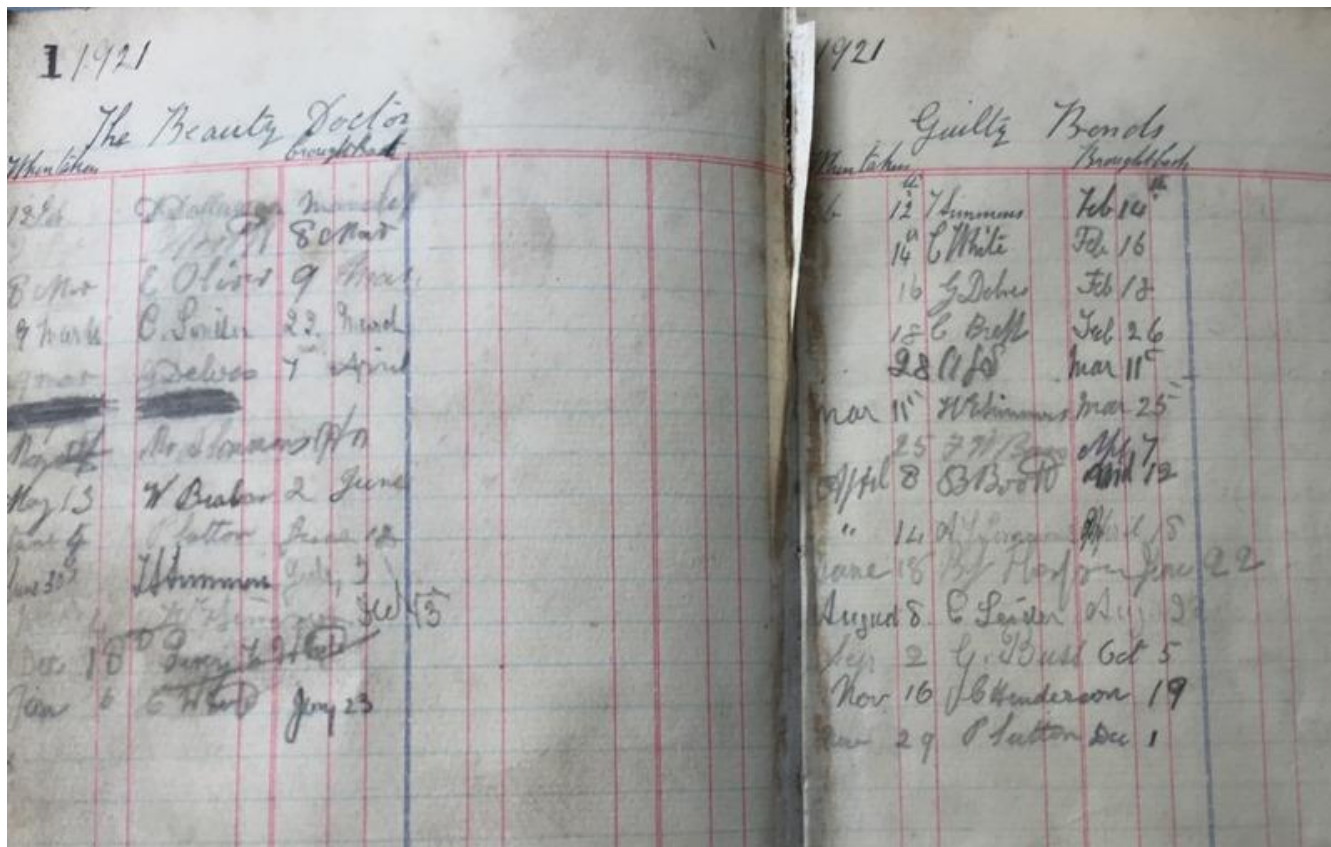


Dallington Reading Room 100 years ago



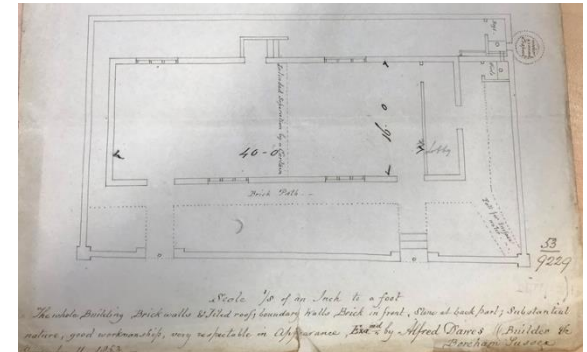
Book of Reading Room Loans (1921-) first page

