

## Village Echoes

Whilst cleaning Christ Church, Kilndown the other day I stopped to read a plaque that I had been dusting for many years without paying it much attention. It was a dedication to a James Arthur Ager who, for nearly 40 years, had been a major figure in all aspects of life in Kilndown. When he died in 1936 his obituary appeared in The Times as well as the local Courier but told of a tragically unusual end to his life.

He had been born in Northampton at the beginning of 1872, the youngest son of Thomas, a grocer, and his wife Jane. In the 1891 census he was described as a school teacher whilst his older brother Fred was a "shoe clicker", which was no doubt a job associated with the primary industry of that town, shoemaking. James married Charlotte Foster in 1899 in St Giles Church, Northampton.

By the time of the 1901 census the couple had moved to Kilndown, and their household included just the two of them and a 14 year old local girl, Kate Tolhurst, who was employed as a house servant. Their address was just given as Kilndown and, although they initially lodged with the Blunt family at Riseden Farm, they soon moved into a residence at the back of the school called School House. It was common practice in those days for the head teacher to live on the school site. They had one daughter, Marjorie, who was born in Kilndown towards the end of 1909.

James Ager remained the schoolmaster for 37 years. However, this was not the only position that he held, because for almost as many years he was the organist and choirmaster at Christ Church. After the infant school closed in the 1930s, the School House was converted into additional school rooms to accommodate the younger pupils. Alfred Tiffin recounted in the Goudhurst Coronation Book of 1937 that James had Down House built ready for his retirement but was never to take up residence.

His death, which happened shortly before his retirement, occurred in Woodfall Street, Chelsea as a result of an unfortunate accident. At the time, he was on the way to play the organ at the funeral of Captain A W J Cecil, a former churchwarden at Christ Church who had lately lived at Finchcocks. The inquest, which was held in London and subsequently reported in The Times, suggests that the handbrake on a parked car had been released by a child with the result that the car ran away and crashed into a lamp-post which then fell onto James. He died in hospital shortly afterwards. His wife, who inherited his estate of £1,858, left Kilndown a year later.

His obituary described a very popular man indeed who was regularly asked to contribute his organisational skills to local groups as diverse as the PCC where he was secretary and treasurer, the horticultural society where he was secretary, and the cricket club where he was the treasurer. Together with his wife, who was also on many village committees, he raised considerable funds for the local hospital.

People interviewed at the time of this death stated that he was a good friend to all and often kept in touch with his former pupils who attended his funeral in some number. Also present were former vicars of Kilndown, together with those of Tenterden, Ticehurst and Lamberhurst. His reputation was obviously not confined to his own parish.