

Village Echoes

Women's Organisations in Goudhurst

In the centenary year of women's suffrage it seems appropriate to recall some community organisations that were formed in Goudhurst in the early 1900s and were mainly associated with women and girls.

The Goudhurst Women's Institute was formed in October 1920 and the first President was Mrs Fitzgerald of Lidwells. Following Mrs Fitzgerald's departure from Goudhurst in 1922, the Honourable Mrs Field of Ballards succeeded as President until 1935. In 1955 the Goudhurst and Curtisden Green WIs joined forces to create a 'Scrapbook' made up of articles of historic information and also photos, maps and mementoes to illustrate a record of memories of life in the parish at the time. In the back of the book is a sealed message to be opened by Goudhurst WI members in the year 2055. Until then the Scrapbook, which was completed in July 1955, is being held in the County WI's Archive at the Kent History and Library Centre in Maidstone.

The Misses Fitzgerald of Lidwells and Miss Collier of The Grove had originally formed a Girl Guide Troop in Goudhurst in November 1919. Then, in July 1928, it was re-formed by Miss K Druce of Flishinghurst, Cranbrook, Miss H Brook and Miss D Kirk. The first Goudhurst Brownie Pack was formed in February 1921 by Miss F M Wickham. Miss Wickham was Brown Owl and Miss Winifred Noakes was Tawny Owl. Guides and Brownies met weekly in the Guide Hut, the old Parish Room that had been re-erected in a field behind Mr Humphries' shop in North Road (now Village Life). However, in summer their meetings were held outdoors whenever possible. Annually from August 1924 some of the guides went to camp along with girls from Cranbrook and Benenden Companies. Until 1935, when they started their own Troop, girls from Horsmonden belonged to the Goudhurst Troop. Goudhurst Guides joined the Jubilee Parade in 1935 dressed as Red Indians. They had decorated Miss Druce's car as a wigwam.

The Goudhurst Branch of the Mothers' Union had been running in 1905 when meetings were held once a quarter at the Vicarage. It was then re-started in 1929 when meetings were held at least once a quarter in either the Church or the Church Room, or sometimes in a member's garden. The Union had three main objects: 1) To uphold the sanctity of marriage; 2) To awaken in all mothers a sense of their great responsibility in the training of their boys and girls – the fathers and mothers of the future; and 3) To organise in every place a band of mothers who will unite in prayer, and seek by their own example to lead their families in purity and holiness of life. In 1935 there were between seventy and eighty members and the annual subscription was sixpence.

The Goudhurst Infant Welfare Centre was formed at a Public Meeting on 14th March 1928. The 1928 annual report by the County Medical Officer shows that

the dentist, Mr Saunders, visited eleven Infant Welfare Centres in the County including Goudhurst. He reported that 100% of the adults and 40% of the children inspected required dental treatment. Centre days started from 29th March and were subsequently held in the Oast-House Room at the Ex-Service Men's Club on the first and third Thursday of each month from 2 until 4 pm. Attendance was free of charge but a cup of tea could be purchased for one old penny. The Centre was not set up exclusively for women and their children but it is clear from a photograph in the Goudhurst Jubilee book that all the attendees at the centre were mothers with their infant girls and boys, the only adult male present being the doctor, Dr I F W Edwards. How different things would be today when fathers take a keen role in the care of their children.

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