



Highworth former parish workhouse, 2005. © Peter Higginbotham.

## Workhouse and Hospital

A parliamentary report of 1777 recorded parish workhouse in operation at Stratton St Margaret (20 inmates). [Highworth & Swindon Poor Law Union](#) (renamed Swindon and Highworth in 1895) officially came into existence on 23rd November 1835. The Highworth and Swindon Workhouse was built within the Parish from 1834 having been re-located from Highworth. The new Workhouse was built in 1845/6 and a hospital was built in 1852, the 1848 Hungerford Workhouse was built to the same design, its address finally becoming 8 Highworth Road to save peoples blushes on birth certificates.

An 1897 shopping list - Carbolic Oil, Methylated Spirit, Cordy's Liquid, Calmits Card Acid, Camphor, Hays Strapping, Bella Plaster, Fullers Earth, Vaseline, Lint & Fly paper.

1915 Kelley's Directory shows following detail - Poor Law Institution, Stratton St Margaret, 2 1/2 miles from Swindon, a building of brick and stone, erected in 1847, and will hold 460 inmates. Rev. Sydney Denton, Chaplain David Muir, Medical Officer Herbert T. Bond, Master Mrs Eleanor C. Kilby, Matron. Board day, every alternate Wednesday, at the Poor Law Institution, Stratton St Margaret, at 10.30am. Mr H T Bond died on 4<sup>th</sup> Jan 1921 after a short bout of pneumonia.

The Union comprises the following parishes: Bishopstone, Blunsdon St Andrew, Castle Eaton, Chisledon, Hannington, Highworth, Hinton Little, Inglesham, Liddington, South Marston, Rodbourne Cheney, Stanton Fitzwarren, Stratton St Margaret, Swindon, Wanborough, Wroughton.

The population of the Union in 1911 was 65,890, area 53.986 acres, rateable value Lady Day 1915, £334,069. Chairman of the Board of Guardians, James Smith Protheroe, 177 Victoria Road. Clerk to the Guardians and Assessment Committee, John Peter Kirby, 100, Victoria Road, Swindon.

A Digital representation of the workhouse can be seen on YouTube [here](#).

After 1930, the former workhouse became a Public Assistance Institution, with the infirmary being used as a general hospital. Five Emergency Medical Scheme wards were erected at the south of the site in 1940, then after the inauguration of the National Health Service in 1948, the site became St Margaret's Hospital for Geriatric patients under Oxford Health Authority, transferring to Swindon in 1974.

### Extracts from Local papers: -

1855 - Mr. William C Golding, master.

22<sup>nd</sup> March 1858 – The Union was advertising for staff – Porter £16 per annum, must be able to read & write and Laundry woman £12 per annum aged 35 to 50, both would also receive board & lodging.

27 June 1859 - SUDDEN DEATH – An inquest was held on Tuesday last on the body of John Dunn, who has been for some years an inmate of the Workhouse. For a week or so previously he had complained of being ill, and had received medical treatment; but on Friday last, he thought himself better, and on Saturday evening he ate a heartier supper than he had done for some time and was very cheerful. A very short time later he left his room and went into the yard, where he was found to have fallen down, and a few minutes after he expired. The jury returned a verdict that he had “Died by the Visitation of God”.

1867 - Thomas East, master. Mrs. Mary East, matron

10<sup>th</sup> Feb 1870 - Wiltshire Independent - Inquest – An inquest was held by Mr Whitmarsh, coroner, on Thursday last, at the Workhouse, on the body of Edwin, Infant son of Roseanna Nash, a single woman. The facts of the case were very simple, but afford another instance of the regard persons have for each other after cohabiting together. The woman Nash has been living with James Archer, a chimney sweep, of Faringdon, by whom she had the child, the deceased. On Monday after a quarrel, Archer turned his partner out onto the street, and both mother and infant slept on the floor at the house of a neighbour. The next morning, she started for Highworth, and procured an order for the workhouse, where she arrived in the afternoon. At six o'clock, both mother and infant retired to rest, but on awakening about one o'clock the next morning, she found the child dead by her side. Mr J Campbell McLean, one of the Medical officers of the Union, stated that having examined the child, there was lividity on the body indicating suffocation, when the returned a verdict of 'Accidental Death'.

12th June 1872 - It was resolved that Thomas Morse of Stratton St Margaret be requested to contribute the sum of 1/6d per week towards the maintenance of his mother Phyllis Morse.

17th July 1872 - Harriet Summers the wife of Edward Summers of Bishopstone had been removed to the asylum by Mr Paul Morse on behalf of the Board of this Union.

1875 - Mr. John Houghton, master

1889 - Rev. Septimus Isaac Crawhall m.a., chaplain; James Fernie, medical officer; Edwin James Stephens, master; Mrs. Elizabeth Stephens, matron.

24<sup>th</sup> Jan 1891 – John Thompson aged 10 and Frank Thompson aged 8 were charged with indecently assaulting Laura Jobbins aged 10, daughter of Ezra Jobbins a mason of Stratton on Jan 16<sup>th</sup>. The two lads had been in the Workhouse for several months after being abandoned by their father.

17/10/1894 Annie Teal aged 14 was sent from Workhouse to Village on errand. About 150 yards from Workhouse she collapsed and died soon after of a weak heart.

In 1896 the medical officer was paid £77 per year.

24/04/1920 – Thomas Heath, aged 41, of Haydon St, Swindon committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor.

**Swindon Evening Advertiser 1947:** 'Elsie and Doris Waters (Gert and Daisy) the radio stars who were appearing at the Empire Theatre in Swindon, visited the Stratton Hospital after receiving requests from more than 30 patients in the women's surgical ward. They moved from bed to bed cheering up patients.'

27/10/1945 – Advert for staff – Male Attendant £75, Assistant Master £85, Porter £80, Female Attendant £75.

1948 Stratton St Margaret Institution Master - Mr R Bird, and Dr John Lowe was Medical Superintendent and Miss Moan the Matron. Children's Home - Foster Father Mr Gilbert, Foster Mother Mrs Gilbert

5<sup>th</sup> December 1970: The new £35,000 Day hospital at the St Margaret's Hospital in Stratton St Margaret was officially opened by Ernest Le Q Herbert, chairman of the St Margaret Hospital Management Committee. The hospital has been unofficially open for the last two weeks and 30 patients attend daily for services from physiotherapists, occupational physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and medical social workers. (extract from Evening Advertiser)

**Evening Advertiser 1977:** 'Life got a little bit easier for patients at St Margaret's Hospital, Stratton St Margaret, thanks to Highworth Lions Club. The club provided the hospital with a much-needed water bed costing £655.' The main building was demolished about 1990, the rest being demolished and redeveloped in 1992 as Sandlewood Court - Avon & Wiltshire Mental Care Service and Merchiston GP Surgery.