

THE OPENING OF THE SECOND SURREY PAUPER LUNATIC ASYLUM AT BROOKWOOD

Iain Wakeford 2015

As promised a few weeks ago, this week we are looking at the early history of Brookwood Hospital, the Second Surrey County Pauper Lunatic Asylum, the first patients of which were admitted on the 17th June 1867.



The site covered over 150 acres, bought from the Necropolis Company in 1860

The first Surrey County Asylum was established at Wandsworth in 1841, but by the end of the 1850's it was clear that accommodation there was not enough and proposals were made to erect a second asylum at Woking – 'a spot easily approached from various points of the County by the convergence – of several railroads traversing the district'.

As we have already seen in previous weeks, one hundred and fifty acres were bought from the Necropolis Company, and the County surveyor, C.H Howell set to work designing the buildings. He was obviously meticulous with his plans, visiting asylums not just all over this country (in places such as Devon, Cheshire, Cambridge and Wiltshire), but also abroad at three sites in France (paid for no doubt by the good ratepayers of Surrey)!

The result, according to his report in 1862, was 'a general plan of blocks', with 'an attendant's room in the centre with a room on either side and at the back a spur for the staircase, single rooms, stores, water closets, etc.', all designed to be 'of a simple and inexpensive character'.

Whilst work on the buildings was taking place (the builders being Messrs Holland and Hannen of London) others were clearing the ground of what became 'Home Farm' ready for cultivation. In March 1867 the Committee of Visitors (chaired by the Hon. Francis Scott of Sendhurst Grange) arranged for a mole-catcher to be employed and also secured a 'bargeload of manure' (at 8/6 per ton) to be spread on the ground that only a few years ago had been open common land. They also purchased a 'horse and cart, plough and harrow' with 'seed potatoes and cabbages' so that by December the Inspection Report was able to note that 'twenty acres have now been brought under

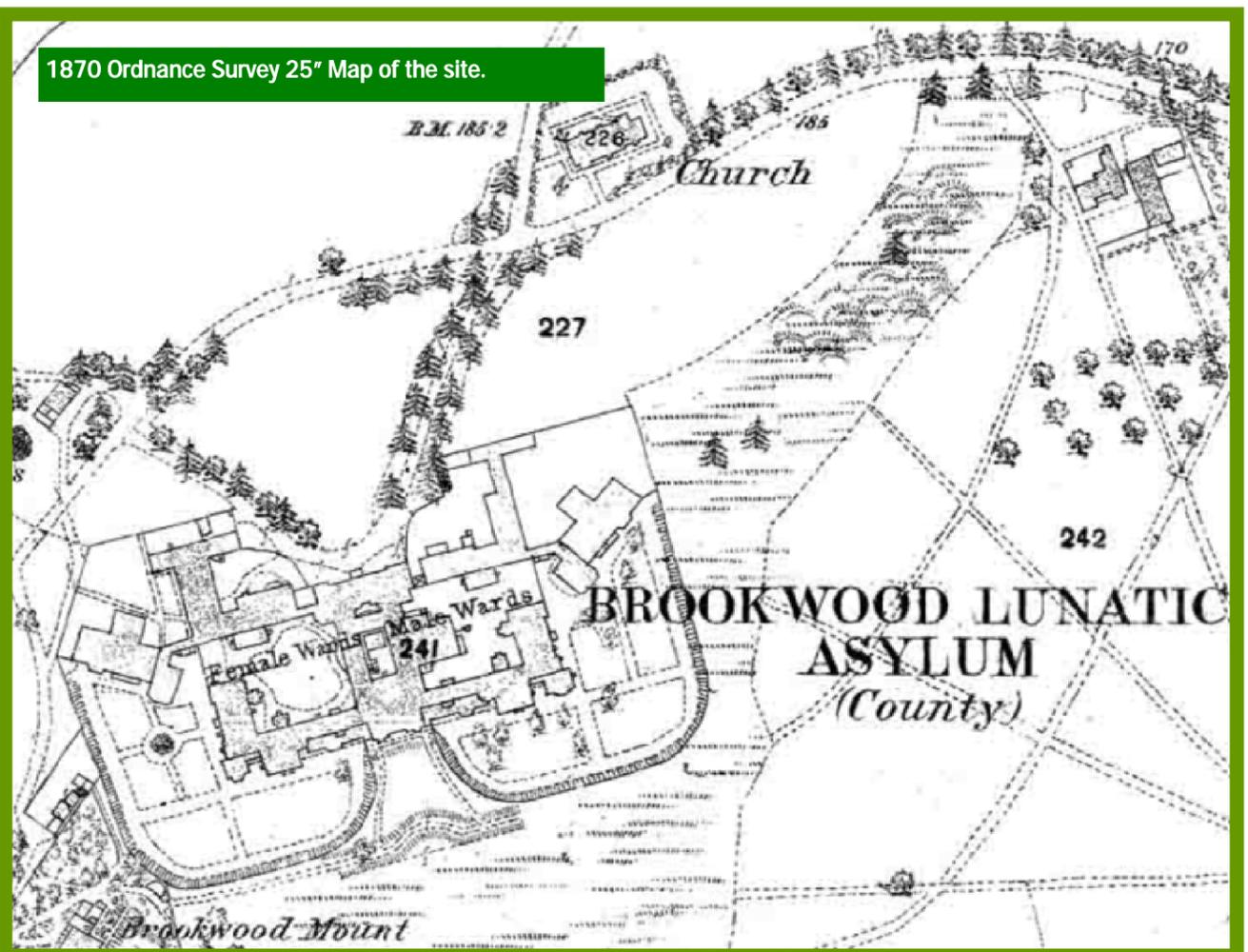
spade cultivation and thirty-three men go out daily under the gardener and farm bailiff'.

