

# **Building Report**

## **Vagrants Reception and Board Room, Kidderminster Workhouse, Sutton Road**

**Author:** Keith Shaw/Nigel Gilbert

**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2008

**Historic Kidderminster Project Ref:** 601

### **Introduction**

This report was undertaken as part of the Historic Kidderminster Project. This is an important building in Kidderminster's history, being all that remains of the workhouse, an institution hated and feared by the poor. Resources at both Worcester Record Office and Kidderminster Library have been used. We have also been able to examine an original plan of this building, which was added to the existing workhouse site in 1874.

### **Historical Background**

A Borough workhouse existed in Kidderminster in Vicar Street in the mid-eighteenth century. Around 1784 a larger one was built in the nearby Vicarage meadow, approximately where Oxford Street is today. A further expansion was needed and a new workhouse was erected in Hornes's Field (now Broad Street) in 1816.

There was also a workhouse in the parish of Kidderminster Foreign. In 1796 the overseers of the poor in Kidderminster Foreign entered into an agreement with one Edward Crow, described as a yeoman, to generally look after the poor and, in addition to his many duties, he was to have the use of "all that piece or parcel of building...since erected at or near Blakebrook....and the piece or parcel of ground near adjoining and now used as a garden...". This may well have been the workhouse that later became the nucleus of the Union Workhouse constructed in red brick between 1836 and 1838 on a piece of land extending to approximately 10 acres. (pp185/186, Tomkinson and Hall, 1975)

The Poor Law Act of 1834 tightened up the system of parish relief for the impoverished and unemployed. Parishes were grouped into "unions", and Kidderminster became the head of one such union. An expanded workhouse was erected on the Sutton Road site in 1837-38. It was built by Henry Herring. The architects were Knight and Nettleship. (p282, TWAS, 2000)

The workhouse was built to house 150, but by 1881 accommodated 323 inmates. Further expansion was completed in 1885 to include two hospitals: one with 66 beds for men and a second with 50 beds for women. Other buildings included a bakery, brewery, laundry and a boiler house together with a school for 120 children. These changes took the workhouse capacity up to 420. (p188, Tomkinson and Hall, 1975)

In 1889 the public house called the Tap House was purchased by the Guardians, who demolished it and added the ground to the workhouse site. From 1915 it was forbidden to keep children in workhouses and the Guardians leased "Sunnyside" in Franche Road as a home for the children. There is no record of further work before the Workhouse buildings were integrated into the National Health Service and formed part of Kidderminster General Hospital.



**The remaining buildings dating from the Kidderminster Union Workhouse.  
Sutton Rd frontage. Keith Shaw September 2007**

### **Vagrants Reception and Board Room**

This was erected in 1874 to a design by the local architect J. T. Meredith. The ground floor of the surviving building served as an administration block where prospective inmates were initially interviewed. It also provided accommodation for staff including a waiting area, porter's day room with adjacent bedroom, bread room and overseers' room. Stairs led to the Guardians' Board Room on the first floor with a clerk's room and retiring room for the use of the Guardians. They had a separate entrance, which led directly to a staircase to the Boardroom.

