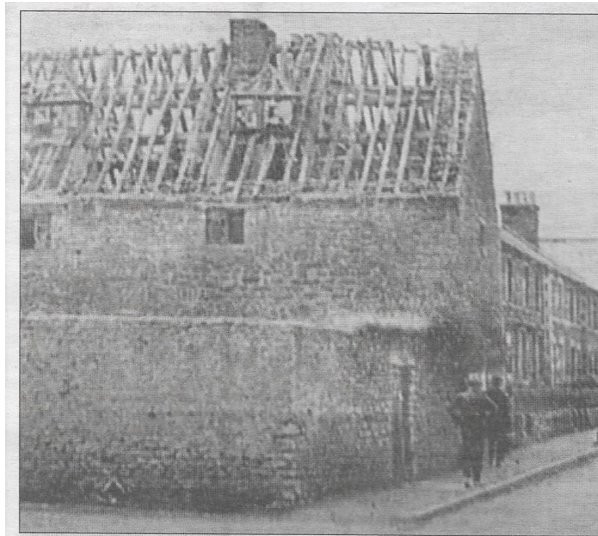




Highworth former parish workhouse, 2005. © Peter Higginbotham.



Original parish workhouse, Ermin St – 1925 – Swindon Advertiser

## Highworth and Swindon Workhouse and Hospital

A parliamentary report of 1777 recorded parish poor house in operation at Stratton St Margaret (20 inmates), this was in Ermin Street opposite The Wheatsheaf. Was converted to cottages, Mr Beams being last resident. Now site of Rose Garden.

Following passing of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act ('New Poor Law'), for the first 12 months the Georgian workhouse at Highworth, and more rustic Wroughton workhouse were both used by Highworth & Swindon Poor Law Union, (there was no longer any provision at Stratton). This allowed time for Highworth workhouse to be extended, which then became the Union's sole workhouse.

The **Highworth & Swindon Poor Law Union** (renamed Swindon and Highworth on 25-03-1899,) officially came into existence on 23-11-1835, first clerk was A.S. CROWDY. In 1836 the Union was divided into two districts for Registration of births & deaths, Swindon & Highworth. *Devizes & Wiltshire Gazette 27-10-1836.*

1837 appointment of Registrars, Highworth, Mr John Cook SALMON, Swindon, Mr. Robert AVENALL. *Devizes & Wiltshire Gazette 22-06-1837.*

1838 Tenders required from Medical Gentlemen, cost per case for work within the Union, to include midwifery at 10s 6d per case, for one year from 25<sup>th</sup> March. *Wiltshire Independent 01-03-1838.*

It was decided in 1843 to build a new Workhouse in 1845 (*The Bath Chronicle 13-02-1845*), Adverts for land were put in local papers in January 1845. (*Wilts & Gloucester Standard 28-01-1845*), Guardians decided on or near Stratton, (*Wiltshire Independent 13-02-1845*), tenders for the work were called for during March 1845, Mr Foden of the Strand was the architect, (It should also be noted that, although Strehill Foden was the architect, both he and Henry Parker were jointly responsible for its design,) when construction of the new replacement workhouse at Stratton St. Margaret, built by Messrs Smith & Pedley of Highworth (*Devizes & Wiltshire Gazette 22-05-1845*), the foundation stone was laid on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, (*Devizes & Wiltshire Gazette 05-06-1845*), and was completed during 1845 and occupied for the first time in 1846. The building at Highworth was subsequently sold with income from this being used to pay off some of the debt, The foundation Stone was laid on 03-06-1845. The T-shaped main building accommodated male inmates at the north and females at the south. The dining-hall and kitchens were located in the centre rear wing.

Salaries in 1846, when Stratton workhouse opened, were as follows:

Master - £90 pa

Schoolmaster £20 pa

Porter £16pa

Nurse £12 pa!

It was estimated an inmate cost 2/11d per week. The original infirmary block lay at the east. A new infirmary was erected in 1902 The new Infirmary was completed to the rear of the workhouse by A.J. Colbourne at a cost of approximately £15,000.'. It comprised a central administrative block with female 'inmates' were accommodated on the right & males to the left of the main entrance, its address finally becoming 8 Highworth Road to save peoples blushes on birth certificates.

*The 1848 Hungerford Workhouse was built to the same design.*

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 falling within the Union at the 1831 census was 12,611.

1864 – The Union Assessment Committee Amendment Act, to stop lengthy claims over wrongly set rates.

