A Victorian library book that provides a window into Edenbridge's past.

A copy of *The Devil's Playground – A Story of the Wild North West* by John Mackie published by T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1894, was recently donated to the museum.
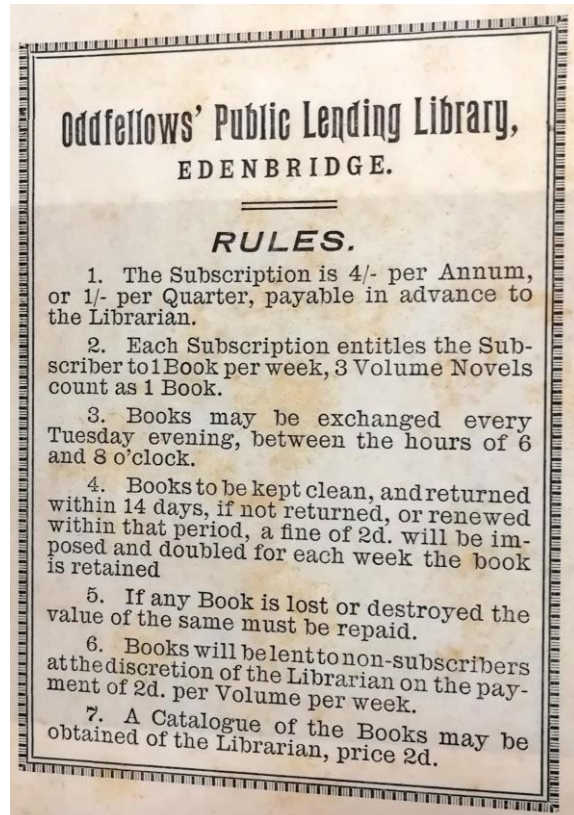
The interesting fact about this book is that it appears to be no.128 in the collection of the Oddfellows' Public Lending Library in Edenbridge.

In the 18th century, there were virtually no public libraries as we are familiar with today, however there came into being a whole network of libraries provided on a private or institutional basis and in many cases funded by philanthropists. Providing a Public, all be it subscription library, perfectly aligns with the other support the Oddfellows provided to their members and to the wider local community.

Oddfellows' Public Lending Library, EDENBRIDGE.

RULES.

1. The Subscription is 4/- per Annum, or 1/- per Quarter, payable in advance to the Librarian.

2. Each Subscription entitles the Subscriber to 1 Book per week, 3 Volume Novels count as 1 Book.

3. Books may be exchanged every Tuesday evening, between the hours of 6 and 8 o'clock.

4. Books to be kept clean, and returned within 14 days, if not returned, or renewed within that period, a fine of 2d. will be imposed and doubled for each week the book is retained

5. If any Book is lost or destroyed the value of the same must be repaid.

6. Books will be lent to non-subscribers at the discretion of the Librarian on the payment of 2d. per Volume per week.

7. A Catalogue of the Books may be obtained of the Librarian, price 2d.

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The Oddfellows
The name Oddfellows refers to the various friendly societies and fraternal organisations operating in the United Kingdom during the 1800's and early 1900's. The term Odd Fellows comes from the fact that in smaller towns and villages, there were too few Fellows in the same trade to form a local Guild. The Fellows from a number of trades therefore joined together to form a local Guild of Fellows from an assortment of different trades, i.e. Odd Fellows. These groups provided benefits to their members such as help with travel warrants when seeking work, free overnight accommodation when travelling, and insurance against times of sickness. It would appear that the Edenbridge Lodge also provided a Public Subscription Library.

The Loyal Eden Lodge No 3897, was established in 1845 at the White Horse Inn (now Costa Coffee) where they met every Tuesday. It appears that they owned the site opposite Ye Olde Crown Inn from about 1882 and a newly built

Edenbridge High Street looking north with entrance to Oddfellows Hall on right, c.1920-1930.
Image: P2013.2061

Oddfellows Hall was built on the site, officially opened on 21 July 1886 by the visiting Grand Master of the Order.

It was an impressive new building, measuring 83ft 8in by 37ft 4in across and forming a conspicuous feature in the High Street with its frontage of red brick with red facings and windows filled with Cathedral tinted glass. Over the door a stone arch bore the inscription 'Oddfellows Hall M.U. 1886' (M.U. = Manchester Unity).

Over the years, as well as hosting Oddfellows meetings, and recruitment drives during WWI, the hall was used by local groups to stage entertainments, so it is perhaps pertinent that in December 1927 the building was leased to the Adelphi Advertising Co. and converted into a 330-seat cinema. *Read more* about the Oddfellows' Hall in 'The History of the Cinema Site – Edenbridge' in *Museum News*, no.26, 2012 available online at www.evmt.org.uk.

Latterly Oddfellows' meetings were held in Church House. The Edenbridge Lodge closed in 1990 and the area is now served by the Tunbridge Wells District Branch.

The Book
The British Library, working with Microsoft has embarked on an ambitious programme to digitise its collection of 19th century books. There are now 65,000 titles available all of which can now be printed on demand and purchased on Amazon. Amazingly, *The Devil's Playground West* is one of these 65,000 titles.