

GREAT BOWDEN HERITAGE & ARCHAEOLOGY

part of Bowden Ridge Research Project

Great Bowden Workhouse to St Lukes Hospital

The St Lukes Hospital site is on Leicester Road, Market Harborough

(SP7260 8810) Before 1836

Care of the vulnerable and destitute in society goes back many centuries and was mostly carried out by the church in a rather haphazard fashion which practically disappeared after the closure of the monastic houses by Henry VIII.

Nationally, the changes in agriculture towards pasture, particularly for sheep, meant that many agricultural workers were dispossessed of land and livelihood. The Poor Laws of the 16th century gave each parish the right to raise a poor rate to pay for their responsibility of caring for the deserving and the undeserving poor within its boundaries. This is a distinction that is also recognisable in today's benefit system.

The establishment of small workhouses, almshouses and poorhouses and relief out in the parish became the norm. Market Harborough had its own small workhouse in Adam & Eve Street from about 1728 and in Great Bowden there was a small workhouse for about 20 people. Similar establishments were in place in most of the villages in the area.



Aerial photograph taken probably in the 1960-70s showing the whole workhouse complex shortly before its demolition and while it was still being used as St Lukes Hospital. The red brick buildings at the back on the right are the Infirmary buildings which are still in existence (2021) and house 2 wards for in-patients.

Market Harborough Poor Law Union

During the Industrial Revolution the population was moving rapidly from the countryside into towns and cities. This brought an urgent need for a change in policy in caring for those who could not support themselves. The Reform Act of 1834 led to the creation of Poor Law Unions and in the case of Market Harborough 41 parishes came together, each with its own member on the Board of Guardians. The Market Harborough Poor Law Union constructed the very large three storey building on Leicester Road which could accommodate 300 people. The building had an imposing frontage on Leicester Road which housed the board room and administrative offices. The 4 residential wards lay behind in a cross shape with a central hub. The exercise yards lay between the wards.

Sources of information

There are a couple of good articles with further detail and information about the main workhouse building and how it operated.

An article by Steve Cockayne written in 2010 for the journal of the Market Harborough Historical Society, *Harborough Historian No 27, 2010, entitled The Market Harborough Workhouse*. This is archived and available in the

Harborough Museum or further information can be obtained from: www.marketharboroughhistoricalsociety.org

There is also a website devoted to workhouses: <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/> and a page devoted to Market Harborough workhouse

The Casual Ward

There were a number of extensions to the workhouse over the years including the Casual Ward which was built in 1936. This was situated at the western end of the complex and could offer accommodation in the metal walled cubicles behind the reception area. The tramps who stayed there were turned out each morning and after a couple of nights were moved on to find accommodation elsewhere. The utilitarian brick design of this building contrasted to the brick and stone facade of the original 1836 building.



Photograph shows The Casual Ward in 2011 shortly before its demolition

Jarrow Crusade October 1936

The casual ward has its own interesting history. The building was unfinished but was offered to the 200 Jarrow marchers who stayed there on Friday 23rd October 1936. There are accounts that among all the places they stayed on

their long march this was their least favourite. The Market Harborough Advertiser and Midland Mail carried an article the following week on 30th October 1936 in which it defends the local action and answers criticism, obviously in the London Press. They reported:

“The Jarrow marchers, who are due to arrive in London to-morrow, where they hope to impress their plight of their own town upon the Government, spent last Friday night in Market Harborough. Headed by Miss Ellen Wilkinson, M.P. (for Jarrow) they were welcomed at the Public Assistance Institution by Bishop J.J. Willis, Assistant Bishop of Leicester.....Although still very tired Miss Wilkinson addressed the mass meeting in the County Cinema at night.....

“Reports in the London Press were liable to leave an impression that the men endured great hardship by sleeping on the brick floors of the new block at the Institution. Actually the men were very comfortable. The master and matron and the Institution staff spared no effort in giving the men a warm welcome.

“Extra blankets were lent to supplement those carried by the marchers and the wards were well warmed. The food ration was the same as the blind marchers had the previous night. Instead of bread and margarine, butter was supplied and cooked meat. The men dined in the main hall and to give a more homely touch vases of flowers were set out on the tables.

“.....Councillor Riley, the road marshal, told the “Market Harborough Advertiser” that the collection at the County Cinema showed a bigger average per person than at most other places they had visited. He seemed a little disappointed, however, that not a single member of the Urban Council had put in an appearance to welcome the pilgrims”

From a distance of 80 years it seems they rather missed the point. The staff at the Institution obviously did their best with the arrival of an unprecedented number of people at their doors but maybe there was a better place for them to stay. The 200 marchers were not homeless, vagrants or itinerants. They were working men who like 70% of their fellow residents of Jarrow had no work, no prospect of work and no money coming in. The march was carefully planned and the men's health checked. You can read a copy of the letter sent from the Manager of the Ministry of Labour in Jarrow to the Home Office giving detailed plans of the march.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/thirties-britain/jarrow-crusade/>

You can also view the list of towns visited during the march.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/thirties-britain/route-jarrow-marchers/>

On the way from Leicester on 23rd October 1936 Ellen Wilkinson addressed the marchers from the mound in Kibworth and on the Saturday morning they left Harborough and set off for Northampton where they had a days rest on the Sunday.

