

Village Echoes

Over the years, place-names in Goudhurst which were once familiar to the local inhabitants change, have become corrupted or disappeared altogether and their exact whereabouts forgotten. One thing the Local History Society tries to do is to identify and record where and what these forgotten names were. One name that has disappeared from Goudhurst within the last few years is Scope Mead; this is the plot of land on the left of Maypole Lane where the road dives down steeply from Maypole Triangle. A bungalow on the plot was demolished around 2008/9 to make way for "Mayfield House".

The name Scope Mead can be traced back to 1543 when it was owned by the Dean and Chapter of Rochester and was leased, along with other lands in Goudhurst, to one Robert Gawen, yeoman. This could well be the Robert Gawen whom the registers show as having been buried on 25th August 1584 with the comment "as he said, and liklie to be trewe, of the age of a hundrith and sixe years owt of the parsonage, farmer there a longe tyme". Whatever his true age he had obviously "retired" by 1560 when another lease allocated 7½ acres of land called Scopemedede to Richard Besbich of Triggs, Goudhurst for 80 years at a rent of 10 shillings a year. He, in turn, by his will proved in 1591, left the lease to his son Richard. The land also gets a brief mention in the Goudhurst manor roll of 1689 when it is described as Scope Land.

While the origin of the word Scope is not known, the word "mead" indicates that the principal use of the piece of land in question was a meadow, and the written document which accompanies the tithe map of January 1842 confirms its use as pasture. During this time it remained the property of the Dean and Chapter of Rochester, and was administered by the then Vicar of Goudhurst, the Rev. William Bagshaw Harrison, in conjunction with Thomas Milles. The same document shows Milles owning several other properties in the parish, including Clay Hill Farm where he lived.

Harrison died in 1849 and, some years later, his son Henry, the vicar of Kilndown, sold the lease to Goudhurst's solicitor Richard White for £420. White lived at Maypole and already owned several freehold and leasehold properties in the parish and elsewhere. He died, aged 90, in 1864, and a family dispute over his will dragged on until 1869. In that year the Kent & Sussex Courier of 30th August reported that the court had ordered all his freehold and leasehold property including the "4 enclosures of meadow land adjoining Maypole lane, known as Scope Meads" should be sold.

During the 20th century, documentary reference to Scope Mead is sparse. Newspaper reports of Goudhurst soft fruit sales in 1912 and during the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s indicate that Alfred Tebbs was growing apples, damsons, plums and cherries there; later on, P. Gilbert and then E. Hatch grew a variety of cherry known as Early Rivers on 4½ acres of land called Scope Mead.

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