

VILLAGE ECHOES

HOPS IN KILNDOWN by Lynda Shepherd

One hundred years and more ago during September and October, the aroma of drying hops would have pervaded all parts of the village and beyond. There were oast houses on many farms, Trillinghurst, Gatehouse, Riseden, Twyssenden, Chingley, Marlingate, Shearnfold, Finchcocks, Three Chimneys, Priors Heath and Nursery Farm at Kilndown Corner. All of these oasts, excepting Twyssenden, have been converted into housing. There is also evidence of oasts once being at Hillside Farm and at The Hollies (Kilndown Poultry Farm).

Where hops are found growing in a hedgerow, is generally a sign that the field behind the hedge was once a hop garden. Good proof of this is the hedge opposite the entrance to Beresford Close. George Shepherd, (1899-1966) a small holder, from Highdown, (now Quince Cottage) rented this land, using it as one of his hop gardens. He also rented several other fields in and around Kilndown and Priors Heath for various crops. George grew his hops up chestnut poles and as some of the land he rented was chestnut woodland, he had a ready supply! Where George dried his hops is not known, the nearest oast was Shearnfold, across the road from Highdown. Stuart Drawbridge farmed there and was also a Carrier

Picking George's hops was quite a family affair! In the photo below the lady in the cloche hat is Dorothy Shepherd (Underhill) George's wife. Behind her is Ethel, one of her sisters, the small boy in the cap is Norman Shepherd, the toddler in the background is Ethel's son Richard Carr. Various other family members arrived at Highdown during September for 'a holiday'! Imagine trailing down from Liverpool with several children as Ella, another of Dorothy's sisters did! No doubt George's Grandfather, George Barrow (1857 -1938) who lived at The Hollies had a few words of advice, as he grew hops in his younger years. The copper stencils he used on his pockets still survive



Members of the Shepherd family, including Dorothy, George's wife



Norman with Trophy for best dried Kent hops in 1961



Loading Hop Pockets from Whitehead & Coleman in Goudhurst 1937

Most often the dried hops in pockets began their journey to a brewery via the Hop Marketing Board, from Pattenden Sidings, Goudhurst. The Board had moved from Southwark, London SE1 in 1932 to its new home in Paddock wood.