

Village Echoes

Goudhurst and Kilndown still have a generous number of pubs, but licensing records of 1753 show that there were no fewer than nine licences issued to 'persons to keep alehouses, inns or victualling houses to sell beer and other liquors by retail'. Unfortunately most of these licensing records don't name the pub, just the licensee, but we have enough information from other sources to locate some of them.

There was the Black Swan Inn located at Black Swan Hall in Goudhurst just beyond the junction of Cranbrook Road and Chequers Road, across the road from the present Goudhurst Inn. It was allegedly the haunt of the Hawkhurst gang and the building is listed by English Heritage as dating from the 16th century.

Fountain House on Goudhurst High Street derives its name from the Fountain Head Inn. The earliest known tenant was a Thomas Mercer who leased it from the Dean and Chapter of Rochester Cathedral, and the premises included a brew-house and garden. It then passed through a series of licensees including Richard Kingsmill who is probably related to George Kingsmill, the notorious leader of the Hawkhurst gang. By 1806, the Fountain Alehouse was owned by a William Willard, who sold "all that messuage called the Fountain Alehouse with the stable, yard, garden" then in the occupation of Older Waghorn to Charles Waghorn, who may have been a relative. When William Chester Burgess bought the property to expand his shopping empire in the mid-nineteenth century, he let the licence lapse.

Near Kilndown, two long-gone hostelries were The Post Boys Inn situated in the small community of Stonecrouch adjacent to the farm of that name on the A21, and the Level and Lamb. The first was originally a stopping-point during the 17th century where the postal delivery men changed horses – hence the name. The 1793 licensing records show it was called the Post House and run by Uriah Blink. When farmer Charles Prickett ran the inn during the 1840s, the 'post boy' was William Pollard aged 45! Richard Golding ran a beerhouse called Levels during the 1840s and 1850s and possibly earlier. In the 1930s this pub was remembered as being called the Level and Lamb, although when it ceased to trade is unclear.

Local historian Alfred Tiffin states that eventually the Stonecrouch Posting Inn transferred to a smaller house nearby run by licensee and wheelwright Thomas Wiles and his successors. The licence was withdrawn from Post Boys Inn in 1916 and from many other pubs during the First World War. However, in 1930 the name Post Boys Café appeared for a time combined with a garage. This building was eventually demolished, to be replaced by the Little Chef which itself has closed down recently.

Just outside Goudhurst was the Cherry Gardens Beer House, now a private house called Cherry Tree Cottage, the oldest part of which dates from the 15th century or earlier. At one time it was known as the Lock and Key Inn and is said to have had a skittle alley. In 1851 79-year-old Edward Sundridge lived there selling beer and farming six acres.

Situated on the corner at Winchet Hill was the Woolpack, also now a private house. The green in front held wool sales of local fleeces each year which became a family day out with other stalls and entertainment for all. It is supposed that because of its rather remote location it was a smugglers' paradise, and when dusk fell they would appear through the trees on their way down to the marsh ports to trade wool for French brandy. The building was probably built in the late 16th or early 17th century.

On the licensing list of 1793 Thomas Masters ran the Woolpack, but he had gone by the early 1800s to be followed by a long line of the Chantler family who remained there until about 1908. In the 1891 census Jesse Chantler was described as an innkeeper and farmer and there was probably always land attached to the property. Like many pubs or beerhouses they had a sideline, as they also sold tea.

Local History Society

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