

Village Echoes

The large marble memorials to the Culpeper and Campion families are the most well known of all of those in St Mary's church, Goudhurst, but the church also contains many small commemorative plaques to past inhabitants of Goudhurst. One such memorial is to General Alfred Fitzhugh who retired to the village after a successful military career.

Alfred FitzHugh and his wife Cecilia moved to Goudhurst sometime between 1888, when he retired from the army, and 1898 when the voters' list records that he lived at Grove Place (now the Grove) in North Road. Mrs Fitzhugh died in March 1911, and in June of the same year an advertisement appeared in the local newspaper stating that the contents of the house were for sale, the house itself having already been sold.

Although General Fitzhugh lived in Goudhurst for only a short length of time, the village still benefits today from his involvement in village life. Not only was he one of the trustees appointed to organise and oversee the building of the Parish Hall in 1903, he also generously sold the land on which it was built to the parish for only £25. The only condition attached to the sale was that the pond and the green beside it were to be fenced in. At times he also served as a churchwarden, was Vice-President of the Cricket Club in 1907, chaired the meeting called to form the Scout group in 1910, and was also involved with the Goudhurst Rifle Club. Not surprisingly, one of his hobbies was shooting; another was golf.

The General, who was the youngest child of the Reverend William Anthony Fitzhugh, the Vicar of Streat, near Burgess Hill in Sussex, had had a distinguished army career. After leaving Rugby School he spent a year at the Addiscombe Military Academy in Croydon where he passed out in 1855. He first joined the 21st Native Infantry at Peshawar, and then the 2nd Sikh Infantry a year later. He was to serve on the Punjab Frontier for his entire career and, by the time of the Second Afghan War (1878-1880), he was the commanding officer of the 5th Gurkha Rifles, a position he held from 1878 until his retirement.

He was several times mentioned in despatches, and in February 1879 the Illustrated London News reported that he was one of two British officers who had led the assault on barricades set up by the Afghans in the pine forest at Spingawi Kotal, south-east of Kabul. Wounded in another battle in December 1879, by late 1880 he was on leave in England when the Morning Post of 24th November devoted several column inches to the reception he was accorded when he visited his home village of Streat. According to the newspaper report, he was greeted by the Lewes Rifle Volunteers who provided a guard of honour, a band playing "See the Conquering Hero Comes", and the Earl of Lewes presented him with an illuminated address. There were also cheering crowds, fireworks, bonfires and other celebrations in his honour.

On leaving Goudhurst in 1911, General Fitzhugh moved to Frant Road in Tunbridge Wells, where he died on 22nd February 1929. He and his wife are buried in the churchyard at Streat, and he is commemorated on wall plaques inside three separate parish churches: the one at Streat, our own St Mary's, Goudhurst, and also St Mark's Church, in Tunbridge Wells.



Streat



Goudhurst



Tunbridge Wells