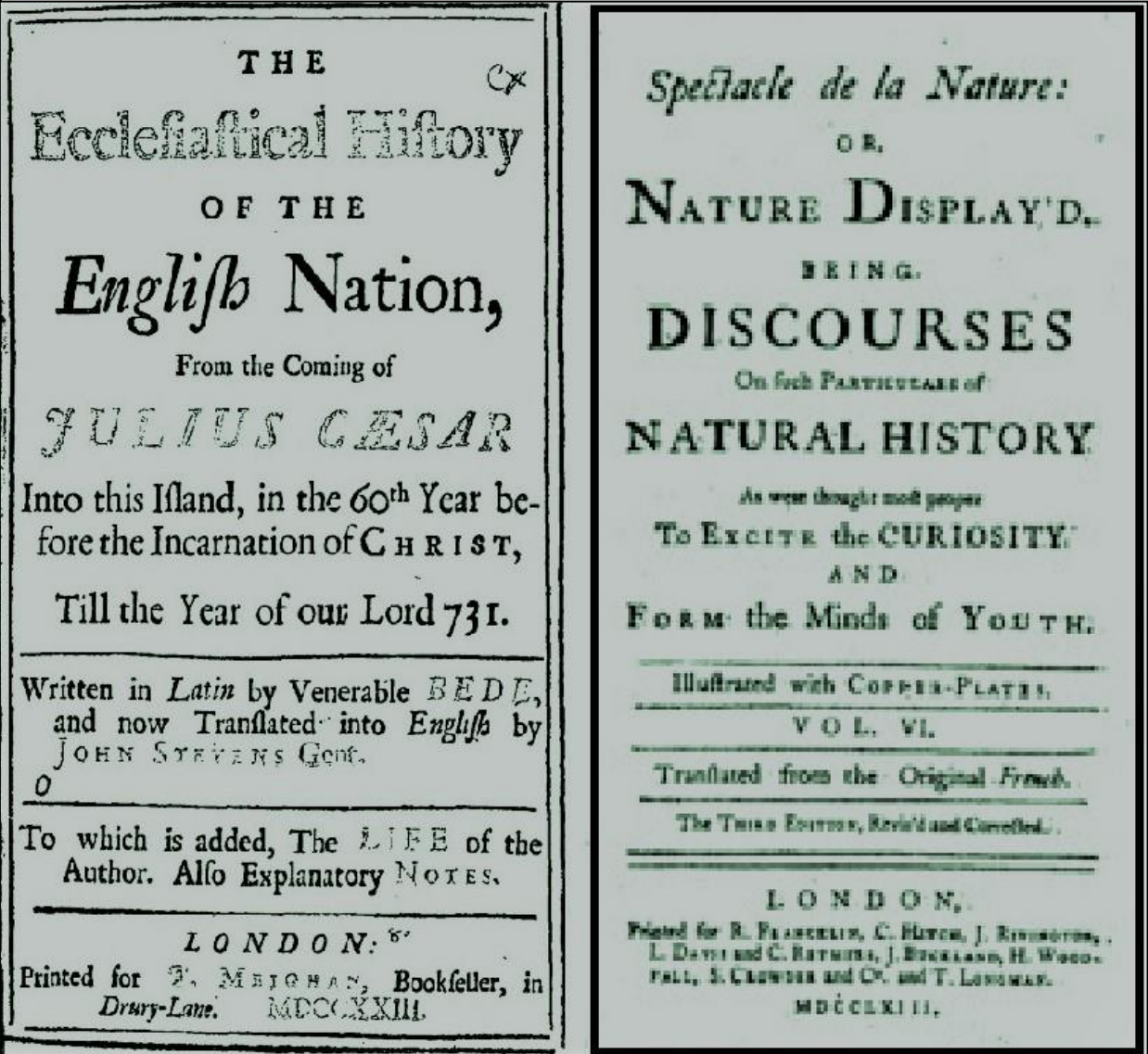


How adult learning evolved in Stonehouse

1 An exception to the general rule

The library of Samson Harris

In his will of 1763 Samson Harris, vicar of Stonehouse, left a library of over 500 books to the parish. Half of them were theological, but the others covered many subjects. Although he was a friend of George Whitefield, a founder of Methodism, his main purpose was to strengthen the Church of England through education.



Two books known to have been in the Samson Harris parish library.

The books were used by his family, clergy and others visiting the Vicarage, but probably also for teaching.



The old Stonehouse Vicarage, home of Samson Harris and his library: rebuilt 1858. The library moved to the new Institute in 1866.