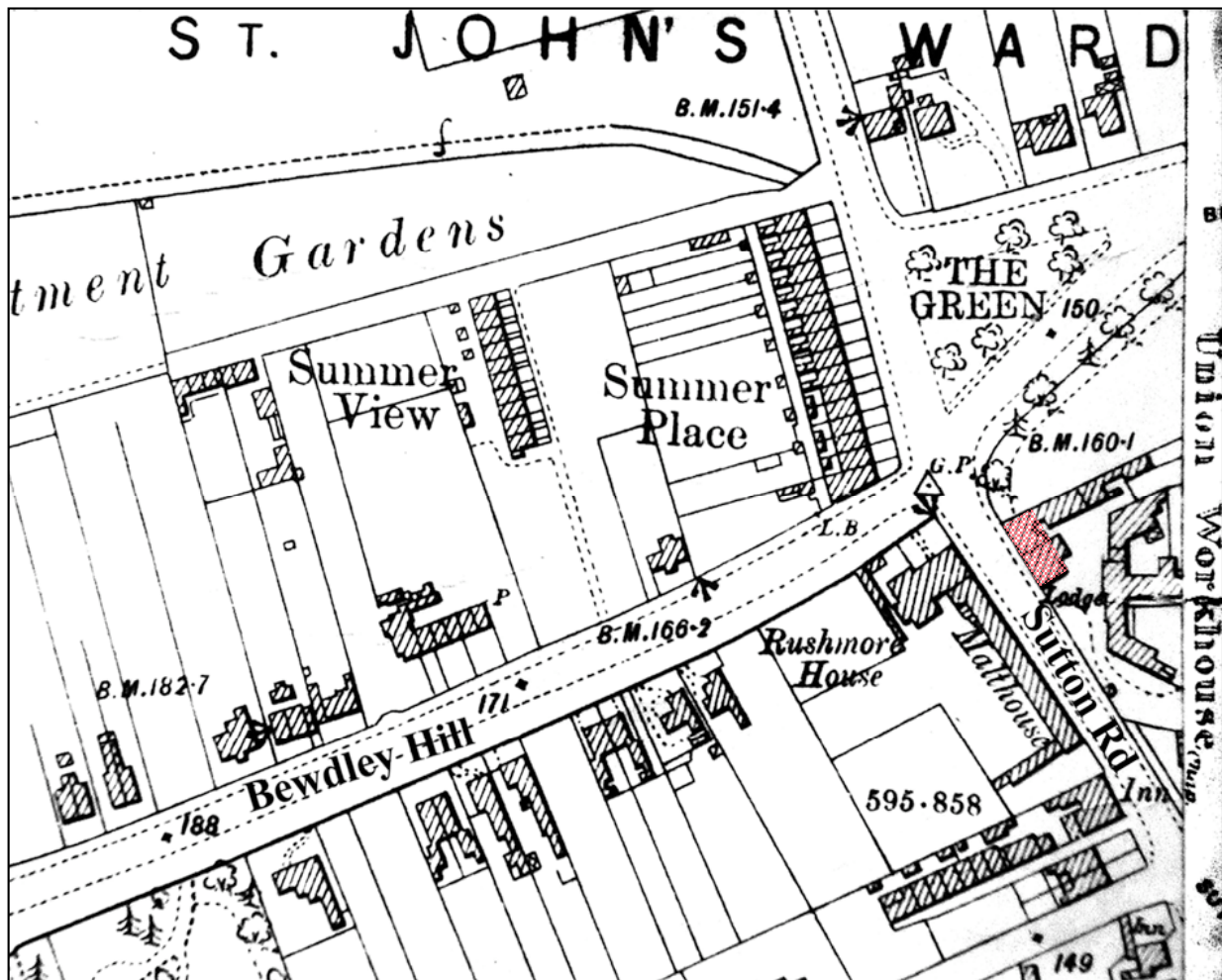
Also erected at the rear were vagrant wards, mostly for men. These have been demolished, apart from one room connected to the surviving main block which was a bathroom. The original plan shows a double room and three single rooms for women. There were ten men's wards (each some 10 feet by 3 feet 4 inches.) and ten labour cells across a passage. (The Local Government Board required some minor changes and a revised plan showed only nine male rooms which were slightly wider at 4 feet each.) The labour cells had an aperture through which stones to be broken had to pass, and the tramps were kept in until the stones were small enough to pass through. (p190, Tomkinson and Hall, 1975) Outside these cells was a stone yard. Provision was made on the plans also for drying ground, a coach house and stable, and a yard with a broken stone store and an unbroken stone store. Inmates broke stone as a condition of their accommodation and were detained until their task was completed.

The surviving reception building with boardroom and offices still remain with modifications. In recent years until 2007 it was in use as offices, but it is now empty. The original main entrance doorway has been partly bricked-up converting it into a window, the Guardians' entrance has been completely bricked up, entrance now being gained by a new doorway probably converted from a window.

One of the attached photographs shows some interesting brickwork on the Board Room chimney. Other recent photographs of the remaining building can be found at the Worcester Record Office web site (see below).



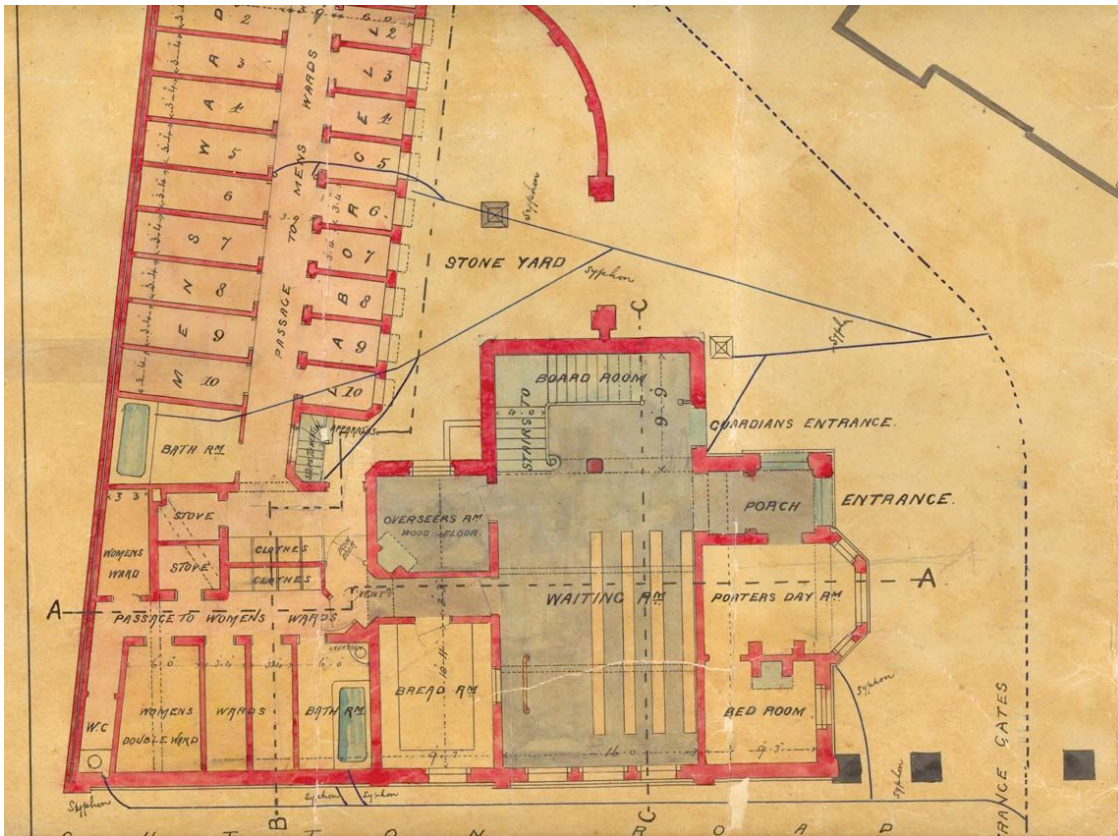
**Fancy brickwork in the Chimney of this building. Keith Shaw September 2007**



