

VILLAGE ECHOES

We take it for granted nowadays that nearly every home, and certainly every business, has a telephone, but the Local History Society's archives show that expansion of the Goudhurst telephone network was in fact extremely slow for very many years.

In November 1902 the National Telephone Company purchased the municipal telephone service in Tunbridge Wells, which at that time had more lines than anywhere else in the country, and within a month, on 23rd December 1902, it opened the Goudhurst telephone exchange in the Post Office, which was then in North Road and later (1912) in the High Street. Although our records do not show how many lines were allocated initially, there were still only 35 lines in operation by 1922.

The Goudhurst Jubilee Book, produced by Alfred Tiffin in 1935, lists the names and addresses of the 98 individuals and businesses in Goudhurst and Kilndown who subscribed to the telephone system. The list would have been drawn from the official telephone directory published by the General Post Office, which had superseded the National Telephone Company. In publishing this list, Tiffin had intended to include the actual telephone *numbers*, but he had been refused permission to do so by the GPO. However, among the ephemera held by the Local History Society is a typescript sheet headed "Goudhurst Telephone Exchange" which lists in telephone number order all 128 subscribers on 31st August 1939. This list compiled in 1939 shows that telephone number Goudhurst 1 belonged to Mrs B Noakes of Trottenden, and Humphries & Son, in North Road, had Goudhurst 2. W C Burgess and Son of Burgess Stores, had Goudhurst 6, whilst the Star and Eagle had Goudhurst 38.

The GPO eventually replaced the old manual exchange with the Goudhurst Unit Automatic Exchange, which by 1949 still only had 162 lines and was housed in the building specially built for it next to the Parish Hall, and which is now generally referred to as the BT building. Further refinements to the system such as the Speaking Clock and the ability to dial 999 were added in 1962. Technological progress eventually spelled the demise of local exchanges, so the Goudhurst Exchange duly closed and the building which housed it was eventually sold by British Telecom to the Trustees of the Parish Hall in 1996.

Local History Society