

# VILLAGE ECHOES

## Rough Music

In October 1861 a report about a criminal prosecution in Goudhurst appeared in the Kentish Advertiser. Richard Blunt, John Gower and Walter Relf, all of the Village, were charged with unlawfully and riotously creating a disturbance in the public streets of Goudhurst. On first glance this would seem to be drunken revelries, probably not uncommon, after the pubs closed. In fact, the person bringing the prosecution was James Hayward, landlord of the Vine Inn.

The three in the dock were just the leaders of a 'large number of pals' who had taken it upon themselves to deal out some rough justice. This group of musicians wielding and playing various instruments loudly and not necessarily in tune, were conducting what was described as the 'tin pot and old kettle' ceremonial with the greatest enthusiasm. Several witnesses were called to confirm that the event did take place.



In the days before any village had a policeman, local communities were very prepared to 'take the law into their own hands,' whenever the need arose. A man beating his wife, or parents badly treating their children, or a couple may have strayed away from the moral code of their village, in which case they might receive some 'rough music.' A time would be chosen, usually at night, when a group of local people (generally lads and men) would assemble, sometimes with blackened faces or some other disguise and proceed in procession to the victim's house. As they went, they would blow on crude musical instruments and bang together pots and pans, tin trays and anything else that would make a loud discordant noise.

The point of this nocturnal row was to 'encourage' the culprit to change his or her ways. Usually, one visit was more than enough to have the desired effect, but not always. If the wrong-doer carried on with their bad behaviour, the rough-musickers would return, but this time they would have an effigy of the person, which they would proceed to burn outside their house. If the mob were really angry, they would throw stones at the windows of the house and chant out dire threats.

Very, very occasionally, a third visit would be needed and this was always the last. This time the mob would seize the miscreant, throw him onto a cart, and wheel him to the parish boundary, often dumping him in a ditch or in bushes by the road. Such a person would never be allowed back in the village, as their very life could be in danger if they did return.



Therefore, these Goudhurst men felt justified in their punishment to the supposed offender James Hayward. On the surface he was a respectable farmer and innkeeper, but who was deemed to have committed some improper conduct. He pleaded his innocence that such a charge 'was entirely devoid of foundation and did not contain a particle of truth'.

Mr Upperton for the defence established that none of the residents of Goudhurst had complained about the noise or asked that the 'concert' be closed. The Bench decided that there wasn't enough evidence to support the charge and the prisoners were discharged, although there was a warning that further action of this disreputable and disgraceful kind, would be dealt with more harshly.

We aren't told what the supposed crime was in this instance and shall never know the truth. However, in small villages where it is often said everybody knows everybody else's business, plus the fact that nobody objected to the actions, suggests that it was well deserved.

Goudhurst & Kildown Local History Society

Thanks to Tony Singleton of Cranbrook History Society for pointing this case out and to <https://southdownsgenerations.org.uk/rough-music/> for background information and illustrations