

APPENDIX ONE

WISBOROUGH GREEN PARISH COUNCIL HERITAGE STATEMENT

THE VILLAGE HALL INCORPORATING 'THE OLD WORKHOUSE' MAISONETTE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE WISBOROUGH GREEN HISTORY GROUP

INTRODUCTION

The building that is now the village hall has had an interesting history as poorhouse, workhouse, family accommodation, public meeting rooms and village hall. It was built in the seventeenth century but has had many additions and alterations over the years to arrive at its current form. Although now a village hall, the building also incorporates a 3-bedroomed maisonette known as The Old Workhouse. The private garden area to the east is enclosed by walls, the subject of these planning applications.

The workhouse website describes Wisborough Green workhouse is an L-shaped building that survives as in the form of the village hall and a house named The Old Workhouse. Its west wing contained (starting at the west) a wash-house, the Master's room, and a hall. The south wing contained (starting at the north) a board-room, and two school rooms. There was a small single-storey cottage at the north-east corner. The area enclosed by the two main wings (now the village hall car park) was the boys' exercise yard. A small building at the east of The Old Workhouse's garden may have been a mortuary.

Sussex Life (July 1979) states that it was built in the Queen Anne period 1702 to 1714. It is alleged that it was built upon the foundations of a Benedictine monastery and quite possibly reused the original stonework. This is the original part of the poorhouse and was constructed of sandstone on three floors and is the part used as the village hall. The earliest date known of its existence is 1737 for which a list of governors is available.

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings stated in a letter to Wisborough Green Parish Council in June 1950 that "the older houses and the courtyard walls are remains of monastic buildings". This was written in connection with the council's search for a village hall and its possible proposal to demolish the workhouse, know at the time as the Institute. The 'older houses' presumably referred to the four dwellings that had existed in the workhouse from around 1920.

Poorhouses were required to grow their own vegetables and the areas on the south and east sides were almost certainly used for this purpose. The area on the south side became the boys' exercise yard, probably after 1835 when the building only accommodated children. It became a garden and yard for the hanging of washing until 1952 when the building ceased to be used as accommodation for families. It became a car park shortly after the original poorhouse was converted to the village hall in 1955. The level of the car park is understood to be higher than it was when it was a garden.

THE ENLARGEMENT

An Act of Parliament dated 6th October 1795, demanded "Better relief and employment of the poor". This may have prompted the enlargement of the poorhouse or it may have been enlarged for other reasons, e.g. overcrowding.

The south wing was added to the east elevation of the original sandstone building in 1797. The construction was financed by Thomas Seward who advanced £1035 of his own money for the work. The loan by him was repaid by the Parish over the next nine years.

It was built in brick and consisted of four storeys and a cellar and came to within twenty feet or so of the churchyard wall. The upper floors were accessed by an internal staircase towards the north end. The third floor had attic rooms that were linked with internal doors between each of the rooms all accessed from a single internal staircase. There was outside metal open staircase on the eastern wall that would have been used for emergencies. The ground floor contained (starting from the north end) a board-room, and two school rooms.

A toilet block was built along the churchyard wall; there was a gap between the south wall of the south wing and the toilet giving access to the grounds to the east.

When the Poor House was enlarged in 1795-7, a room was set apart in the New Part as "the Committee Room" (Vestry Meetings ref viii.30) (GJ) This replaced vestry meetings held in the inns.

During the Napoleonic Wars of 1799 to 1815, French prisoners of war were housed in the building and were put to work on the turnpike roads. It is rumoured that they constructed the stone wall around Petworth Park.

The extended building continued as a poorhouse until the New Poor Law of 1834 was passed which introduced a rigorously implemented, centrally enforced, standard system that was to be imposed on all workhouses and funded from the local poor rate. It required Poor Law Unions to be established to administer the workhouses each under the control of a master or matron. It required the able-bodied paupers to do unpaid work in return for food and accommodation. This was in contrast to the poorhouse situation where little or no work was required of the inmates.

