

## Village Echoes

### Christmas

Writing in November, it is perhaps unwise to predict anything about the coming Christmas, remembering the experience of last year. Perhaps it is interesting to look back to the Christmases past as reported in the local and not so local papers.

I'm tempted to call the article published in 1858 as 'false news', but one has to feel sorry for the newspaper for having so little else to report. The Maidstone Journal & Kentish Advertiser stated that a self-sown pea was discovered in the garden of a Mr Colville of Goudhurst on Christmas Day. It had attached itself to a gooseberry bush and produced several pods, which contained a quantity of peas!

By far the most numerous accounts were of the Annual Christmas cattle markets, which took place in mid-December on the show yard down by Goudhurst railway station. In 1915 the highlight was the auction of sixty prime Sussex bullocks. Other attractions were prime fat pigs and sheep.

In 1891 The Sussex Agricultural Express reported on a party held at the Wesleyan Chapel in North Road. After tea an entertainment, consisting of singing and recitations, took place and in the evening there was a distribution of presents to the Sunday school. Unsurprisingly this is just one example of an annual event that took place in all of our various Churches diligently recorded in local papers.

At Christmas 1856 members of the Kilndown Rural Library and Reading Room, now the Quarry Centre, were treated to a reading of Dickens' Christmas Carol. The Sussex Advertiser reported that the room was crowded by 'a most respectable audience'.

The Kent & Sussex Courier of 1957 informed us that 16 year olds Vicky Millson and Angela Wells 'had the pleasant task of distributing the four hundred tombola prizes to lucky winners at Goudhurst Conservative Christmas bazaar held at the Parish Hall'. This again was obviously an annual event and probably similar to the photo below taken of the same event in 1968.



The Kent & Sussex Courier in 1976 featured the headline ‘Hot Potatoes’ before reporting on a burglary that took place on Christmas Eve. Potatoes worth £100 were stolen from an oast house at Mr Michael Levett’s farm in North Road. The potatoes in twenty, one half hundredweight sacks were taken during the early hours of the morning.

A helpful advertisement appeared in a copy of The Kent & Sussex Courier of 1934 featuring Goudhurst Newsagents. It promised ‘prompt attention for any periodical or book order’ and that it ‘can be delivered within 24 hours. Phone Goudhurst 51 and your Christmas gift problem will be solved.’ That’s as good as Amazon Prime!

During the Second World War, at least two temporary hospitals were set up in the parish. On Christmas Eve in 1942 at Bedgebury Park Emergency Hospital, the Master and Matron, together with staff, went around the wards singing carols and distributing presents. In 1943 The Kent and Sussex Courier again described the wards as being tastefully and cheerfully decorated by staff. The Christmas day dinner included roast pork, Christmas pudding and beer and that presents were distributed from a gay Christmas tree.

Every year there were umpteen parties held by various organisations in Goudhurst and Kilndown such as the Mothers Union in 1930, held at the parish hall and one for the Brownies in the same year held, surprisingly in the Vine Hotel, although thankfully supervised by Miss Noakes. The Kilndown branch of the British Legion distributed gifts each year and in 1931 raised funds for the cause with a whist drive in the Globe and Rainbow, according to the Sevenoaks Chronicle and Kentish Advertiser. There was a similar ploy by Kilndown’s Hockey Club in 1954 as reported by the Kent & Sussex Courier.

The residents of Bedgebury Estate seem to have been particularly involved with the community at Christmas. As early as Christmas Day 1841 the Beresfords distributed clothing to the schoolchildren of Kilndown following a service in Christ Church, a building that had been recently funded and opened by them. This was from the English Chronicle and Whitehall Evening Post. Again, in 1850 The Daily Telegraph and Cinque Ports General Advertiser relayed that ‘Viscountess Beresford, with her accustomed beneficence at this season of the year, has given directions that one hundred stones of beef be distributed for Christmas day to all the workmen and their families of the Bedgebury estate’. There was also an annual dance held on New Year’s Eve for the servants, who were allowed to bring a friend.

In 1927 the Kent & Sussex Courier gave details of a Christmas party held on New Year’s Day at Finchcocks, Kilndown, at the invitation of Captain and the Hon. Mrs J Cecil. School children with their teachers were entertained in the spacious hall where long tables had been decorated with iced cakes.

On 26th December 1890, it was noted in the Sussex Agricultural Express that a service of song was performed at the Primitive Methodist Chapel entitled The Musical Miller. Ironically there had been a series of heavy frosts and the river at Hope Mill was frozen.

Finally for those worrying about the supply of Christmas turkeys this year may be envious of the display across the front of Southon the butchers, probably sometime in the 1930s. As well as turkeys there were geese, ducks and chickens. For those who didn’t want poultry there was prime English beef or English mutton, lamb or pork.



A Very Happy Christmas from Goudhurst and Kilndown Local History Society.

<http://www.goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org>