This book was found in very poor condition in a cupboard in the Snooker Room along with a few of the original loan books all badly damaged by mould

Background:

The building now known as The Old School

- In **1849** Thomas Dray erected a small wooden building on the current site to be used as a school
- By **1853** it was considered unsuitable, so the vicar and churchwardens bought the freehold site from Mr Dray for £100 and a new brick building was erected at total cost of £244.18s 10d. A plan of the new building (right) dated Nov 1853 describes it as *“brick walls, tiled roof...substantial nature, good workmanship, very respectable in appearance”*
- By **1872** this was in turn found to be inadequate by HM Inspectors. Building work began in Sept 1872 on an extension adding a classroom cloakroom and offices built from bricks donated by Lord Ashburnham and opened on 1 January 1873 ...“
- Below right: photo showing the 1873 extension



Origins of the Reading Room

1882 Rev Ralph R Tatham started a reading room for men. Meetings were held in a room adjoining Rose Cottage in The Street.

1915 After the new National School was built in 1913, the old school was repaired and the Dallington Reading Room & Mutual Improvement and Recreation Society moved in - using one room as a billiard room, and one as a reading & club room.

1918 Mary Tatham died & left £100 to the Society and in **1920** 4 permanent trustees (Lord Wrenbury, George Cramp, Herbert Simmons & Charles White) used this money to buy the freehold of the property.

Sources: Bryant-Mole, K (2000) *Six Miles from Everywhere* + Newspaper cuttings held at The Keep

Rise of 19thc Reading Rooms

In towns, reading rooms were often part of working men's clubs:

"Prior to the 1870s and the expansion of popular education, the reading rooms in the clubs often provided the only significant educative service available for working men who sought it."

In rural areas, they were often organised by the local vicar or squire:

"There is some truth in the idea that ...reading rooms, including public libraries, were intended by middle-class reformers to control working-class reading [and] as a means to keep working men out of public houses"

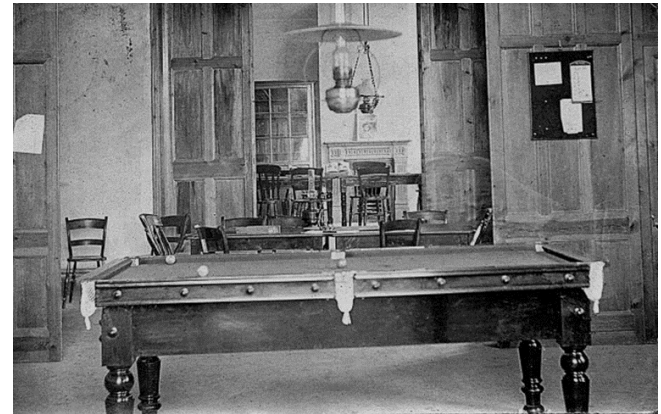


Photo of an East Anglian rural reading room and clubroom in 1908

Sources:

Hobbs, A. "Local newspapers in Victorian era: Early 'rolling news' and reading as pub activity" *Press Gazette*

King, C. "The Rise and Decline of Village Reading Rooms". *Rural History*, 20(2)

B. Rosen "Working Men's Clubs and Reading"

Dallington Reading Room after 1920

‘In the winter evenings the Men’s Institute in the old schoolroom is a popular resort, games of various kinds being provided with a supply of literature, and periodical entertainments which are given for the benefit of the whole community.’ from article “Delightful Dallington” Sussex Express 1922

“The society opened its doors every night except Sunday. In addition to playing snooker and billiards, members whiled away the evenings playing cards, dominoes and draughts”

The society closed in 1939. It reopened after the war though attendance declined, and the society eventually became the Snooker Club.”