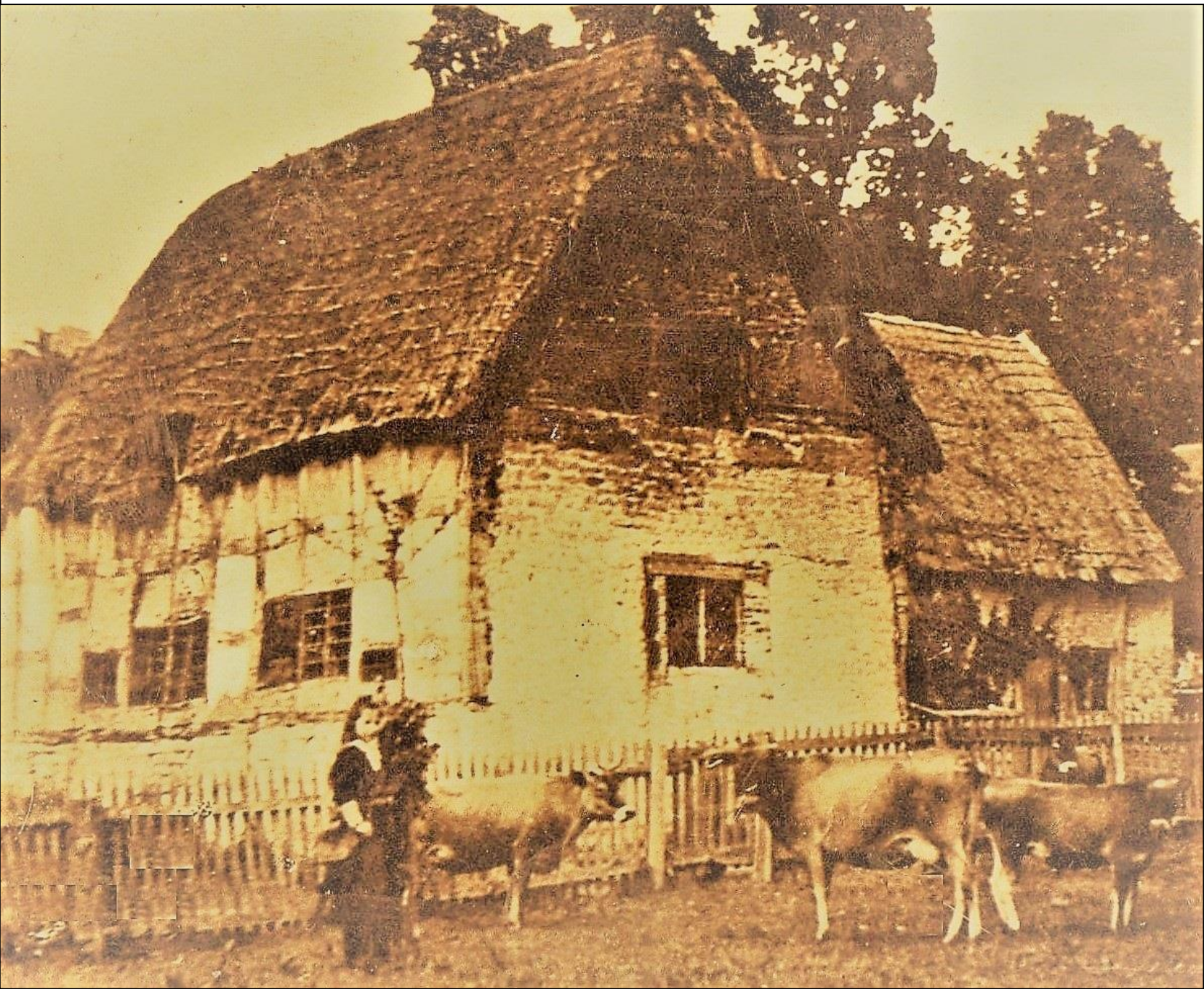
Early schools

Stonehouse village had a small charity school in 1720. In 1774 a larger one was opened ‘for instructing the poor children... in the principles of the Church of England,...and teaching them to read’. It was funded by subscriptions, led by John Elliott, of Lincoln’s Inn, London, a gentleman from a local family, who had not forgotten Stonehouse. Other donors, besides the vicar, were gentlemen such as John Andrews of Haywardsfield House and John Harmer of the Grove, and clothiers such as William Hill of Lower Mill, William Arundel of Bond’s Mill, and Nathaniel Fowler and John Dimock of Bridgend. All of them saw the value of literacy among their workers, both for religious and social purposes. This charity became a National School in 1832, still closely connected to the Church of England. There were also several small private schools by 1840.



Original bell of Stonehouse National School, opened 1832.

Weavers with wellbeing 1840



The home of William Aldridge, weaver, in 1840, in Pearcroft Road, photographed in 1894, now gone: the last Stonehouse hand-loom weaving house.

