

Village Echoes

Tattlebury House, situated on the north side of Cranbrook Road where it joins Church Road in Goudhurst, had a long association with the Newington family of medical practitioners and, indeed, with the medical profession in general from the late 18th century until the early part of the 20th century.

A surgeon, Samuel Playsted Newington, occupied Tattlebury House as his home from the late 18th century until his death in the early 1830s. During that time he mainly worked at the private mental institution in Ticehurst (i.e Ticehurst Hospital) which was run by the Newington family until 1917. However, in Goudhurst in April 1840 Samuel Wilmot Newington, his son, who was by then living at Tattlebury House, opened it as the Goudhurst Private Asylum. The 1841 census shows that, apart from his own family and servants, the household included one female patient aged 35.

Ten years later there were five private patients (3 women and 2 men) and their individual attendants living at what the census calls the "Surgery", alongside the Newington family and their own servants.

Records show that by the mid-1880s, Tattlebury House Asylum, which was then in the charge of Robert Samuel Newington, was licensed to house 6 male patients and 2 female patients from the upper and middle classes. A report by the Lunacy Commissioners in 1882 showed that the accommodation was "fair and well maintained" and that there were only three patients in residence. The cost of housing a patient was then £200 per year.

In 1902 the Asylum was purchased as a going concern by retired Surgeon-Colonel James William Evans of the Indian Army. His tenure appears to have been short-lived and it is believed the asylum was then closed and reverted to being a private house. It was purchased by an Australian-born tea merchant, Frank Hobart England, who had retired from business in China and who promptly renamed the property Man Hing. After his sudden death in December 1913, the house was purchased by local retired farmer, Harry Martin and his wife who renamed it Tattlebury. The Martins lived there until their respective deaths in 1935 and 1936 when the house once more changed ownership. Meanwhile, in 1930, Dr Reginald Marshall (who had come to Goudhurst in 1922) moved into part of the house and used the old gun room as his surgery. Subsequent doctors continued to hold their surgeries there until 1976.

The patients known to be resident when the house was run as an asylum stayed for periods ranging from a few months to many years. The sole patient listed in 1841 was still there in 1861, although it is not known what happened to her after that. Recent research has also discovered that William Worth, whose younger brother was Charles Worth, the famous fashion designer based in Paris (but actually English by birth), was a patient from 1873 until his death in 1893. He is buried in the old cemetery in Back Lane.

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