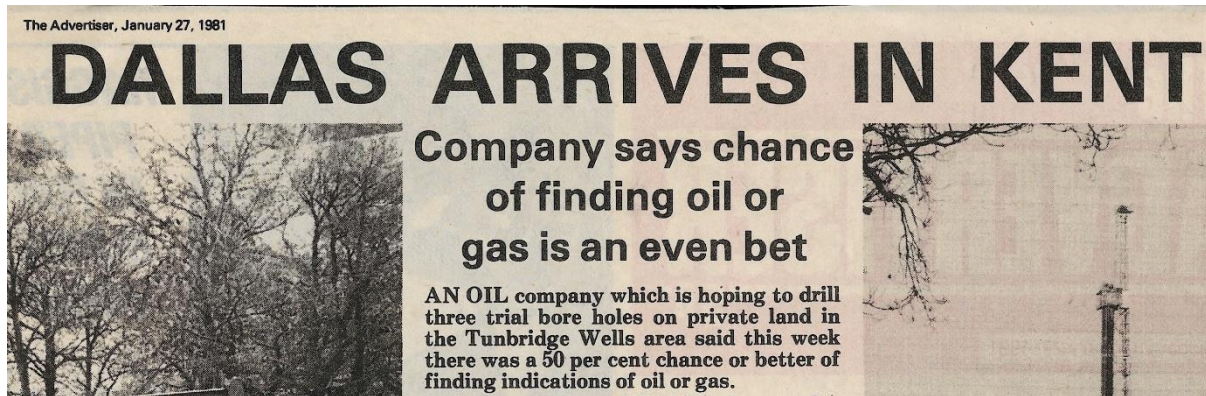


VILLAGE ECHOES

OIL IN GOUDHURST?

I'm sure we are fed up with, or wondering what to do about the current energy crisis especially regarding oil, which most of our community depend on. Amazingly, Goudhurst was once the subject of oil exploration. The headline in the Kent Advertiser in January 1981 was 'Dallas Arrives in Kent', referencing the oil capital of America.



It was an American company, Conoco, who had spent £2 million on surveys in the area and thought that they had a good chance of finding oil or gas. There would be three boreholes – to the north of Bidborough, Blantyre House land and Crowbourne Farm. Each area of about 1 ½ acres would be fenced off in turn to contain a rig about 120 feet in height, apparently especially silenced. Each borehole would go down about 6,000 feet encased in concrete. If oil was found the rig would be replaced by a pumping unit 12 feet deep and the oil or gas transported to the BP refinery on the Isle of Grain, the nearest refinery at the time.

Although Conoco had been granted licenses by the Department of Energy for exploratory drilling, prior to any activity approval had to be obtained from Kent County Council. Conoco promised to hold consultations with 'Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, parish councils, statutory bodies and environmental organisations'.

A public meeting at Goudhurst Village Hall was arranged for the evening of the 27th January and soon after Goudhurst villagers, led by Roger Coombs, made clear their strong protest against the plans. Apparently there had been a recent television programme on a similar scheme in Dorset, which had gone ahead. It cited a large complex of buildings and equipment with 'nodding donkeys' working 24 hours with lights on day and night. Goudhurst would be in danger of expanding into a larger exploration enterprise would be quite inappropriate in a valley designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty.

Protests gained momentum into March and at a meeting of the Parish Council Chairman Kenneth Large stated that the decision and control over the matter rested with Kent County Council and that what was at present only an exploration could not be stopped. In some respects the Parish Council felt that it was in the interest of the

nation, who owned all deposits, to explore all potential oil deposits even if none were exploited.

It was obvious at this point the level of opposition and Conoco acknowledged this by promising to control noise at night, protect water courses and reduce traffic to a minimum along agreed routes. The drilling began and an article in Kent Messenger in July reported on progress including the death of one man when part of the equipment slipped accidentally. Despite the operation costing £500,00 at that point it was admitted the chance of finding oil in Goudhurst was slim. Apparently only one in 40 explorations end in success, which are odds worth risking for the chance of potential profits from liquid gold.



Kent Messenger July 24th 1981

Eventually the site was closed down with plans to continue the search the following year in Sussex and Tonbridge. The Isle of Grain Refinery was decommissioned in August 1982.

In the UK there are now approximately 120 onshore oil and gas sites with 250 operating wells producing between 20,000 and 25,000 barrels of oil equivalent a day. The UK Onshore Geophysical Library website shows that operations are primarily in the Weald Basin, in South East England, which has a long tradition of oil and gas exploration <https://ukogl.org.uk/>

www.goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org