Source: Bryant-Mole Six Miles from Everywhere

Aaron York

- Born 1856. 1861 census shows him (age 5) living in The Street with grandfather Jesse York (Parish clerk and journeyman bricklayer) and mother Caroline York
- 1871 (age 16) working as “servant/houseboy” for Moses Body at Herrings
- By 1881, working for Caleb Simmons at Graylings as assistant corn merchant, remained there until his death in 1925 (probate to Thomas Simmons, £108)
- Member of Board of Managers of Dallington School,
- Also bandmaster of the Dallington Band
- A 1922 newspaper article about Dallington Mens Improvement Society notes that it has had only 2 secretaries to date: Mr York and Mr Burgess



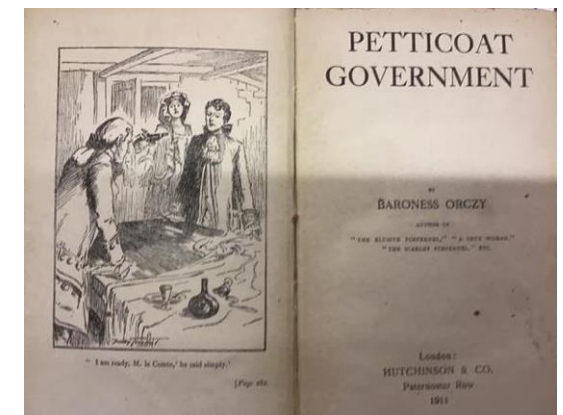
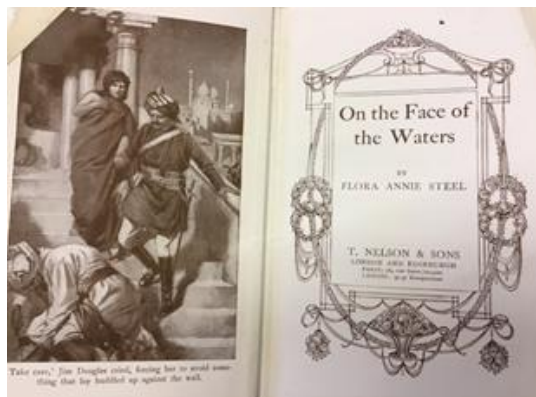
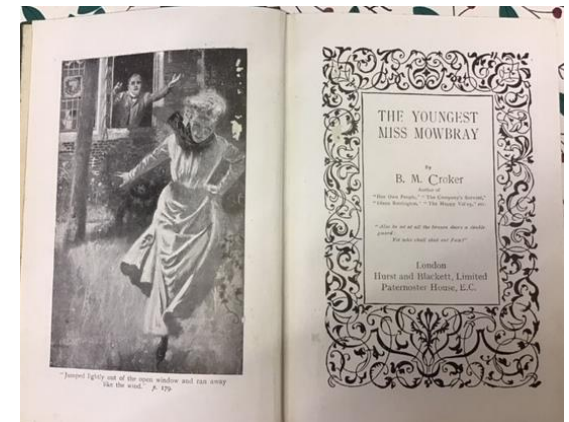
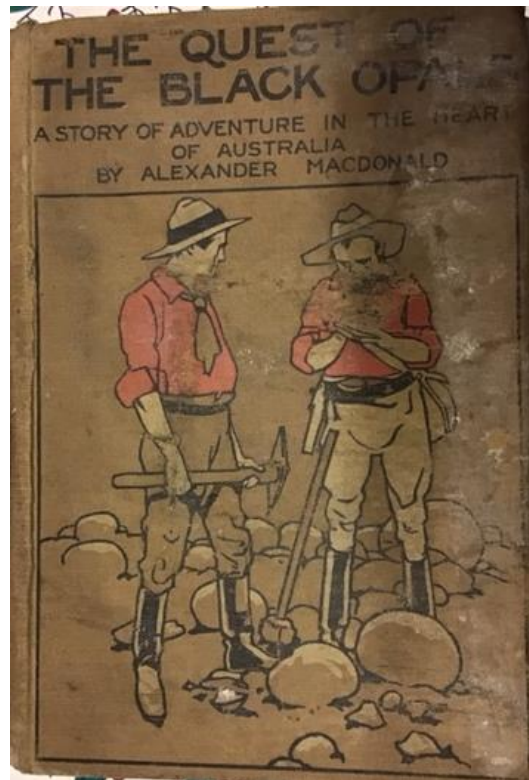
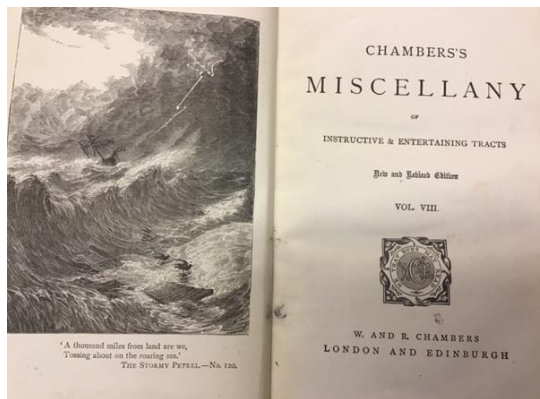
Aaron York,
honorary secretary

