

Village Echoes

GOUDHURST AND KILNDOWN GYMKHANAS

Considering the level of equine ownership in Goudhurst and Kilndown, the archives on the subject are very slim. In fact there are only two items. In 1992 a Bedgebury school girl won the Individual Title at the National Schools' Showjumping Championships at Hickstead. This was despite the weather conditions being described as 'appalling'.

The other item concerns a fundraising Gymkhana held in August 1962 in Taywell Field. In those days before computers, the income and expenditure was recorded on double page lined paper. The entry fees for contestants totalled £108.3s.3d and a separate dog show produced £5.3s.6d. Spectators were charged for car parking, unlike today at the annual fête, which came to £32.7s.9d. This seems to have been a one-off event, organised by a Miss Vicky Millson, primarily in aid of St Mary's Church Organ Fund (£80) although other donations were given to Goudhurst Scouts (£20), the Horse and Pony Protection Association (£23.8s.9d) and the Police Orphans Fund (£4.10s.) Books were given as raffle prizes and rosettes to the winning horses and riders. There were also money prizes totalling £13.10s. The Royal Insurance Company insured the event for £1.14s.0d, surely a bargain!

It is interesting to see the no little amount of organisation behind this event and to imagine how much more is involved in the current annual village fete (when it takes place). Keeping on the horse theme, Miriam Reader wrote in the Goudhurst & Kilndown Millennium Book about the ten years of Gymkhanas that she organised between 1950 and 1960. The first one in 1950 raised £18 for the R.S.P.C.A. despite the rain pouring down most of the day. We aren't told what the takings were for the 1951 gymkhana the Courier reported the astonishing news that, apart from the equestrian events there was a competition to decide the dog with the ugliest owner! That would gain headlines in the national papers these days.



Miriam Reader 1971 (picture by Ms Reader from the Goudhurst Millennium Book)

By 1954 there was a growing team of organisers as well as judges and stewards. Jumping classes were introduced in that year, which took far more organisation, a larger ring and more parking spaces for exhibitors. More than 500 spectators attended, increasing profits, which still went to the R.S.P.C.A. However, during the following years, profits were donated in turn to the Olympic Equestrian Fund, the Church roof and a new Scouts' hut.

A brief notice in the June parish magazine of 1936 recalls the earliest known Gymkhana held in the grounds of Taywell and Jetwells. Once again it was in aid of the Church, this time the Restoration Fund. An article in the Sevenoaks Chronicle gave more details. The equine events included the 'ball and basket race', 'Gretna Green race' and the 'dog and bun Derby! In addition there was pig sticking and musical chairs. The usual stalls and side-shows were available with entertainment from the Goudhurst Band and dancing. At seven in the evening there was an aerobatics display by Mr. Michael Sassoon of Matfield, a member of the Sassoon family and the older brother of Siegfried. We aren't told but perhaps it featured this De Havilland Gypsy Moth that he owned and kept at Gravesend. In 1967 he was still flying the loop the loop at age 82. Quite a bargain for the 6d entrance fee!



In later years the action seemed to be focused in Kilndown where a Horse Show took place for several years at the Mayhew residence, Twissenden. It included all the usual elements of racing and jumping. After this period competitions were hosted by Bedgebury Riding School, sometimes National Hunter Trials and cross-country events, whilst dressage took place in the indoor arena.

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