

Village Echoes

One thing that most residents of Goudhurst in the 18th and 19th centuries dreaded was to be sent to the workhouse situated at the top of Clayhill.

The rules they had to live under were tough. Thirty-two rules were laid down by the churchwardens and overseers on the 3rd August 1744, including one which said the poor people rise by seven of the clock in the morning from Michaelmas to Ladyday and by six from Ladyday to Michaelmas (except when hindered by sickness).

Those who did not attend the morning service lost their breakfast for which, under rule 22, they were to receive either broth, water gruel, bread and cheese or any cold victuals not proper for dinner as the master or dame see fit. Breakfast was to be had at eight o'clock in the winter and seven in the summer. They had to work from breakfast until dinner at noon and from one of the clock until five winter time and six in the summer. For their work they were paid, for their own use, one penny per month for every shilling they had earned. The inmates were not allowed to leave the limits of the workhouse without permission of the master. They had to be in bed by eight o'clock in the winter and nine in the summer, and the master or dame should see they "are abed and remove the candles".

Some of the poor did not go to the workhouse but received help from the parish poor relief known as out-relief, the money being raised from the better-off villagers as a form of local tax. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 required parishes to join together and build joint workhouses known as unions with the aim of stopping out-relief. Goudhurst came under the union at Cranbrook situated at Hartley. Goudhurst had made it a rule that no relief should be given outside of the workhouse back in 1744, with the exception of thirteen named parishioners, seven of them widows.

Another way parishes solved the problem of paying out on their poor was to assist some of them to emigrate. Thanks to a book researched and written by Helen Allinson, who gave the history society a talk in December 2008 (on a different subject) it is known William Roberts, his wife and six children, Charles Crittenden, George Crittenden and Thomas Golding along with their families went to South Africa with assistance from Goudhurst parish in 1849.

Between 1837 and 1845 at least 39 Goudhurst residents were helped to a new life in Canada, 67 to Australia and New Zealand and in the year July 1841-July 1842 a further 12 went to either Canada, Australia or New Zealand. In November 1893 a local newspaper reported the death, at Hastings, of Mrs Harrison Blair, late of Finchcocks. Whilst at Finchcocks the lady gave a lot of help to the poor including helping many to emigrate. No poor person was ever turned away from Finchcocks during the twenty years she lived there. Many farm workers managed to stay off parish relief even when they had large families to bring up. Goudhurst Agricultural Society gave annual prizes for those who raised large families

without relief. The great-grandfather of the chairman of the local history society received five prizes between 1872 and 1881; he and his wife brought up eleven children.

Local History Society