

Village Echoes

The exact date of the first church in Goudhurst is not known but it is recorded that there was a church here early in the 12th century when it came under the auspices of Leeds Priory. Eventually, however, a priory was established at Combwell whose monks then acted as chaplains to St Mary's Church in Goudhurst. Records are vague from this time but a past resident of the village, Walter Parry Haskett Smith, listed the names of the vicars from 1210 in the Goudhurst Coronation Book of 1937. First in the list was Benjamin, then William followed by Benjamin de Guherst in 1254. In 1300 Peter the Vicar (the first incumbent to sign himself 'Vicar') made a name for himself by lodging a complaint against the Prior and convent for withholding money due to him from tithes levied in the parish. They also charged him 18d per year for holy oil which he thought was excessive. The case went in his favour, with the result that rights were restored to him and future vicars. It wasn't until 1391, when Thomas Syer was Chaplain, that funding was forthcoming for a vicarage in the village. Until this time Vicars shared Goudhurst duties with their own parish in some cases as far away as Ashford or even Theydon in Essex. This was because the tithes, or earnings, from the parish were insufficient to support a clergyman in his home parish.

After the dissolution of the monasteries during the reign of Henry VIII, St Mary's Church was transferred to the Dean and Chapter of Rochester but responsibility for appointing a Vicar devolved to the Rector who in the case of Goudhurst was a lay person and usually a member of a local landowning family. The Rector kept the income from the tithes out of which he then paid the Vicar a salary. This income was known as the Living and the amount concerned varied wildly from parish to parish depending on its resources. Henry VIII's reign was a period of great turmoil for churches and their priests and in Goudhurst it took a long time to settle down, with a total of eight different incumbents between 1550 and the arrival of William Walter in 1562. He stayed in post until 1589 when the registers of St Mary's record his burial on 21st August that year.

Two more clergymen followed in quick succession before Richard Milbourne arrived in 1612. A Londoner by birth, he had been educated at Winchester College and Queens' College, Cambridge and came to Goudhurst via Sevenoaks and Cheam in Surrey. He was appointed Dean of Rochester in 1611 and chaplain to Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales, the eldest son of James 1 of England. However his tenure was also short-lived as he resigned from Goudhurst in 1613 and went on to become Bishop of St David's in 1615 and Bishop of Carlisle in 1621.

In 1625 Walter Balcanqual, (alternative spelling Balcanquhall) the son of a Presbyterian minister in Edinburgh, also became Dean of Rochester - the same year he was appointed vicar of St Mary's. After attending university in Edinburgh he went to Pembroke College, Cambridge and by the time he left there in 1616 he had changed his religious allegiance. He spent a short time as chaplain to James I of England before taking up various posts in other parts of the country. He left Goudhurst after only a year. In 1639, he was made Dean of Durham in recognition of his services to the monarchy, and in the same year he published *His Majestie's Large Declaration concerning the Late Tumults in Scotland*. On 29 July 1641 for his support of the King against the covenanters in Scotland he was one of those denounced by the Scottish parliament as an 'incendiary'. With the advent of the English Civil War his fortune waned and, forced to flee by the Parliamentarians, he died in Chirk Castle, Denbighshire in 1645.

The English Civil War also caused problems for Daniel Horsmonden, a member of a wealthy family whose property ownership in Goudhurst included Lamberts, in Church Road. Daniel was vicar of St Mary's from 1625 until 1640 as well as being the Rector of Ulcombe from 1627. In 1643 he was one of several clergy in Kent whose Royalist sympathies led to them being forced from their livings and their estates sequestered by the Parliamentarians. He had also been falsely accused of "being a scandalous and malignant priest, a common haunter of ale-houses and taverns and very often exceedingly drunk". As a consequence of these events he was forced to sell a substantial amount of property in order to support himself and his family. His eldest son, Warham, left England during the Civil War for Virginia, America where he held office as a justice in Charles City County for over twenty years before eventually returning to his homeland with the restoration of Charles II.

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