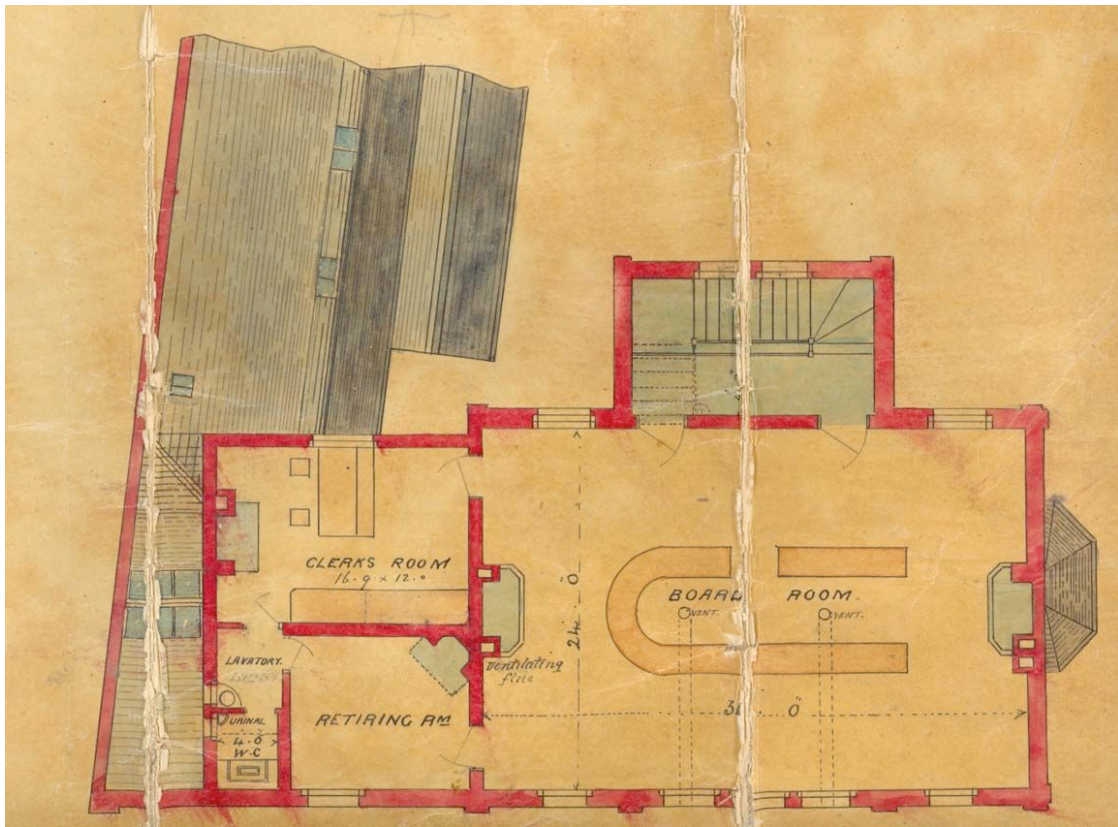
1902 OS Map – Ref: SO822764

### **Bibliography**

- 1) Worcester Record Office, County Hall, Spetchley Road, Worcester. WR5 2NP
- 2) Web site: [http://www.institutions.org.uk/pictures/workhouses/kidderminster\\_workhouse.htm](http://www.institutions.org.uk/pictures/workhouses/kidderminster_workhouse.htm)
- 3) "Kidderminster since 1800" by Ken Tomlinson and George Hall, (1975)
- 4) Plans of 1873 alterations loaned by Nigel Gilbert.
- 5) "William Knight, a Worcestershire Architect", by Don Gilbert from Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society, 2000.



1874 Plan Ground Floor



1874 Plan First Floor