So what did people read?

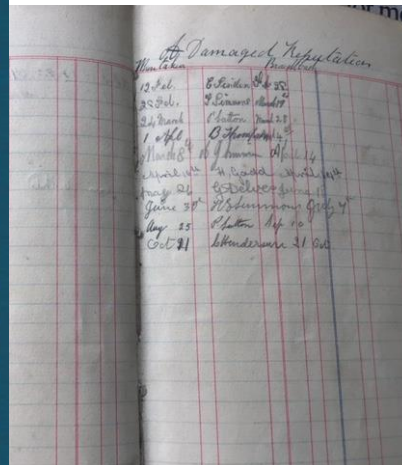
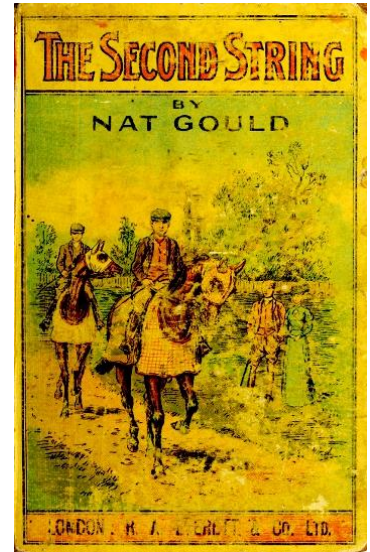
- The loans record book from 1921 provides a fascinating insight into village life 100 years ago.
- Just beginning to research the regular borrowers (all men) and what they did for a living. For example, Aaron York, first and longest serving secretary of the club
- Most of the books mentioned were by highly popular authors at the time – but most are now unknown.
- Only a few surviving books were found in the hall but they weren't among those listed in 1921.

Some of the books found in the old cupboard

Not listed in the 1921 loans book so we don't know when they were read or by whom, and most too badly damaged by mould and mice to save.



These are no longer in the hall – cover images from internet

[illegible]

In general the books most heavily borrowed appear to be westerns and other adventure stories. A surprising number are by Australian authors – were they donated by one person?

Nat Gould – author of several titles in the collection

- Nat Gould (1857 - 1919),
“one of the most prolific authors of all time.
During his life he wrote numerous best selling books,
normally on a racing theme, and was in his day the
most widely-read author in the world”
https://www.natgould.org/the_miners_cup
- The Miners Cup *“Alec Wilton and his mate Will Barker endure great hardships in their travels through Western Australia, but eventually they find gold near Coolgardie and become wealthy. There are numerous fights with unscrupulous prospectors, perils by fire and hurricane, and an exciting horse race. Villains are punished and virtue triumphs, as all ends happily.”*

