

Village Echoes

Back Lane in Goudhurst sometimes acts as a by-pass for pedestrians and desperate motorists when traffic chaos affects the High Street. To most of its users, it is simply a through-route, with the churchyard, the Star & Eagle and the backs of the High Street shops and houses on one side, and on the other.....? A few houses, a field and, hardly noticeable behind a plethora of yew bushes, the small cemetery which opened in 1874 when extra space for burials was required. Over the last few months the Local History Society, with the co-operation of the Parish Clerk, has created a map of the burials and has photographed the headstones and other memorials in this space.

One of the larger burial plots is that of Joseph Ridgway and his family. Born in the parish of Horwich, near Bolton in 1821, Joseph Ridgway was the son of the owner of a successful bleach-works business which had been in the family since the mid-eighteenth century. (No connection with the family who founded the famous Ridgway Tea Company has been proved). Known as "Young Joe" to distinguish him from his father who was also called Joseph, Ridgway inherited the business when his father died in 1842. By 1851 he had purchased and was living at Fairlawn, a big estate near Tonbridge, along with his wife Selina and their two children, Cecily and Thomas Francis. Ten years later, and in poor health, he was advised by his doctor to visit a warmer climate, so he, his wife and son travelled to Thebes (Luxor) in Egypt - with disastrous consequences. While there, all three contracted a fever from which only Ridgway himself recovered, and he had the unenviable task of returning to England with their bodies. He remarried in 1865 and had two more daughters, but his second wife Georgiana died in 1871 shortly after the birth of the second one. He subsequently sold Fairlawn for £100,000 and came to Goudhurst where he had purchased a house called Brandfold. This he promptly demolished in order to build a new one with the same name on the same site.

Ridgway became involved in the formation of the new burial-ground at an early stage. In July 1872 he wrote a letter offering to pay for the building of the wall which now surrounds the cemetery and in return he requested that he be given a corner plot measuring 25 feet by 25 feet. In 1873 the newly formed Burial Board agreed to this proposal, and Ridgway became the owner of the first "purchased" grave plot in the north-east corner of the burial-ground on 5th December 1873. The first actual interment was of 82-year-old William Parks, a plumber from Wickham's Row (Rope Walk) on the 12th June 1874 whose unmarked grave lies against the south wall. Ridgway died at his London house, 73 Eaton Place, on 20th January 1879. His was the seventy-fifth burial to take place and, unlike Parks, his final resting-place and those of his two wives and only son are marked with elaborate memorials. There are also memorial windows to Ridgway and his second wife in St Mary's Church.

Brandfold was inherited by his eldest daughter, the wife of John Stewart Gathorne Hardy who later became the Earl of Cranbrook. After passing through a series of owners, the main Brandfold house was demolished in 1927.

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