

Village Echoes

GOUDHURST ENTERTAINMENT

With live entertainment in short supply at the moment it seems a good time to revisit past performances in Goudhurst. A very complimentary review in The Courier from January 1913 lists a cast of over thirty and five changes of scenery for a production of Aladdin. Mr J Burfield, the local butcher was pictured delivering a meat order in his Widow Twanky costume. A canny publicist indeed. As in today's pantomimes the script covered contemporary issues of the day with a caption on another picture of the Empress of China remonstrating with her husband, the Emperor, for not believing in Votes for Women. She calls for the Court Phrenologist to examine his bumps! The village school teacher Mr Charles Gripper wrote the script, took the part of the Lord Chamberlain and had a hand in building the scenery. Only a photocopy of the programme survives, see below.

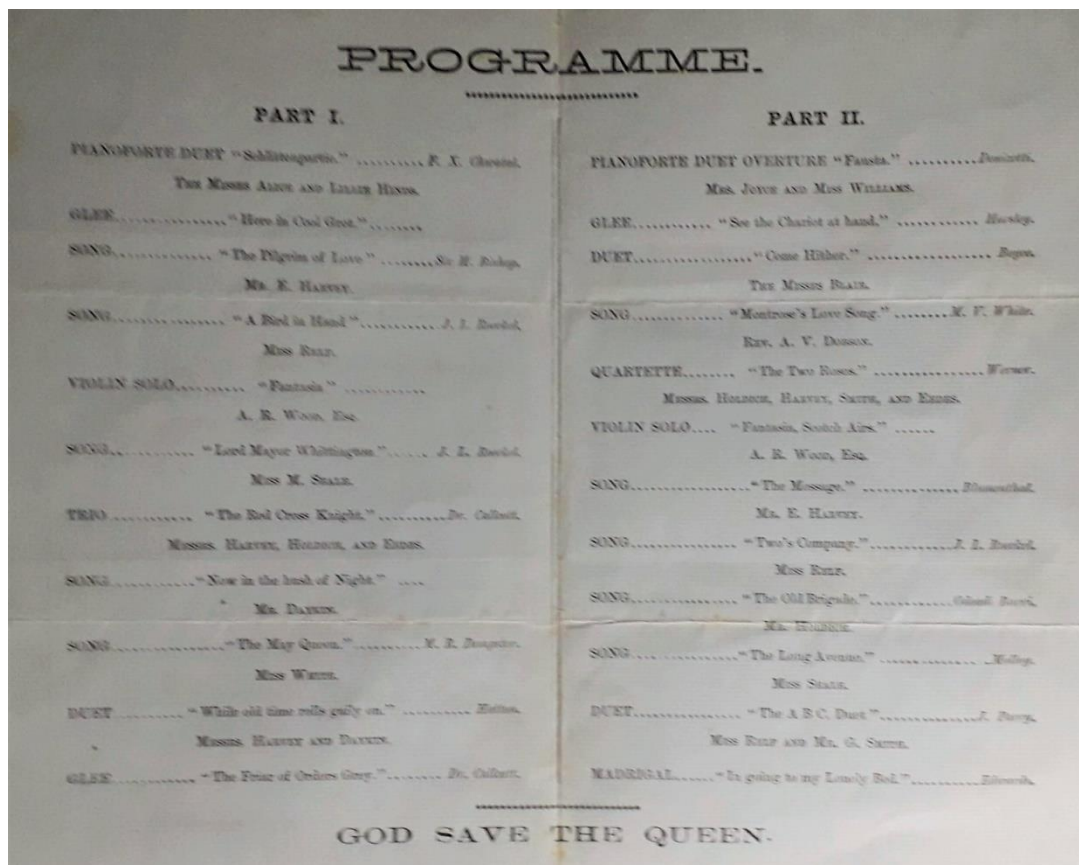


Surprisingly, a run of even older programmes are kept in our Archives. They are all for concerts from April 1883 to 1900 and in all cases they were held to raise money for a variety of good causes. They were all held in the National School old building rather than the Village Hall as that wasn't built until 1903. The price of tickets were from 2/- reserved and numbered and 6d unreserved. The majority of the concerts were held on Wednesdays with two on Tuesdays. Doors opened half an hour before the start, either 7pm or 7.30pm.

The concerts all had a similar format beginning with an instrumental item followed by solo songs or duets. These might be classical, comic or popular songs of the day. They often featured a 'Glee', which according to my dictionary, was 'a type of song originating in 18th century England 'by three or more unaccompanied voices' with titles such as 'The Friar of Orders Grey' or 'Here in Cool Grot'. For those who remember, they sound very much like 'The Good Old Days' television programme. There

were also recitations such as the thriller 'Bernardo and his Revenge' or the cheery 'A Christmas Day in a Workhouse'.

In January 1883 the concert was in aid of the Choral Society and one in April that year was for the Cricket Club. In May 1888 the show took on a slightly different form with musical numbers in the first half followed by a farce called 'Make Your Wills' in the second. This time the event was held to raise funds for the 'Goudhurst Clothing Club'. The concert held in July 1892 was in aid of the fund for 'Warming the Parish Church'. In January 1893 the money raised went towards 'Providing Coals for the Poor' and in February 1895, the funds were for the 'Relief of the Unemployed in the Parish'. This was of course before the government introduction of unemployment benefit although there were national or local insurance schemes in existence to help workers during periods of unemployment. Coal would have been a major source of cooking and heating when people cooked on ranges. In February 1900, in the middle of the Boer War, a 'Patriotic Concert' was in aid of the 'Soldiers' and Sailors' Association'.



It is enlightening to see that fund-raising for clubs, organisations and the under privileged has been a feature of parish life for many years and that it continues today. It is even more gratifying that despite official government help, our village still feels it is necessary to consider the less well-off and set up facilities to alleviate this, especially in these difficult times.

Local History Society
Email: help@goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org
Website: www.goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org