

VILLAGE ECHOES

We seem to be told with increasing frequency that it has been the hottest/coldest/wettest/driest day or month or year "since records began", but historical records show a good deal more than bare statistics, at every level from the local to the global.

Something that affected Goudhurst, along with most of southern England and parts of mainland Europe, was the continuous eruption of Mount Laki, a volcano in Iceland, between 8th June 1783 and 8th February 1784. With such a prolonged eruption it was inevitable that the wind would eventually blow clouds of dust and poisonous gas over a huge area. The resulting atmospheric haze caused numerous deaths of livestock and outside workers, and a subsequent heat wave caused thunderstorms accompanied by hailstones.

Nearly a hundred years later in June 1880, a freak combination of thunder, lightning, rain and hailstones of an unusual size caused widespread damage. Most of the houses on the south side of Goudhurst High Street were severely affected, with their windows broken as if they had been riddled with shot, and residents were forced to use old canvas, sacks or boards as temporary cover until proper repairs could be done. Recounting his experience of the storm in the Goudhurst Jubilee book (1935), Amos Mercer recalled that although his family's pea crop was ruined by the storm, they left the remains of the plants in the ground and to everyone's surprise not only did the plants recover but they produced a bumper crop of peas. A few years later, between 9 and 10 in the evening of 14th July 1894, some unfortunate residents were once again to bear the brunt of a severe thunderstorm. This time a lightning strike on a chimney caused a chain reaction which did severe damage to several of the cottages known as Morbreddis in Chequers Road. Fortunately no-one was killed although the elderly Mr Brakefield who had been sitting close to where the lightning passed through his cottage was seriously injured.

In 1929, Kilndown residents experienced some notable effects of the weather, their problem being not too much rain but the lack of it. At the time, Kilndown had no mains water supply, and by September 26th of that year there had been no rain for 40 days. This serious drought meant that water had to be brought in from Hawkhurst and sold to the residents at a penny a bucket. There were then rumours that Kilndown would soon get mains water and so they did, eventually, in 1931. It's an ill wind that blows no good.....

In more recent times there will be many in the parish who remember the hurricane of October 1987 when much of the south east of England suffered severe damage which changed the landscape for ever. At least one Goudhurst resident reported that his French windows blew out and were never seen again. Most recently, in August 2008, during an overnight thunderstorm lightning struck one of the tallest trees at the highest point in Goudhurst, Church Road, with predictable consequences, as shown in the photograph. This article may turn out to be the only historical record of that particular weather event.....

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