

VILLAGE ECHOES

If you live in one of the older properties in Goudhurst or Kilndown, then the odds are that you have a well somewhere in the garden, which in all probability is safely covered over or has been made a feature of the garden landscape. In the past, however, before the advent of piped water, wells were the main source of supply and during the late 19th century one of the more common jobs the local building firm of Davis and Leaney was asked to do was to repair the pump attached to someone's well.

Wells are deep and can therefore be dangerous places. In November 1752, for instance, Elizabeth Cacket, wife of William Cacket, husbandman of Goudhurst, was found dead at the bottom of a "draw well", prompting Mr John Colvill, to publish a funeral sermon about her "*sudden, unexpected and surprising death*". Just over one hundred years later in October 1877, a Goudhurst plumber by the name of William Buss had the misfortune to succumb to the "*foul air*" found at the bottom of a 34ft well, which he had descended with the intention of undertaking repairs needed to the pump. No sermon was preached in his remembrance, but this being an age of growing mass communication, the local press published a graphic account of the poor man's predicament and of the - ultimately unsuccessful - attempts to rescue him. These rescue attempts had been undertaken by the local doctor, Alexander E Bartlett, who, at some risk to his own life, descended the well twice but was only successful in eventually bringing Mr Buss's body to the surface. For this selfless act of gallantry he was awarded the Royal Humane Society's silver medallion.

On a more cheerful note, in 1886, with the intention of erecting a Goudhurst memorial to celebrate Queen Victoria's golden jubilee in 1887, Mrs Blair of Finchcocks organised a subscription with the intention of commissioning a well to be dug on The Plain. A copy of the estimate for the work from George Stevens of Flimwell shows that it was to be 80ft deep and the total cost, including a pump, was estimated to be £110. In fact, the Goudhurst Coronation and Jubilee books have various anecdotes about a well dug on The Plain around this time and various theories as to why it was a failure. It either failed, despite being a reputed 120ft deep, because it missed the water supply as no-one thought to check the line of flow for the springs in the area and so the well remained dry; alternatively, someone else thought it couldn't be used because the water "*came up black every time*". Whatever the reason, the well was covered over and almost forgotten; that is until 1997 when the road works undertaken through the village briefly uncovered its location near the horse-trough once again (see accompanying photograph). Being of no further use then, it stayed exposed just long enough for people to take photographs before being safely concealed once more.

Local History Society