The combined efforts of clergy and benefactors seem to have borne fruit among the adults. In 1840 the government published a report on conditions among hand-loom weavers. It found that in Stonehouse:

‘Not only were the houses of the weavers clean, neat and well-furnished, but in many instances a respectable little library was to be seen...in all the other parishes I scarcely found a relic of a bookshelf...Stonehouse is altogether an exception to the general rule... If in other districts...some amusement was cultivated among the men after the hours of labour...the moral state and the happiness of the people would be materially improved.’

How adult learning evolved in Stonehouse

2 *Birthright of every human being*

Mechanics' Institutes

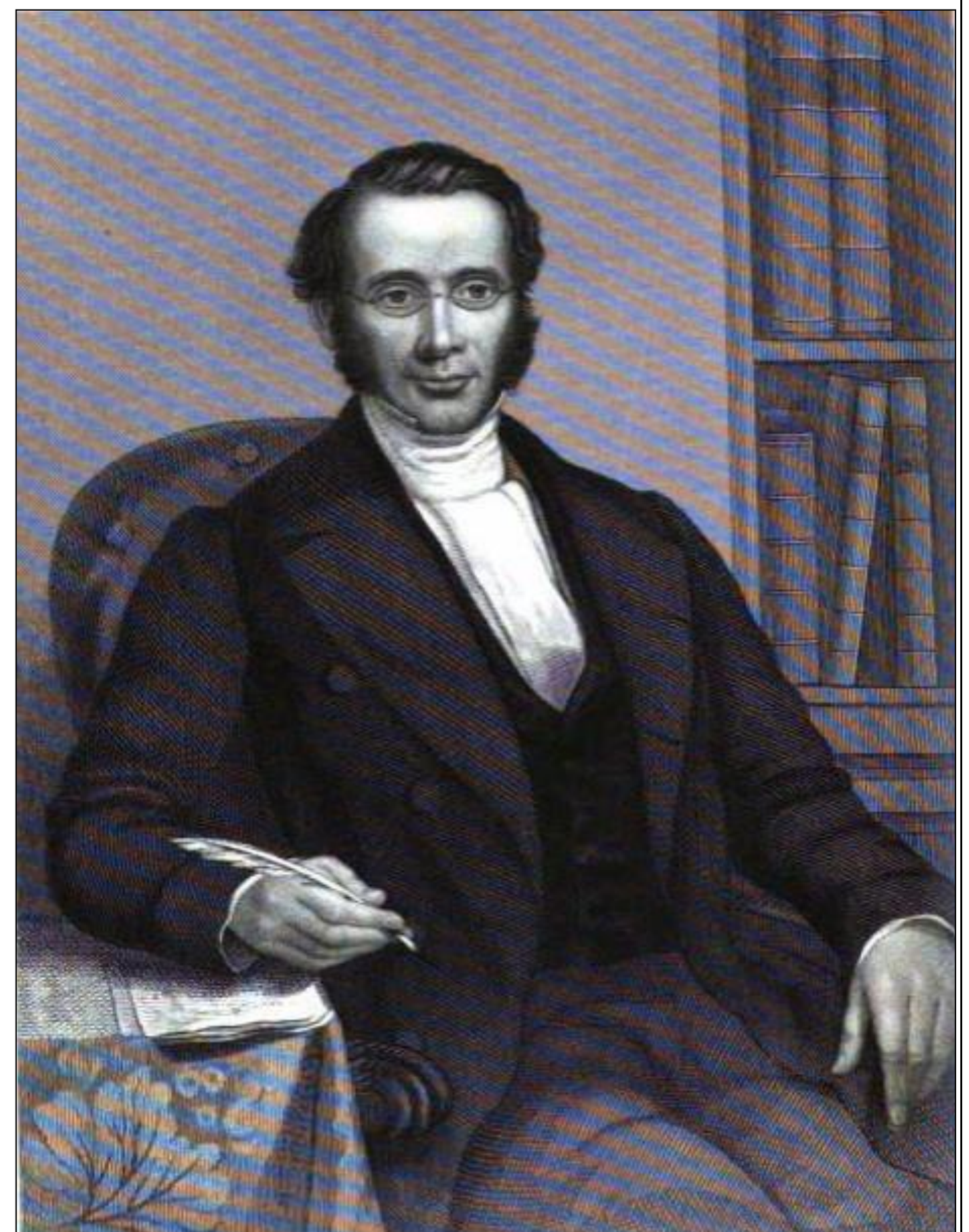
Interest in adult education grew out of concern for the wellbeing of workers in the developing industries of the north of England, and was often promoted by nonconformist churches. Institutes to improve literacy among workmen, or 'mechanics', were founded from the 1820s onwards, and spread nationally.

Many Anglican clergy, and employers, mistrusted Mechanics' Institutes as sources of sedition and discontent. In 1825 weavers in the Stroud area had rioted over wages.

