

VILLAGE ECHOES

A CHRISTMAS ALBUM

This is an album that was donated to the Goudhurst & Kildown Society archives in 2004. It is full of Christmas and birthday cards, postcards and Victorian 'scraps' that once belonged to a Mr & Mrs Chapling in the late 1890s. Scrapbooking was a popular pastime in Victorian times for both children and adults. Creating a scrapbook was not only a craft project, it was also a way of preserving memories. The album was the inspiration for the Christmas Village Echoes for an article about early Christmas cards. However, it led to a bit of historical detective work



Most of you will be familiar with the origin of the first commercially produced Christmas card that was designed by Cranbrook artist John Callcott Horsley in 1843. It was commissioned by Sir Henry Cole – a prominent civil servant, the first Director of the V&A and the man who introduced the Penny Post system. It pictures a family gathered around a table enjoying a celebratory drink, including rather young-looking children. The side panels show poorer people who were unlikely to afford to indulge in any celebration.

However, an exhibition held in 2020 revealed that the very first recorded Christmas card was sent much earlier. In 1611 a German physician named Michael Maier sent one to King James I of England and his son the Prince of Wales. The elaborate greeting was:

A greeting on the birthday of the Sacred King, to the most worshipful and energetic lord and most eminent James, King of Great Britain and Ireland, and Defender of the true faith, with a gesture of joyful celebration of the Birthday of the Lord, in most joy and fortune, we enter into the new auspicious year 1612.

Perhaps he was hoping for a job in the royal household?

Horsley's card eventually established the custom of sending Christmas cards with messages of charity and celebration, not of religion. In fact, early British card designs rarely showed winter or religious themes - see below



On first sight we know very little about the Chaplings except that their initials were G & E although most of the cards were addressed formally to Mr & Mrs. However, one birthday card is addressed to Aunt Esther and so a search through the census records finds Esther Chapling, aged 49 born Kenardington and living in Lewisham in 1901 with her husband George, a 53 year old coachman born in Woodchurch. In 1881 George was living in a large house in Woodchurch called The Firs where he was a groom. Another member of the household was Esther Wood, the housemaid. It seems romance blossomed there. They were still living in Lewisham in 1911. George died in 1921 and Esther died in 1940.



It seems unlikely that the couple ever lived in Goudhurst. It isn't even known if they compiled the book themselves or a relative carefully stuck all the items in. There is no record of who donated it to the Society but presumably one of their descendants lived here. However, the memories of these two Victorians, especially Christmas ones, are preserved for ever.

HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL FROM GOUDHURST & KILNDOWN LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Please join us for the Christmas talk on 5th December for

'The Goose is Getting Fat!