Three changes to Rules were made by the Guardians, Abolition of Parochial Settlements and constitute the several local parishes as one, abolish exemptions of woods and mines and thirdly treat expensive medicines such as Quinine, Cod-liver Oil &c should be supplied by the Guardians withing regulations of Poor Law Board. *Swindon Advertiser 28-11-1864.*

*The Poor Law Amendment Act 1868, which made it illegal to fail to provide a child with food, clothes, medical help or somewhere to live.*

1868 – Mr. Morris, Guardian and editor of Swindon Advertiser won right for press coverage of Board meetings. *Swindon Advertiser 27-04-1868.*

-James DODD was charged with destroying property of the Workhouse. Mr. Pritchard, the master, had found Dodd quarrelling with Spock, Dodd attacking Spock with a stone hammer, for this he was put in the lockup. Later when porter was taking him his meal, he was found to have removed his wooden leg and damaged the door and grating and loosened the wooden door. Having previous history, he was sentenced to two months gaol. *Swindon Advertiser 07-12-1868.*

By 1868 the Union also owned 6 acres that they farmed.

1868 to 1875 - Thomas Pritchard – master. He died 04-05-1878 aged 38 *North Wales Chronicle 18-05-1878.*

In 1869 there was a Parliamentary Commission Report on Boarded out children from Workhouses. From returns, Highworth & Swindon Union, cost per head 3s 9½d including food and clothing. Children in Workhouse school 96, 11 orphans, 21 deserted, 27 legitimate, 37 illegitimate. Total number boarded out 32, 16 orphans, 9 legitimate, 7 illegitimate. The children are placed out into service from the workhouse school as soon as they are about 13/14. Guardians would remove foster support if they were not put out to service by 14. *Example – Mary DODD, aged 12 with Mr & Mrs Enos BARNES, he is a tailor. She attends Board School and church. Allowance 2s 6d per week paid by guardians and 10s 6d quarterly clothing allowance. Others - Edith CHESTERMAN aged 11 & Sarah DAY aged 9 fostered with Jane ADAMS single woman. Jane WILKINS aged 13 with Mr & Mrs Ambrose BARNES employed in housework. Emily SELWOOD aged 6 and Thomas SELWOOD aged 5 with Mrs CARTER their Grandmother.*

*The Protection of Children Act was introduced in 1889.*

In 1903 a new infirmary was opened.

In 1904 the Registrar-General agreed to reference's to The Workhouse should be omitted from births to remove any stigma, alternative to be used. *Swindon Advertiser 23-09-1904.* Births from this date show 8 Highworth Road.

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](#).

During WWI the number of inmates decreased significantly as more casual labourers were required to cover for men called up. By 1915 the number of inmates had decreased to 246 from 313 the previous year and by 1916 to 185. 1916 had also seen the number of vagrants had fallen from 148 to 80.

The hospital was also used for wounded and 80 men were transferred from Reading, local groups arranged entertainment for the men. Mrs Muir was Matron at this time.

1923 Dennis Twyning was master, Miss Winifred Clowes was matron, and Rev. Sydney Denton was Chaplin. *Kelly's Directory 1923.*

1928 master was Mr. Harry Smith

1929 a stone chapel was added at a cost of £1,350, demolished in 1995.

1929 Local Government Act transferred governance to Counties, and it became Stratton St. Margaret Poor Law Institution.

*The Children and Young Persons Act was introduced in 1933*

In 1935 the infirmary became a general hospital, the first Matron earned £165-185 per year, and the workhouse was called a Public Assistance Institution. Five Emergency Medical Scheme wards were erected at the south of the site in 1936, they were built of wood and were supposed to be temporary, giving 134 beds in total, then after the inauguration of the National Health Service in 1948, under Oxford Health Authority, 1966 saw Medical, Paediatrics and Surgical being transferred to Princess Margaret's Hospital, the site became St Margaret's Hospital for Geriatric patients In 1994 it became part of Swindon & Marlborough NHS Trust and in 1999 everything was transferred to Princess Margaret's. Main Building Wards, from front, Right lower 5&6, right

upper 7&8, left lower 1&2, left upper 3&4, West Wing wards, Montgomery, Kingsley, Nightingale, Elizabeth (mental), Alex. There was also a separate Outpatients and Mortuary. The main workhouse building was demolished in around 1990 but the 1900 infirmary wings survived for another dozen years. 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 and the area behind for residential use.

1999 Demolished