Casual Ward in Wartime

In 1940 when Britain was under threat of invasion from Nazi Germany, many of the exhibits in the museums and galleries in London were evacuated to safer places throughout the country and hidden in remote caves and underground chambers. What is less known is that the documents from the Public Record Office were also removed from the Capital.

In his book ***Operation Sealion - How Britain crushed the German War Machine's Dreams of Invasion in 1940***, author Leo McKinstry reveals the part the casual ward at Market Harborough Workhouse played in keeping records safe during the war years.

The relevant extract reads:

"For its most important documents, the Public Record Office found a quartet of contrasting venues, made up of the women's wing of a disused prison in Shepton Mallet, the casual ward of the old workhouse in Market Harborough, and the splendours of Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire and Haddon Hall in Derbyshire. More than 1,000 tons of material were sent to these four places, with the most precious records, such as the Domesday Book and the collection of royal degrees, going to Belvoir."

Author: *Leo McKinstry*

Title: *Operation Sealion - How Britain crushed the German War Machine's Dreams of Invasion in 1940* Published 2014 by John Murray (Publishers) 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH
A Hachette UK company ISBN 978-1-84854-701-8

We have asked around and no one to date seems to know about how this rather unremarkable building played its part in World War II. Maybe even after 75 years they still feel the need for secrecy. Elsewhere in the book it mentions that all the documents were retrieved intact at the end of the war.

We assume that the casual ward retained its original purpose at the end of the war for a few years. We have an eye witness who had school friends who were resident there “for their own safety” and the building was reputedly used for homeless families and itinerant working men until the 1970s.

The author of this article visited the building in the early 1980s when it was offered as a project for the Youth Training Scheme. It was in a bad state of repair although the iron cubicles, baths and a clothes sanitizing machine were all visible. It was considered too much work and too dangerous for 16 year old building trainees to take on and the adult unemployment scheme, Market Harborough Opportunities Programme, took it over, restored it and used it as their base, presumably for several years until the scheme closed down.

One of the last pictures of the casual ward appears on Jonathan Calder’s Liberal England blog on 7th February 2011.

And, finally, the demolition of the casual ward can be seen taking place on Google Earth’s picture taken in 2010. The University of Leicester carried out a watching brief prior to demolition.

The ULAS report reference is: ULAS 2010-82 and the link is:

<https://doi.org/10.5284/1010949>

RFC

Transition from Workhouse to Hospital

The transition from workhouse to hospital nationally was a long and complex one. Although the Local Government Act 1929 abolished the workhouse system, the Poor Law did not disappear entirely until the birth of the NHS in 1948. On the way, the healthcare aspects of the Poor Law gradually came to the fore. A very informative article by M.A. Crowther sets out this transition. It also highlights the perplexing relationship between voluntary aided and private hospitals and local authority provision, with funding, as ever, being a driving force.

At the time of writing (2016) St Luke’s Hospital is part of the Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, a healthcare trust which provides care for a broad range of clients, in community hospitals and mental health and learning disability services. St Luke’s fits into the picture as a community hospital offering rehabilitation, palliative and end of life care, usually after a stay in an acute hospital. Many of its patients are in the older age group, though the

hospital is now developing and growing and will soon offer a much wider range of services.

Nevertheless, care of older people can be seen as a link back to the hospital's origins, with this age group making up the largest proportion of workhouse inmates nationally. St Luke's, in common with other workhouses, had an infirmary and, as Crowther highlights, there was often no clear distinction between these two aspects of the institution.

The term 'workhouse' always had a pejorative ring to it and was feared by many who needed care, especially in old age. Therefore, the term 'workhouse' was replaced, in 1913, under the Poor Law Institution Order, by the term 'Institution'. Some local authorities moved away from these terms all together but it is not clear when the name "St Luke's" was adopted. However, it was certainly in place by the Second World War. However, the workhouse name still lingered and I recall older people in Market Harborough still using it in the 1960s and 70s.

With the advent of the NHS, hospital care moved to the NHS. In some areas local authorities kept the buildings (and staff) and some former workhouses became homes for older people. Others joined the NHS, some becoming hospitals for people with mental illness or learning disability, others community hospitals such as St Luke's. As Crowther points out, the relatively low status of 'geriatric' care and, indeed, care of people with mental health and learning disability often meant that these hospitals were the poor relation still.

In my nursing career, I have visited several former workhouses, most, like St Luke's, on the edge of town with some of the old buildings intact. The older buildings at St Luke's date back to the 19th century and there are photos in reception showing the rest of the workhouse buildings fronting Leicester Road.

It is unclear whether St Luke's became part of the NHS immediately. However, it certainly cared for many older patients, particularly at the end of their lives. My own great grandmother was one, in the late 1950s. My father recalled visiting there where she was being looked after in a large ward with other older ladies.

