

## VILLAGE ECHOES

### Keeping the Parish Educated (& Sober!)

In 1855 Alexander Beresford Hope, supported by the Rev H Harrison, proposed the creation of a library and Reading Room at Kilndown. Occasional lectures would be



gran and the Maidstone Journal reported that "everything will be done to render the institution attractive, and to draw away the working population from the low and demoralising enjoyments of the beer shop". Books could be borrowed and classes were offered to people wishing to improve their education. The Reading Room, supplied with newspapers and magazines and a

library of 300 books, was in the boys' schoolroom and opened formally on 1 November 1855. Beresford Hope delivered the inaugural lecture, on the subject of astronomy and other sciences, to an audience of about 350 people. He went on to deliver many other lectures.

The institution attracted prominent speakers and guests, undoubtedly because of the Beresford Hope connection. In January 1856, James Gascoigne-Cecil, Viscount Cranborne, delivered a lecture on 'The Crusades'. He was the older brother of both Lord Robert Cecil MP, the future Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, and Lady Mildred Beresford Hope, the wife of Alexander.

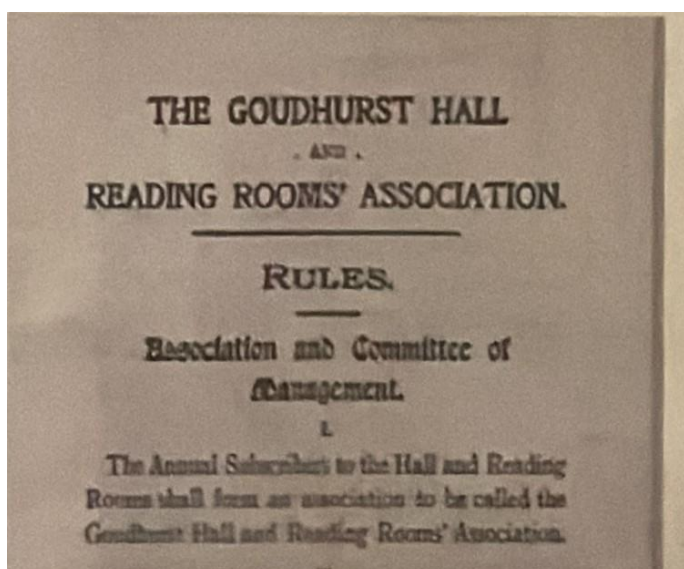
In November 1856, on the institution's first anniversary, Rev Harrison, as Treasurer, reported that it had been a successful first year but there was a deficit in the accounts because of the set-up expenses. There were 295 members, each paying a yearly fee of one shilling. He was satisfied that the following year's receipts would be sufficient to clear the deficit. The number of books had increased to 700, with contributions from friends and patrons of the institution.

In 1865 the Institute resolved to commence a series of fortnightly entertainments, including readings from 'amusing' books, singing of glees, songs etc, which non-members could attend for one penny. At the second of these entertainments, Rev Harrison read a selection of poems by Robert Southey and there was a magic lantern show.



In 1880 Rev Harrison presented the Quarry Centre building to Kilndown. It became known as The Institute and was used as a recreational reading room. In 1991, when the vestry building in Kilndown churchyard was demolished, a cupboard was opened that was full of books. A few books had survived relatively intact and each had the rules of the library attached to the inside of the cover. There were also copies of the 1889 book catalogue.

Details of a reading room in Goudhurst are sketchy but the first appears to have also opened in 1855. In 1856 lectures were given on matters such as the 'Arctic Regions' and 'Ninevah'. Games of chess and drafts had been introduced and had proved popular. By 1858 the institution was known as Goudhurst News & Reading Rooms and continued to hold lectures such as, in February, on the 'Qualities of the Vegetable World'. Unfortunately, the whereabouts of the reading room are unknown but it was probably in Church House, High Street where, in 1861, Ann Couchman lived and was the Reading Room Attendant.



By 1866 there are reports of 'Penny Readings' at the Reading Room. These were a form of public entertainment consisting of readings, singing and recitations.

In 1879 a meeting, presided over by Rev J S Clarke, resolved to establish a Working Men's Reading Room & Institute in Goudhurst. A Committee was formed and a site for meetings selected. But there is no indication

where the site was. However, in 1891, at the National School, a show was put on in aid of the Institute.

In 1899 a series of fortnightly Penny Readings was held at the Star & Crown Inn and, in Spring 1903, at the Vine Hotel. Later that year the Parish Hall was opened and the Reading Room moved to there. The last reference to a Penny Reading is reported in 1908 and it was said that there was no doubt that the hall was the most suitable and most commodious room in the Parish for those and similar public entertainments.

Goudhurst & Kilndown Local History Society  
Email: [help@goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org](mailto:help@goudhurstlocalhistorysociety.org)