Benjamin Parsons, pioneer in Ebley

In 1826 Benjamin Parsons became minister of Ebley Congregational Church, then in Stonehouse parish. As well as founding a school for children, he ran a night school and classes for adults, and promoted community activities.

His writings, such as '*Education, the birthright of every human being*', 1845, made him widely known. A new Congregational Church opened in Stonehouse High Street in 1827, and would have supported a neighbouring minister. Such nonconformist enterprise may have encouraged further interest among Anglican clergy.



Benjamin Parsons, from 'The Earnest Minister', by Edwin Paxton Hood, 1856.

Public funding and support

The Great Exhibition of 1851 celebrated British achievement in industry and technology, but also showed that other countries were gaining competitive strength. Prince Albert's patronage inspired government support for the better education and training of workers of all ages.

In 1853 the Science and Art Department was established in South Kensington, and supported the development of what became the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Early photograph inside the Great Exhibition of 1851 in the Crystal Palace, London, by William Henry Fox Talbot.

The Science and Art Department offered grants to Mechanics' Institutes running lectures and examinations in science and art subjects, with scholarships for some to study in London. These examinations were promoted in Stroud, where the school of Science and Art opened in 1860.

In 1858 a government report stressed the need for elementary education for both children and adults, as well as technical training for the workforce.

Church of England clergy now often became active partners in founding Institutes, such as the one at Painswick. It was opened in 1856, and is still in existence today as the Painswick Centre.

How adult learning evolved in Stonehouse

3 Counter to the influence of public houses

Stonehouse Institute

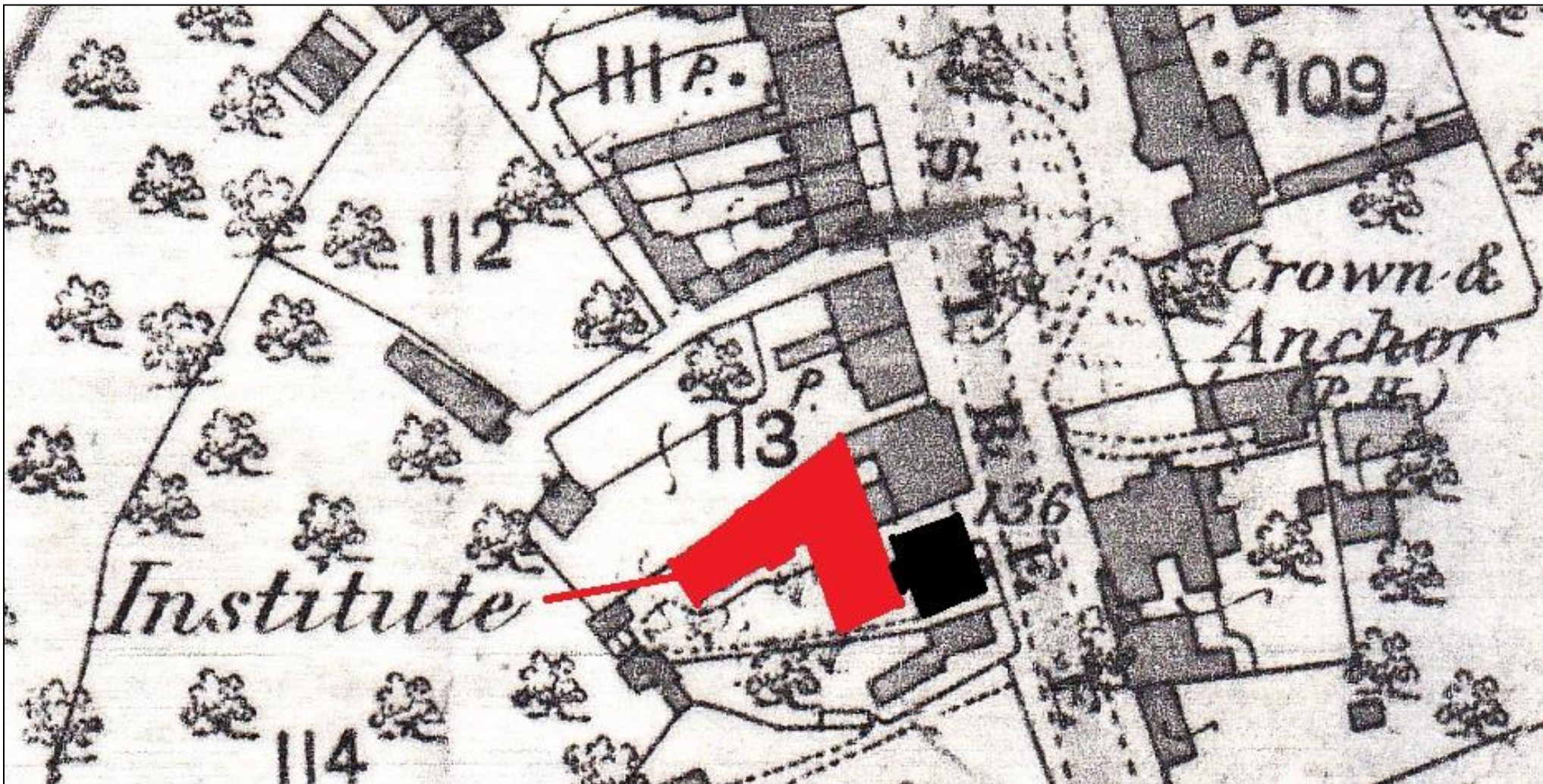
On 11th November 1865 a public meeting was held in Stonehouse ‘for the purpose of creating an Institute. The movement has been most liberally supported by parishioners of all classes...its importance cannot be over-estimated as a counter-attraction to the prejudicial influence of...public houses’.