My mother worked there as a nursing auxiliary in the 1970s and I still have her training notes. These indicate that St Luke's was affiliated with Leicester hospitals, the Infirmary and the General. The old buildings were still in use then and had the capacity to house a large number of patients. In those days, and up until the 1980s, the NHS did care for older patients in long stay setting, the old style 'geriatric ward'. This was particularly so for older people with dementia and some people would have had a bed for life.

All this changed in the 1990s, with a drive to care for people in their own homes or in local authority or private care homes, bringing about tensions between the NHS and local authorities- echoing those between the voluntary services and local authorities in the early 20th century.

With the turn of the 20th century, it was clear that new hospital provision was due in Market Harborough. The old Cottage Hospital in the centre of the town closed its beds and became out patient only. St Luke's continued to have beds and still does at the time of writing (2018).

After a long period of frustrated plans, new hospital out patient facilities and a GP surgery finally opened at St Luke's by 2016. During the planning stage, it was suggested that the name be changed from St Luke's, as that still had connotations of the old workhouse, which clearly cast a shadow into the 21st century. However the name "St. Luke's" still endures, which seems appropriate, as that was the name chosen to dispel the old workhouse name, back in the early 20th century.

For those who want to read more, Crowther's article can be found here

www.evolve360.co.uk/Data/10/Docs/workhouse/Poor_Crowther.pdf

And the full reference is:

Crowther, M.A. (1999) *From workhouse to NHS hospital in Britain, 1929-1948*. In: Hillam, C. and Bon, J.M. (eds.) *The Poor Law and After: Workhouse Hospitals and Public Welfare*. Liverpool Medical History Society: Liverpool, pp. 38-49.

MJK

References:

Crowther M.A. "From workhouse to NHS Hospital in Britain 1929-1948"

The following information is from the Information Board at the St Lukes Hospital site 2016.

1609 Almshouse maintained by town estate feoffees (trustees)

1725 The Market Harborough almshouses are mentioned in An Account of Several Workhouses for

Employing and Maintaining the Poor

1728 Market Harborough feoffees convert several small houses in their care into almshouses for the poor, sited at the corner of Adam and Eve Street and Sheep Market. This was paid for by the poor rates which were a tax levied on properties in each parish to provide poor relief

1780 Estimated to be 300 families in the town and 20-25 people in the workhouse

1793 Joseph Tilley becomes workhouse master and bears all expenses for £4 4s. a week. His duties

included teaching the children to read

1796 The master is paid 2s 6d. a week per pauper in the workhouse **1798** The master is paid £6 a week per pauper in the workhouse **1800** Overseers pay all charges directly

1803 Workhouse re-built by overseers

1834 Poor law introduced

1836 New workhouse costing £5000 constructed designed by workhouse architect, Sampson Kempthorne. Much larger than the old building, it accommodates 200-300 people from 44 different parishes

1881 Census reveals 102 paupers and 5 staff: master, matron, school mistress, nurse and porter. The “paupers” were divided into 3 groups: inmates or long term residents of the institution; casuals or itinerants (they were housed in the unfortunately named “tramps ward”) and scholars or schoolchildren. The inmates were further categorised as either idiot, dumb or imbecile

1888 Pig sties installed

1899 New infirmary built, still used by St Lukes Hospital today

1918 Poor relief introduced and run by central government

1930 Workhouse back under local authority

1930s The term workhouse dropped, now referred to as Poor Law Institute or PLI

1939 Nurses Home is built, no trace of this survives today

1945 Workhouses phased out after introduction of the National Health Service and the Welfare State

1950 Ambulance station built. Site now referred to as 33 Leicester Road and not PLI

1959 Last births and deaths at 33 Leicester Road are registered. A casual ward for homeless and itinerant workers remains until the 1970s

1960 The building is mentioned by Nikolaus Pevsner in The Buildings of England: Leicestershire and Rutland saying “...some more Georgian houses,

further out the former Workhouse, of brick, the centre nine bays wide with a three-bay pediment. This is of 1836 and also still classical”

1974 St Lukes Hospital is built around the old workhouse, including a new geriatric ward and the modernised workhouse infirmary becomes the female ward

1975 Workhouse demolished

2017 The new St Lukes Hospital is completed. It now houses two in patient wards; a GP practice and a Treatment Centre.

MJK



Photograph shows the new St Lukes Hospital opened in 2017

More Information Need

We are hoping to include the following and need help. Please contact us on the Heritage Group's email

address, greatbowdenheritage@virginmedia.com or on our Great Bowden Heritage Facebook page if you can help with any of the following questions or have anything interesting to contribute to the history of the St Lukes Hospital site.

Does anyone have personal memories of the nurses home which was built in 1939 but of which no trace remains?

Were you part of the Opportunities Programme and what can you remember about how and for how long the building was used?

Do you have any memories of the old workhouse building before it was demolished in 1975?

Thank you