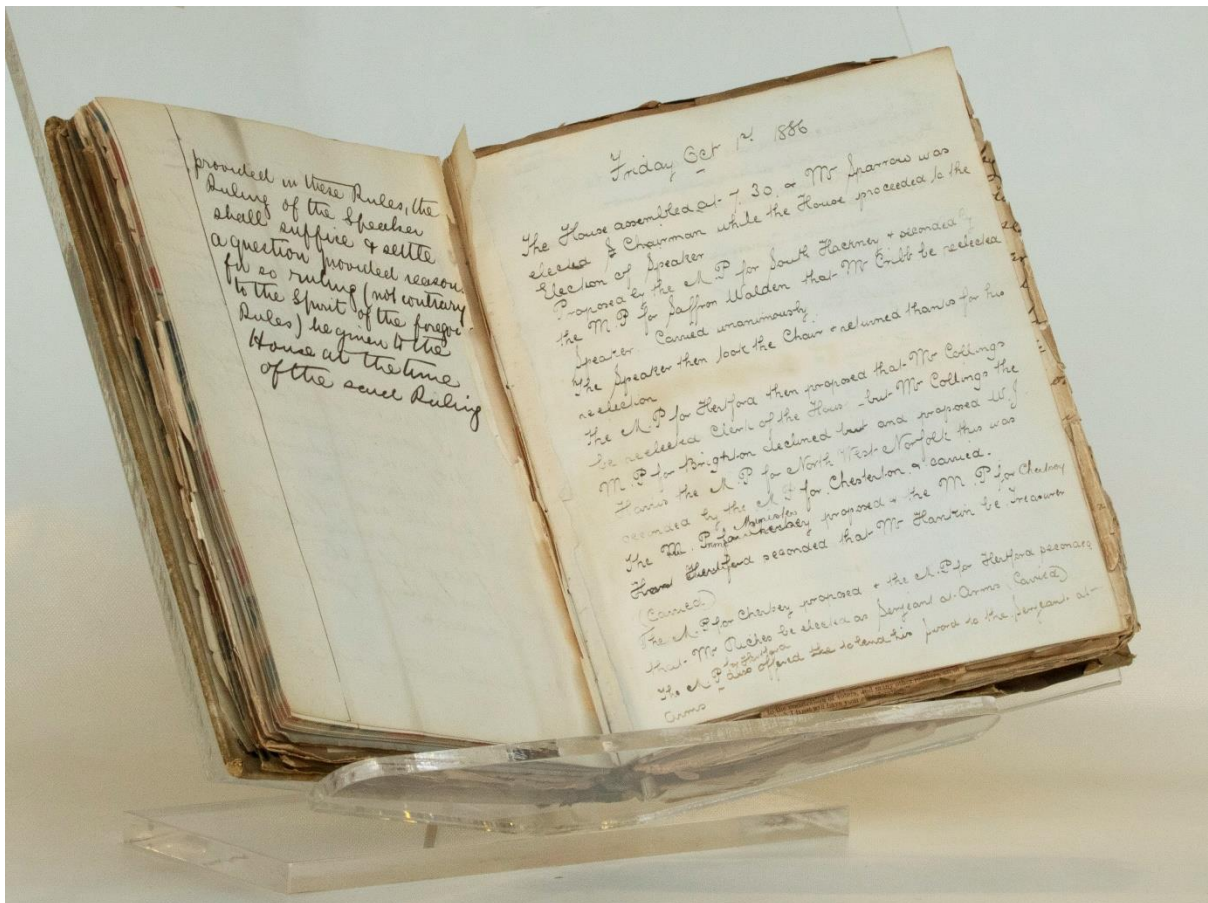


The Bishop's Stortford Parliamentary Debating Society

By Roy Fletcher



At the Bishop's Stortford Museum there exists a battered book that dates back to 1885. The book belonged to the Bishop's Stortford Parliamentary Debating Society. A copy of the rules state that the objective of the Society is to discuss all subjects of a public interest, in accordance with the Rules and Forms of the House of Commons, as far as practicable.

A Parliamentary Constituency Book was kept by the Clerk of the House and each member of the Society were required to select a Constituency from the list of vacant seats.

At the start of each Session they elected the Officers of the House namely:- Mr. Speaker, Clerk of the House, Treasurer and Serjeant-at-Arms. Twelve members were then elected from the membership representing six Liberals and six Conservatives. As with the House of Commons, The Society's Mr Speaker presided over the sittings of the House but took no part in Debates. The Clerk of the House recorded all proceedings in the book that is held by the Museum. He also prepared a

list of all Bills, Questions, Motions and Resolutions. The Premier chose a Cabinet from the membership. Similarly, the Leader of the Opposition selected member to fill Opposition posts.

Reading from the Rulebook it is clear that the Society treated the whole process in a very serious way. The rulebook States under the heading of Decorum:-

No Member shall pass between the Chair and the Member addressing the House. Members entering or leaving the House, or moving from one part of the House to another, shall remove their hats. Members on entering or leaving the House shall make obeisance to the Chair.

No expression of Assent or Dissent, except such as are permitted in the House of Commons (cries of "Hear, Hear" and the like) shall be used by the Member.

At the front of the book it lists the Members who were elected to Posts within the Government together with a copy of Queen's Speech to Parliament. Some interesting points in the Speech are:-

The relations between this country and Russia are now most cordial.

The hostilities between Bulgaria and Servia (sic) which at one time threatened to disturb the peace of Europe appear now to be in a fair way towards a satisfactory settlement.

The book lists all the proceeding of the Society, the resolutions made, right through to March 1888.

What happened to the Society is, as yet, unknown.

The museum's copy of the debating society's book is currently on display at the Bishop's Stortford Museum in the Rhodes Arts Complex.

Researched and written by Roy Fletcher.

Roy has been a volunteer at the museum for six years, spending his time cataloguing the museum's collection. Roy has an interest in the local history, particularly the last 200 years.

The Bishop's Stortford Museum is your first choice for discovering the history of the town. With a mix of local history displays, holiday activities and themed walks and talks, we have something to offer the whole family. Admission to the museum is free and is open Monday – Friday, 10am to 5pm, and from 10am – 4pm on Saturday's.