Plans included a reading room with periodicals, games such as chess, a library, occasional ‘penny readings’, and lectures. A classroom would provide for chemistry classes in connection with the Government Science Department, ‘and doubtless other classes of instruction on other subjects’.

The Institute was to be in an old malthouse behind a baker’s shop in Stonehouse High Street. The baker, Richard Smith, provided the coffee room essential to the Temperance movement. Coffee would be served every evening. This was at least as important as the drive to train workers in the setting up of Institutes. The Church of England Temperance Society was founded in 1862, and the Salvation Army in 1864. Stonehouse, like most places, had many small beer sellers, as well as recognised beer houses and inns. One inn was the Crown and Anchor, which stood across the road from the proposed premises.



Stonehouse High Street, 1864. The old malthouse is hidden behind the cottage, its chimneys just visible. Richard Smith’s premises front the High Street.



High Street 1884, Institute in red: adjoining building in black is Richard Smith’s bakery as rebuilt 1877. Reproduced from 1884 Ordnance Survey map with the kind permission of the OS.

STONEHOUSE INSTITUTE.

THE READING and COFFEE ROOMS of this Institute will be OPENED on Monday, January 1st, 1866, at 7 o'clock, when the Committee will be present to receive the names and subscriptions of those, above 14 years of age, who may wish to become members.

Advantages of the Institute to which members are entitled:—Use of Library, Reading and Coffee Rooms, Free Admission to all Classes, Lectures, Penny Readings, and Entertainments, except where the contrary is expressed in handbills and advertisements.

TERMS OF MEMBERSHIP:
6s. 3d., 10s. 6d., or £1 1s. a-year. 1s. 6d. a quarter or 6d. a month.

Subscribers of £1 1s. a-year will be entitled to Reserved Seats at Lectures.

Subscribers of 10s. 6d. a-year,—Front Seats.
6s. 3d. " Back Seats.

Coffee will be supplied to members every evening at reasonable charges.

Ladies may become entitled to the use of the Library, through a member, and Reserved Seats at the Lectures on payment of 10s. 6d. a-year. Those subscribing 6s. 3d. a-year shall be entitled to the same advantages, with the exception of the reserved seats.

Signed, W. FARREN WHITE, President.
WILLIAM BISHOP, Secretary.

Stonehouse, Dec. 28th, 1865.

Opening ceremony

The Stonehouse Institute was opened on 30th December 1865. As well as enjoying music, members viewed ‘collections of British and foreign birds and eggs, butterflies, moths, ants, beetles and other specimens of natural history’.

They saw demonstrations of magnesium light, rubber manufacture and electroplating, as well as electrical and chemical experiments, and ‘the marvels of many microscopes’. A highlight was ‘the chemical phenomenon of Pharaoh’s serpents and boa-constrictors’, which ‘excited not a little astonishment’.

