as recorded in a newspaper cutting from September 1886. This reported that a game had taken place between Goudhurst and Cranbrook Grammar School on the "Cricketing Field" the previous day, and that Goudhurst had won by six goals to nil.

Later on in the 19th century, a map of Church Road similarly refers to it as "The Cricket Field", and a photograph taken some time during the 1890s shows that sheep also grazed there. Incidentally, this is the only photograph in the society's possession which shows the two cottages, known as Mill House Cottages, which previously stood between Mill House and Cloth Edge, before they became a victim of the parachute mines that fell on the village during the Second World War.

In 1935, when Goudhurst held a Flower Show as part of the celebrations to mark the jubilee of King George V, it was held in the Glebe Field. A photograph of the show, seen from the top of St Mary's Church tower, was taken by Alfred Tiffin who had gamely climbed the 78 steps, encumbered by his camera and tripod in order to take the picture. No mean feat in the days before digital cameras!

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