

VILLAGE ECHOES

The Great Floods of 1960 (and others)

We all know that we have been experiencing the wettest weather in the UK for many years, a trend that is predicted to continue. Goudhurst and Kildown haven't suffered as badly as other parts of the country but there was a time when it was closer to home. An article in the Goudhurst & Kildown Millennium book tells of the Great Floods of 1960, which wasn't an isolated incident.



A map of 1596 by Symondson clearly shows the route of the River Teise and its tributaries travelling from the north. It branches into two at Lamberhurst and crosses into the Bewl Valley in Sussex. The numerous sources of water at this time supported the iron industry, which was thriving at this time. * see below

Apparently, flooding was fairly common in the Bewl Valley but in 1960 it was a deluge. However, the Goudhurst Jubilee Book of 1935 recalls the Great Flood of 1909 and elsewhere in the book is an illustration of an inundated Hope Mill in 1925.

In truth Hope Watermill has always been vulnerable to flooding, understandably because of location at the bottom of the hill and fed by the River Teise and the Bedgebury Stream from the lake in Bedgebury Park. In 1909 the then owner of the mill, Mr Clementson, gave a particularly graphic description of this event –

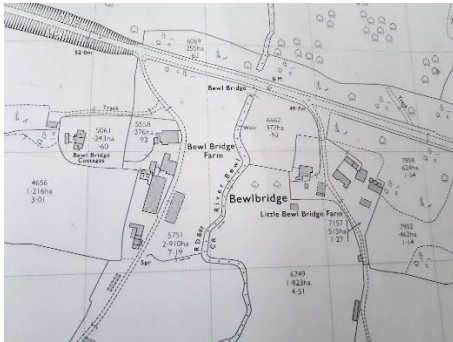
“Four inches of rain fell in 24 hours and at 8 o'clock in the evening (when they were still working) it was still pouring with rain. So we stopped the mill, lifted the flood gates (installed in 1886) right up and let the water through, so that by 10 o'clock the river was empty. Then we went to bed. At about a quarter to one a rumbling noise woke me up. When I looked out of the bedroom window I saw our water butt and dog kennel floating down the yard. I came downstairs and found the water was just coming indoors.”



FLOOD AT HOPE MILL, GOUDHURST, 1925.

Outside the water was up to his waist as he set about rescuing cattle and pigs and moving them to dry land. His wife and three children were eventually rescued by backing a cart up to the house. In all he was in the water seven hours. The mill has regularly flooded since then, notably in 1960.

The River Bewl was fed by several rivers including the Teise and Hook, with tributaries spreading out across approximately fifty square acres and converging in the Bewl Valley resulting in frequent flooding. This was easily identified in 1946 as a suitable location for a much needed reservoir to serve the Medway towns and other parts of North-West Kent. Work began in 1973 with a dam that bridged the valley between Chingley Wood, Goudhurst and Old Forge Farm, Lamberhurst. Seven hundred and seventy acres of largely empty land was cleared and the River Bewl diverted in 1974 when filling started. Farms that were 'in the way' had to relocate. Many were successfully moved to Cousley Wood and one, Tindalls Cottage, to the Weald and Downland Museum. **



Houses that were displaced by Bewl Reservoir



Tindalls Cottage

Bewl water holds 31,300 million litres of water and, unsurprisingly, is the largest body of inland water in South East England and largely protects us from devastating consequences seen elsewhere.

**see also Rivers & Mills of Goudhurst & Kilndown on our website -*

Village Echoes, September 2016

**<https://www.wealddown.co.uk/buildings/tindalls-cottage-from-ticehurst/#facts>

goudhurstlocalhistory.org