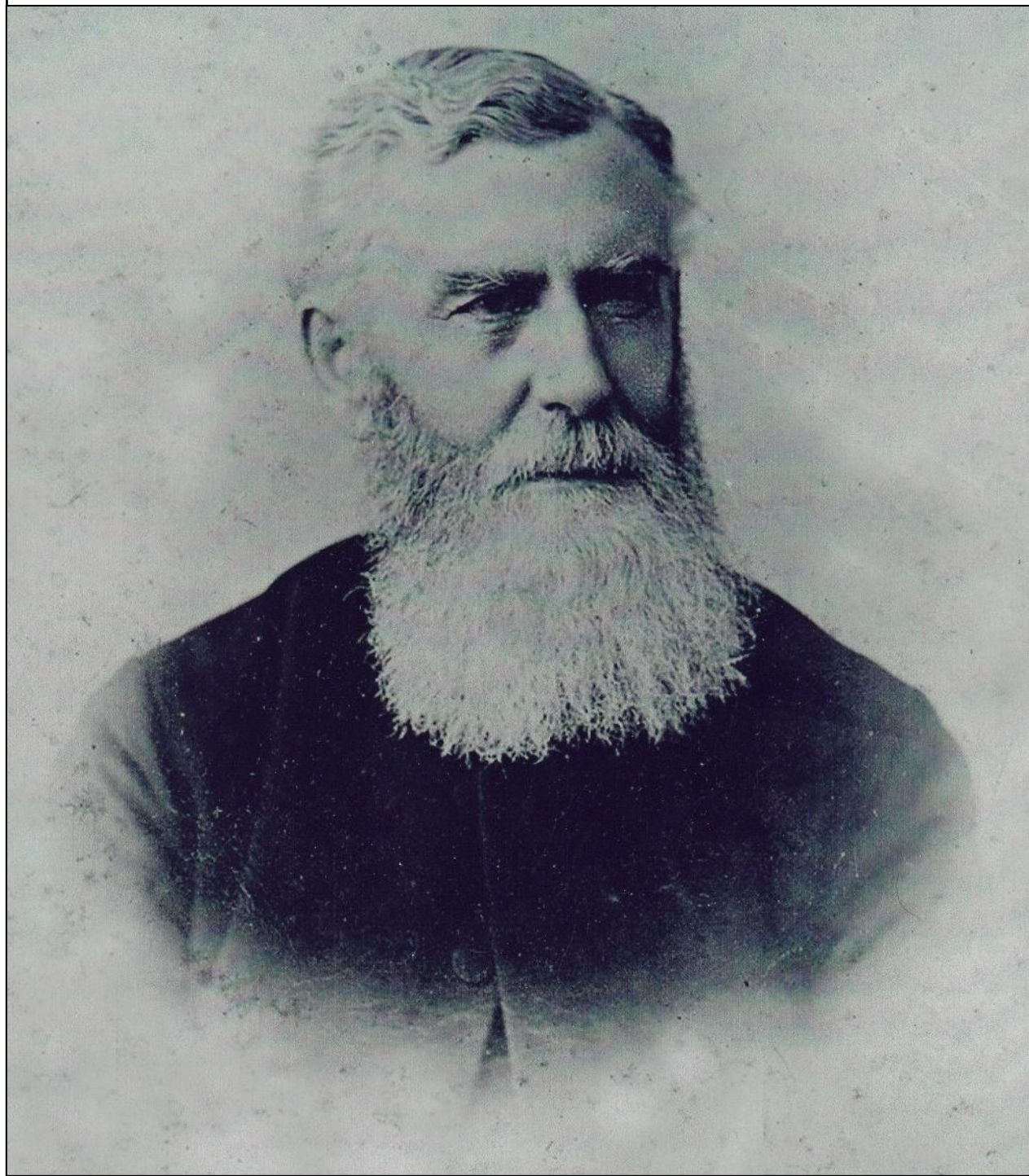


Microscope image of Antarctic sea creatures, from ‘The Universe’ by F.A.Pouchet, 1870.

How adult learning evolved in Stonehouse

4 *Morals which apply to home life*

Christian focus



Rev. William Farren White, died 1899

The Institute was very much the project of its president, William Farren White, who became Vicar of Stonehouse in 1861. He was a naturalist, and an expert on ants.



'Ants and their Ways', by the Rev. William Farren White, advertised in 1883.

Many nonconformist Institutes forbade political or religious debate. Stonehouse welcomed people from any background and allowed all subjects but, whatever the activity, there was a broad-based Christian focus.

In 1866 lectures began on optics and the human body. Courses on chemistry and literature followed, as well as talks on varied subjects, drawing classes, a picture exhibition, a Cottage Gardeners' exhibition, and concerts by local performers. The parish library was enlarged.

After the vote was given to some working men in 1867, a branch of the Working Men's Liberal Association was formed in 1868. The Institute was a polling station in the general election of that year, as well as hosting a Conservative party dinner.

A different path

In 1870 universal education was introduced for children, after which many Mechanics' Institutes were used to provide scientific and technical training for adults. Stonehouse was still holding classes connected to the Science and Art Department in 1876, but does not appear to have entered students for examinations. By 1918 many Institutes had become art and technical colleges, some later becoming universities, but Stonehouse did not take this course.

Church Institute

When Stonehouse Subscription Rooms were opened in 1893, the educational aspects of the Institute moved there. The building became St Cyr's Church Institute, the meeting place of the Church of England Young Men's Society. In 1898 a lantern entertainment was given, *'bearing morals which apply to home life the consequence of drink and bad influences'*.

Institutes were intended to be teaching centres for working men, and this one did play its part, but it emphasised moral conduct more than educational achievement. It closed in 1899, when Farren White died. In 1901 the building was a Baptist chapel.

The parish library was put into store in an outhouse at the Vicarage.



