

VILLAGE ECHOES

A pair of mallards have been regular visitors to my garden in Goudhurst in recent weeks; I am not sure why they come - not for the pond, there isn't one - perhaps for the shade or the bird food - whatever the reason, they have provided numerous photo opportunities and endless amusement. Ducks, of course, are a familiar sight in Goudhurst, but it was not always so. During the twentieth century it was swans which were often to be seen on the village pond. The first pair arrived in about 1910; acquired from the swannery on the river Thames, they were carried to Goudhurst in two canvas tool bags of the type used by carpenters. All went well until 1913 when there was an unfortunate incident with a bulldog, which was swimming in the pond. The male swan, in defence of its nest and its mate, attacked the dog, resulting in injuries to both creatures, with the subsequent death of the male and the abandonment of the nest by the female swan.

Despite this setback, the pond continued to be a home for swans: a newspaper report of 1936 refers to a new female swan arriving as a replacement for the

previous one which had just died after residing on Goudhurst pond for ten years, and you may have seen the "50 years ago" snippet which appeared in the Courier just a few weeks ago - this referred to the fact that swans' eggs may have been lost through a hole in the bottom of the pond which was leaking in 1958. In fact



swans were still resident in the village in 1964 when the "Ducks v Swans" debate provoked by the growth in traffic through the village even made headlines in the national press. In 1910, when swans were first introduced to the pond, traffic in the village was negligible, but by 1964 this was no longer the case and the swans, although considered by some to be a tourist attraction, had become a traffic hazard because of their habit of wandering about in the middle of the road. Thus, in September 1964 a Parish meeting was specially convened to vote on whether the pond should have swans or ducks but not both. From the account that appeared in the parish magazine, it would seem that the champions of the swans were mostly women, who considered that ducks "are the thin edge of the wedge, soon we'll have water lilies: suburbia!" On the other hand, one longstanding male councillor of the time memorably observed, "You must be careful with women on the council, they would get their own way too much, and

you know what that means - Petticoat Government". The vote went 19 to 6 in favour of ducks, and from this we can surmise that the swans were removed.

So, ducks had won the day at least until 1980 when apparently, another pair of swans settled in, only to be removed later as being incompatible with ducks. Meanwhile, the ducks flourish and continue to act as a tourist attraction, so perhaps the pair that have been frequenting my garden of late are taking a well-earned holiday from the hustle and bustle of life on the village pond.

Local History Society