

Village Echoes

In Goudhurst, where the war memorial now stands, there was for many years a small cottage which was generally known by the name of "Paine's Folly". In April 1915, when the building was assessed as part of the National Valuation Survey carried out by the Government between 1910 and 1915, the inspector wrote that the "tiny brick and slate building" was the "smallest I've ever seen"¹.

The valuation records give us some indication of the extent of the property. It had an entrance into a living-room which also served as a shop, with a tiny round bay (window), a scullery and washhouse, bedroom, cellar, WC and outhouse. Village memory also supplies the fact that the only way to reach the bedroom was via a steep ladder (there being no room for a proper staircase) and that on reaching the bedroom, the occupant was then presented with a further difficulty as a large iron beam which helped to hold the cottage together, ran across the room, only a foot or two above the bed.

The cottage earned its name from the fact that it was started by John Wilkinson Paine, but he never finished building it. He apparently wanted a few more boards to complete a room when he died suddenly in 1879. There are two alternative stories relating to his death: one says that he dropped dead in his shop one Sunday morning; the other maintains that he was rushing to Ladham House to shave Sir George Jessel when he died from "over-hurry". Fortunately, the entry in the burial register of St Mary's Church on 28th April 1879 confirms the latter account by helpfully noting that he "died suddenly at Ladham House"².

Paine, who was born in Appledore in 1810³, had moved to Goudhurst by 1840⁴ and opened his business as a hairdresser and perfumer in a shop partitioned off on the right-hand side of the building which is now the Pharmacy in the High Street. He spent the rest of his life working there, running a successful business and employing the occasional apprentice. By 1871 the census describes him as a hairdresser and shoemaker, which seems an odd combination until it is realised that the same census entry shows that he was sharing the shop with a shoemaker, called George Brown. Paine was also elected Parish Constable during 1864⁵.

The piece of ground on which he built Paine's Folly was common land, i.e. available to anyone to use and he originally used it for the storage of (wooden) faggots. He eventually acquired ownership rights to the land by virtue of his long possession, and despite local opposition he built the little cottage which he intended for his retirement. To provide some extra room, he built a large cellar beneath the cottage.

After his death, it is thought that his housekeeper (Paine was a widower when he moved to Goudhurst), Ann Pooley⁶, and her niece lived in the cottage and later still

¹ IR 58 Field Books Goudhurst, entry 570 – The National Archives

² Parish Register Transcript held by Goudhurst & Kilndown LHS

³ www.familysearch.org

⁴ Pigot's Directory of Kent 1840

⁵ Sussex Advertiser, 7 May 1864 – accessed on British Newspaper Archive;

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>

⁶ Name taken from 1861 and 1871 census – see attached pages

there were a number of further tenants, some of them reported as “undesirable”. At the time of the 1915 survey the building was owned by Mrs F M Burgess of Greentrees, Goudhurst, who rented it to a Miss Rubridge, who must have been related to the previous occupant, Mrs Caroline Rubridge. The latter, a widow who died in 1913⁷ and who apparently weighed about 18 stone, appears to have lived there from at least 1891, when the census for that year lists her as a shopkeeper, and it is not until the 1911 census that we learn that she was also the village nurse as well as running a sweetshop from the premises. Village memory recounts that one of the tenants used to sell fish and sweets from the cottage. This latter story could be related to the fact that Mrs Rubridge sold sweets and that the local fishmonger, Orlando Hodge, had a whelk stall in front of the building.

The structure was demolished in 1924, and today there are no visible remains to remind us of Paine’s Folly. When it was demolished, the contractor was instructed to leave the existing brickwork forming the cellar walls as a base to support the war memorial. The old bricks and other indestructible debris were then used as hardcore, which had to be rammed solid in order to fill the cellar to ensure that there was no possibility of subsidence⁸.

Extra Information:

(A) The article on Paines Folly (July 2012) explained that the original owner was John Wilkinson Paine and that by 1915 the building was owned by Mrs F M Burgess, but gave no information on how it came to belong to the Burgess family. Fanny Burgess was the widow of William Chester Burgess (died in 1902), the owner of Burgess Stores. Documents recently lent to the Local History Society show that Paine had borrowed £18 18s 3d from Mr Burgess and had given the title deeds of the little building to him as security for the loan. The loan was still outstanding when Paine died suddenly in 1879 without leaving a will, and Burgess subsequently became the owner of Paine’s Folly by default. At the time, the building was in a poor state of repair and, before it could be let, Burgess was forced to spend a considerable sum of money putting it in good order. Some time after 1915, the building was used to store second-hand furniture, and later the war memorial was built on the site. (Written December 2012).

(B) 1851 Census⁹

William Brown and his wife Jane aged 45 and 44 respectively. William was born in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire and Jane in Warrington, Lancashire.

Occupation: umbrella maker.

(C) 1861 Census¹⁰ (not named)

William and Jane Brown as in 1851.

Occupation: Licensed Hawker

(D) 1871 Census¹¹

“The Folly”

Henry and Rosanna Osborne, aged 35 and 40; Both born Goudhurst.

Occupation: Ostler.

1881 Census not identified and probably empty.

⁷ Buried in Victorian Cemetery in Back Lane- grave 824 (Hope Family)

⁸ Manuscript of instructions to the Contractor in the Local History Society’s archives

⁹ HO 107/1619 folio 273

¹⁰ RG9/508 folio 34

¹¹ RG10/950 folio 38