St Cyr's Church, Stonehouse, 2011

How adult learning evolved in Stonehouse

5 Instruction and amusement of all classes

Subscription Rooms

The Stonehouse Institute had faced ‘*grumbling*’ over its small rooms and limited facilities. Whether for practical or political reasons, a group of prominent local people subscribed to provide better ones. In January 1894 the Stonehouse Subscription Rooms and Working Men’s Club opened in Regent Street, intended to ‘*contribute considerably to the instruction and amusement of all classes in the neighbourhood*’.

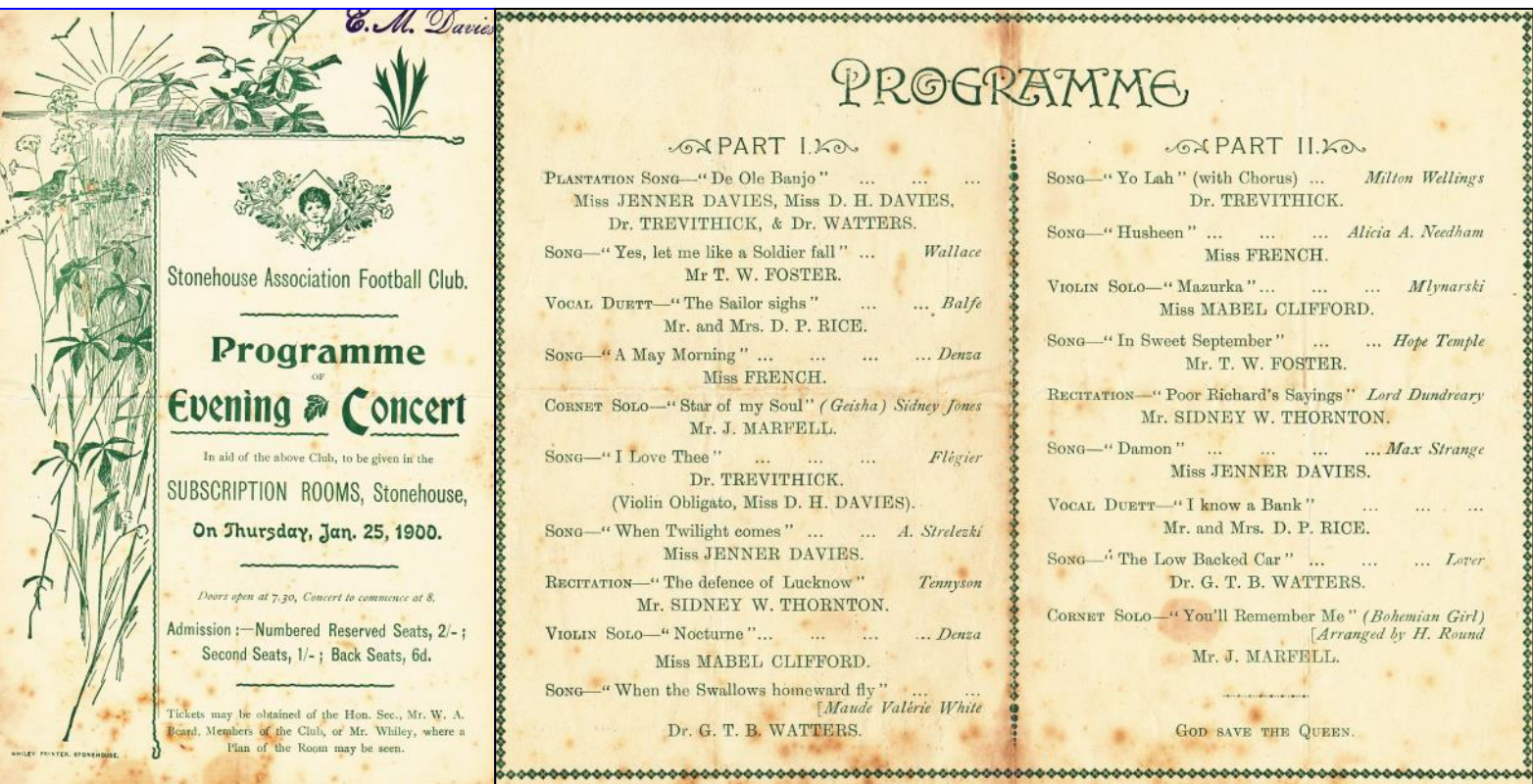


The Subscription Rooms, Regent Street, now part of Wycliffe College: altered since 1893, but main doors may be original.

Among the sponsors was Edward Jenner Davies of Haywardsend House, who was already promoting crafts at the Stonehouse Flower Show, using his own grounds. His family would be important to the new venture. The building provided a library with newspapers, a classroom, a recreation room or gymnasium, and a large hall with a stage.

