

## Village Echoes

Last November, the Parish Hall hosted an event enabling more than two dozen clubs and societies based in Goudhurst and Kilndown to show off their wares. However, looking back through the archives of the Local History Society, it is clear that only a fraction of the organised activities now remain from those that were enjoyed by villagers in the past.

Over a hundred years ago, one such “forgotten” organisation, the Goudhurst and District Rifle Club was set up in April 1902 at a meeting held at The Vine Hotel. A committee was elected, the name decided upon and the appointed Secretary was charged with ordering two rifles, 2,000 targets and 10,000 rounds of ammunition. These purchases were made possible by a donation of £20 by Major General Fitzhugh who was made President. The initial venue for the rifle range was the Schoolroom, but after it became unavailable, Mrs Beeching’s Oast House – now the Goudhurst Social Club - was hired at £2 per annum. A set of rules was agreed upon and printed versions distributed to all members. Practices took place twice a week on Wednesday and Friday evenings at 6pm.

This was by no means solely a local hobby, as frequent matches were held against teams from Lamberhurst, Cranbrook, Benenden, Brenchley and Bayham Abbey. Teams also travelled as far away as Margate, Cuckfield and Bognor. The accounts show regular expenditure for hiring a carriage and trap for transportation to matches. This would presumably not be suitable for the more distant matches such as a national meeting at Crystal Palace where the club competed for trophies



presented by the Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail and the Nestles Company.

Between external contests, members competed against each other. Silver spoons (pictured) were given as prizes, alongside monetary rewards ranging from 2/6d to 10/-.

Over time more equipment, such as short and long Winchester Rifles, cleaning oil and brushes, was acquired as membership increased to a high of thirty at one time. The rifle range itself also needed regular maintenance necessitating the appointment of a caretaker. Inevitably fund-raising was needed to ensure the continuity of the Club and, apart from annual subscriptions, of which a list was published, there was income from social events and on one occasion the East Kent Regiment, ‘The Buffs’, hired the range.

Detailed individual scores were kept throughout the twelve years of the Club’s existence. There is no record of a winding-up meeting or of the disposal of the equipment, but the last Committee meeting was held in March 1914. It can only be assumed that the onset of the First World War, with a more serious side to rifle shooting, led to its demise.

Local History Society