

## Village Echoes

Some years ago a small number of receipts dating from the 17th century were found concealed in the fireplace of a house in Goudhurst High Street. One is dated 13<sup>th</sup> August 1683 and was given to William Cogger when he paid his half-yearly Hearth Tax. This was a tax which was levied between 1662 and 1689, during the reign of King Charles II, as a means of raising revenue for his government. In theory all households paid two shillings per hearth (i.e. fireplace) which was collected in two instalments - Lady Day (25<sup>th</sup> March) and Michaelmas (29<sup>th</sup> September) - each year. In practice, however, not everyone was taxed: for example, those in receipt of poor relief who probably only had one hearth were exempt from payment, and this is indicated in the returns. Surviving lists of householders, which list the number of hearths in each dwelling, can give a good indication of not only the size of the building but also the social standing of the inhabitants.

This receipt tells us that William Cogger's house had six "fire-hearths" for which he had paid 6 shillings for the half-year, meaning that he would have been one of the better-off inhabitants of Goudhurst at the time. Records for St Mary's church show that William and his wife, Mary, had eight children (2 sons and 6 daughters) baptised between 1663 and 1682, and that four of these died in infancy. Mary Cogger died in 1684 and William in 1693. The inventory of his "goods and chattels" compiled after his death on 10<sup>th</sup> June gave his occupation as "gardiner". It is clear, however, from the items listed that he was not a gardener as we understand the term in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but in all probability a farmer, hop grower and brewer. Apart from his household goods and furniture, the inventory listed hop-poles, 4 acres of wheat, an orchard, cows, hogs, horses, dung – the latter valued at £1 – and numerous barrels and casks of beer and canary wine in his cellar.

In total the inventory valued his property at £238 18s, a considerable sum in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and equivalent to about £30,000 in today's money.

Local History Society  
Email: [info@goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org](mailto:info@goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org)  
Website: [www.goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org](http://www.goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org)