

Village Echoes

The 1851 Census of Goudhurst

Modern census records began in 1841 but the amount of information available from that census is fairly limited. The 1851 census gives more information, such as where a member of a household was born and their relationship to the head of the household.

The information for the 1851 census was taken on the night of Sunday 30 March 1851. Each householder had to complete a form showing who was in the house on that night. The forms were then collected by an enumerator and copied into enumeration books. Goudhurst was divided into six enumeration districts, i.e. one covering Goudhurst village centre (called 'The Town') and five others covering the rural areas of the Parish including Kilndown and Curtisden Green.

So, what can we learn from the information in the 1851 census? Perhaps the most striking thing is how little the Parish has changed over the last 170 years. Many of the place names will be familiar to current residents, although the spellings will sometimes have changed, for instance Curtisden Green is recorded as Courtesan Green.

The greatest difference between 1851 and now is probably the occupations of the Parish residents. Although then, as now, much of the Parish was given over to agriculture, the number employed on the land was far greater. Aside from those directly working the land, many had occupations related to the land, such as gamekeeper, woodreeve, shepherd, sawyer, blacksmith and hurdle gate maker.

Within Goudhurst village the range of occupations was far greater and demonstrates how self-reliant a country parish was then. Therefore, we find, among others, an umbrella maker, lawyer, dressmaker, corn dealer, hairdresser, shoemaker, thatcher, rat catcher, milliner, baker, butcher, laundress, confectioner, plumber, draper, druggist and wholesale cigar dealer. Many of the young boys in the village were employed to run errands and deliver goods for the likes of the butcher and baker, whereas the young girls were often apprenticed as dressmakers. Some of the occupations will be unfamiliar to people nowadays, such as cordwainer (shoemaker), huckster (seller of small wares in a shop or booth) and higgler (a peddler).



Many residents were employed as servants. The household might employ just one maid or, in the better-off households, several. If there were children, there would probably be a governess and nursery maid. James Dewar his wife and five children at Taywell employed three servants although they might have had other daily help.

It is noticeable how few of the residents in 1851 were born outside of the Parish. If they were born elsewhere, it was usually in Kent or Sussex. Those who were born in Sussex are



particularly prevalent in the Kilndown/Chingley/Flimwell area. This is not surprising bearing in mind that the area adjoins the county boundary. There were, nevertheless, a few people who came from further afield. James Dewar was born in Berkshire and two of his children were born in Belgium; the governess at Ladham House came from France; the butler at Brandfold House from Belgium; one of the servants at Lidwells House from Tuscany and Francis Ashdown, a broomdasher (someone selling brooms), was born in Quebec.

Finally, we should remember that life was hard for many people and, before the welfare state, if you could no longer work or otherwise support yourself, you had to rely on parish relief. Therefore, in the census there are agricultural labourers over 70 years old and many parish residents noted as 'paupers'. They would doubtless be amazed at the general standard of living nowadays.

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