The new Petworth Union made use of its three former parish workhouses, but instead of each housing all ages as before, it was determined that each workhouse should be assigned inmates within a particular age range, as follows:

- Petworth was for able bodied adults
- Wisborough Green was for children
- Kirdford was for the old and infirm.

A small single-storey workhouse keeper's cottage was attached to the north-east corner of the workhouse. This was demolished in 1956 shortly after the demolition of the majority of the south wing and conversion of the west wing into the village hall. Today, the northern and eastern walls still stand with the cottage's front door position used as the front gate to The Old Workhouse. The site of a fireplace is evident in the eastern wall. The roof profile is very evident on the eastern wall of the workhouse.

The cultivated area that belonged to this cottage occupies the area to the east of the workhouse and is believed to have been used as allotments or a growing area. This is borne out by some distinct dips, some very deep, in the area currently laid to lawn.

During the First World War, German prisoners of war were housed in the building and they also worked on the land. The number of children at that time was down to 35, leaving plenty of room for the prisoners.

CONVERSION INTO FLATS

The workhouse ceased to be used in this capacity by 1920.

The parish council minutes of 20th February 1920 show that the council authorised to let the workhouse as follows

- Four flats (known as Almshouse Cottages)
- School canteen
- Entrance hall let to Local Education Authority for cooking and woodwork classes
- First floor of south wing let to WI
- Second floor of south wing let to Girl Guides

The work undertaken to convert the workhouse accommodation into flats mainly consisted of building new internal stud walls.

The workhouse kitchen on the ground floor was used as a school canteen (Sussex Life May 1973). This was accessed by a new door in the north wall that replaced the right hand window. The existing door gave access to the first floor flat by means of a hallway with stairs up to the flat. When the building was rebuilt into the village hall in 1955, the canteen door reverted to being a window and the flat door became a first escape from the hall.

The first floor was a long hall that could be hired for meetings and functions, e.g. dances, the showing of films, etc. The second floor was latterly disused and the floor was in very poor condition and considered unsafe. However it was sometimes used for storage of chairs, etc. that were used for functions. There was also an attic although its use is unknown.

In 1950, Petworth Rural District Council served notice under the 1936 Housing Act that the inhabited portions no longer complied with the requirements of the Act. The parish council decided to accept a closing order on the four flats. The last tenants moved out to new homes in the newly built Butts Meadow estate in 1952.

After the flats were vacated in circa 1953, the end room of the westernmost flat became a surgery for Dr Vine and Dr Woods.

THE VILLAGE HALL

Most of the south wing was declared to be unsafe and all of the wing from the south eastern corner of the original poorhouse was demolished in 1955. The first six courses of the eastern wall of this wing can still be seen. They form the boundary between the car park and The Old Workhouse's garden. The extension of the Vine Room (used as the surgery waiting room) was also demolished at this time.

Shortly after the demolition work, the following rebuilding work took place:

- The original poorhouse was converted into the village hall by removing the canteen and the upper floors
- An entrance hall was built on the south side of the western extension.
- The open end of the remaining part of the south wing, i.e. the part directly attached to the original poorhouse, was filled in and windows provided for the staircase area.

The official opening of the new village hall was 8th September 1956.

A second phase of rebuilding in 1957 was as follows:

- Provision of two one-bedroom flats in the first and second floors of the remaining part of the south wing
- Removed the dormer window on the east roof
- Demolished the workhouse keeper's cottage
- Converted the south yard into a car park.

A third phase of rebuilding occurred in 1977. In November 1973, it was decided to widen the hall. Grants were given in March 1976 and work begun by Allfreys Builders in June that year. The work involved widening the main hall by demolishing the lower part of the south wall and supporting the upper part of the wall by a 60' long girder supported by columns. The extension was then added to this, thus widening the hall. The kitchen block was also added at this time. It reopened in March 1977.

Nothing of historical interest was found during the excavations.