

Village Echoes

MARKETS AND FAIRS

Many of us have been using the local farm shops during lockdown, reminding us that in times gone by all shopping was conducted locally at a weekly market or annual fair.

By the end of the 13th century, Goudhurst was an established village with a farming community on which its economy depended. By 1309 the village had a weekly market held on a Wednesday and an annual fair on 26th August. They were both granted during the reign of Edward II to Joane, widow of Roger de Bedgebury. The original market and fair were held in the triangular area on the Plain where all the incoming routes converged. Stallholders paid rents to the Bedgebury family but, by the late fourteenth century, Goudhurst market paid an annual rent to the Manor of Marden, which owned most of the parish. The Manor in turn rented it to various sub-holders, such as the Bedgebury family. In 1754 Mr James Hayes, Bedgebury's then owner, paid a yearly rent of 5/-.

By 1532 the market place had moved up the hill to an area outside the Star and Eagle. Notes in the parish registers record that the market often overflowed into the churchyard where *misbehaviour* was common. Eventually the Archbishop found it necessary to send a 'stern rebuke'. At that time the road through Goudhurst didn't take the present route round the churchyard but, as reported in the Village Echo of February 2016, the main road was Back Lane, where the Church entrance was also sited. In 1637 St Mary's Church spire was struck by lightning and the tower below destroyed by fire. The rebuilding plan moved the main entrance to its present position to the west of the building and shortly afterwards the new road constructed. It was no mean feat to level out the plateau at the top of the hill and demolish two shops, which backed onto the churchyard. Some of the soil was redistributed to reduce the steep gradient and steps up to many of the buildings on each side of the road are evidence today of the road lowering. Once the new road was completed, outside the Star & Eagle was an impossible site for the market.

The market buildings were pulled down in 1650 and replaced by a smaller set-up down at the Plain although it still had provision for cattle. According to another note in the Church registers the Goudhurst market cross was removed in 1652. Goods such as chickens, eggs, butter, and cheese were for sale; the sales usually managed by the farmers' wives. Butchers and bakers took the chance to sell to a weekly crowd. In addition, craftsmen such as potters, wood carvers and weavers sold their wares. Blacksmiths could shoe horses, whilst their owners met up with neighbours or visited the taverns, and barber-surgeons would cut hair and pull teeth. However, livestock sales of mainly sheep and pigs would have played a major part in proceedings. This side of the business continued long after the general market ceased. There was a market pound for stray cattle opposite the pond, which also contained a cage for drunkards!

It wasn't just at Goudhurst that a regular market was held. Down at Combwell Priory on 6 July 1227 Henry III granted a yearly fair *on the feast and the morrow of St. Mary Magdalene*. In addition, on 5 February 1232, he granted a market there on Fridays, but the year after altered the day to Tuesday! Both events were probably held in the field behind the present Lady Oak house and shown as Fayre Place on an estate map dated 1622.



An impression of a typical medieval fair

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Pigs for sale near the Green Cross Inn in 1920