Instruction without formality

The Institute was invited to move its technical classes, and to transfer furniture and appliances, but government funding for formal training does not seem to have been taken up. Periodicals such as *The English Mechanic* were not stocked after the first few years. By the 1890s most adults had benefited from compulsory elementary education.



Concert in aid of Stonehouse Football Club, 1900

In the first ten years the Rooms were used for plays, concerts and bazaars, dance classes, badminton in the gymnasium, cookery lessons, Bible classes, and support for football and rifle clubs, as well as political meetings. In 1905, political subjects were allowed at the Literary Society. Adult leisure learning had become less structured, but the committee still kept a close eye on moral content and standards of behaviour.

Viability versus public value

Being dependent on subscriptions, there was always tension between being popular enough to have stable finances, and providing services deemed to be of benefit to society, such as, in 1904, ambulance classes about the use of gas.

In 1911-12, applications to use the Rooms as an early cinema were resisted. A mock parliament and a debating society were both considered, but not launched. On the other hand, billiards tournaments, which produced important income, were promoted.

Stonehouse Subscription Rooms

Tuesday Evening, April 16th, 1907,

At Eight o'clock,

MR. GEORGE NORMAN-BURT'S

Performance of Sydney Grundy's celebrated Farcical Comedy in Three Acts,

'The Arabian Nights.'

Tickets (numbered), 2/6; Unreserved, 1/-; and a limited number at 6d.;

To be obtained (by letter) from Mr. Norman-Burt, Marsh Leaze, Leonard Stanley; or at Mr. Whitley's, Stonehouse, where a Plan of the Room may be seen.

Doors open at 7.30. Carriages at 10.

CONCERT AT STONEHOUSE.

"The Arabian Nights," a farcical comedy in three acts, was presented before a large and appreciative audience at the Stonehouse Subscription Rooms on Tuesday evening, by a number of local ladies and gentlemen, the performance from start to finish going with a good swing. Each of those taking part sustained their role in a creditable manner, those responsible for the interpretation of the various characters being Mrs. Humphris-Clark, Miss Norman-Burt, Miss Jenner-Davies, Miss Rosie Nash, and Messrs. George Norman-Burt, Jack Margetson, Herbert Duberley, and M. G. Cartwright. Prior to the raising of the curtain and between the acts capital selections of music were rendered by an orchestra under the conductorship of Mr. A. M. Boucher. The platform was attractively decorated with flowers.

'The Arabian Nights' at the Subscription Rooms, 1907

How adult learning evolved in Stonehouse

6 *Lifelong learning for all*

Attitudes affected by two World Wars

In 1914 the Subscription Rooms were affected by both the outbreak of war, and a fire at Stonehouse Co-operative Stores. The large hall was let to the Co-op while it was rebuilt. During the war lettings were reduced, but events supporting the Red Cross and Standish VAD Hospital were held, and men on active service were given free access.

Enthusiasm for adult learning suffered from the trauma and disillusionment which followed World War 1. Many among the working classes no longer wanted what the social or religious authorities chose to offer them. At the Rooms, partnerships with an ex-servicemen’s club, formed in 1920, and with Wycliffe College, strained finances. The reading room was made smaller, and few courses were held, even after the Co-op left in 1923. The unused parish library was catalogued in 1932 and afterwards dispersed.



Stonehouse prospered in the 1920s and 1930s, in spite of national depression, but the Rooms still favoured entertainment over instruction. World War 2 saw classes for ARP wardens and Home Guard meetings, as well as support for servicemen and the home front. Financial struggles continued after the War. Billiards and snooker were still popular, but the Rooms closed in 1964.

Stonehouse Community Centre was built by the government in 1944, to provide recreation for war workers. It was taken over by the Parish Council in 1946. People recovering from war looked for relaxation in their leisure time. They enjoyed amateur dramatics and musical performances, put on by groups such as the Regent Players, and the Cropthorne Concert Party. The whole village took part in Coronation celebrations in 1953, and a Carnival in 1957.



Concert party 1950s



Amateur dramatics 1950s

New leisure opportunities



Library opening 1963

Gradually, people began to have more spare time, and to develop wider interests to fill it. The well-used County Library was opened in 1963. In 1966 the Sperry Gyroscope Company, at Bond’s Mill, produced a recruitment brochure called ‘*What Stonehouse offers you*’. It stressed sport, but also pointed to evening classes at what is now Stroud College.

Stonehouse became a town in 1990. Today, the Community Centre is a focus for lively social and educational activity. Classes are run by the voluntary Workers’ Educational Association, a charity founded in 1903 to promote ‘*the higher education of working men*’. Nowadays it is dedicated to ‘*lifelong learning for all*’ as a chosen leisure activity. Libraries and the worldwide web have made information freely available, but people still enjoy learning together, through activities such as Stonehouse History Group.