The gardener (who had to be married) was apparently paid 21/- a week and provided with 'a house, gas and coals'.

The reference to gas is interesting as the Asylum had its own gas works (more or less where the Sainsbury's Petrol Station is today). They also had their own water supply through

wells and reservoirs, although for a number of years water was also taken from the Basingstoke Canal, the canal company apparently charging £10 a month for the privilege.

The asylum was almost self-sufficient with male patients not just employed in the gardens and farms, but also in shoe-making, tailoring and 'other useful trades', whilst the women did



In March 1867 a barge-load of manure was brought to Brookwood to help prepare the grounds for the Home farm

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The Canal, from Hermitage Bridge, Knaphill, Woking.

needlework and straw-work or worked in the laundry or kitchens.

Looking at some of the case notes of patients it is clear that the work played a vital part in some peoples' recovery (although it was thought in 1867 that only 5% of patients were able to improve), with various recreational activities also helping considerably. To this end 'an ample supply of books and cheap publications of a cheerful nature, in addition to Bibles and Prayer Books, shall be provided and replaced in case of destruction'.

There was entertainment too, 'and various methods of in and outdoor amusements', including cards, dominoes and draughts, and a band, with concerts and balls occasionally taking place.

The library was to be run by the asylum chaplain, who we learn in April 1867 was to be 'of moderate views and not more than 45 years of age'. He also had to be married and devote all his work to the hospital for which he was paid £200 per annum. His wages seem quite excessive when compared to the pay of the attendants at the hospital who were paid just

£30 per annum for a 'first class' male (£18 for a first class female) and £25 per annum for a second class male attendant (£14 female – the same rate that an 'under laundrymaid' was paid in 1869).

It would be impossible to include the complete history of the site in these pages, but fortunately a recent publication by Alison Craze ('From Asylum to Community Care') covers much of the story with recollections of former patients and staff. The archive of the hospital is held at the Surrey History Centre in Goldsworth Road.

All of the original asylum buildings have now been demolished to make way for new homes, although later additions to the site have been retained and reused.

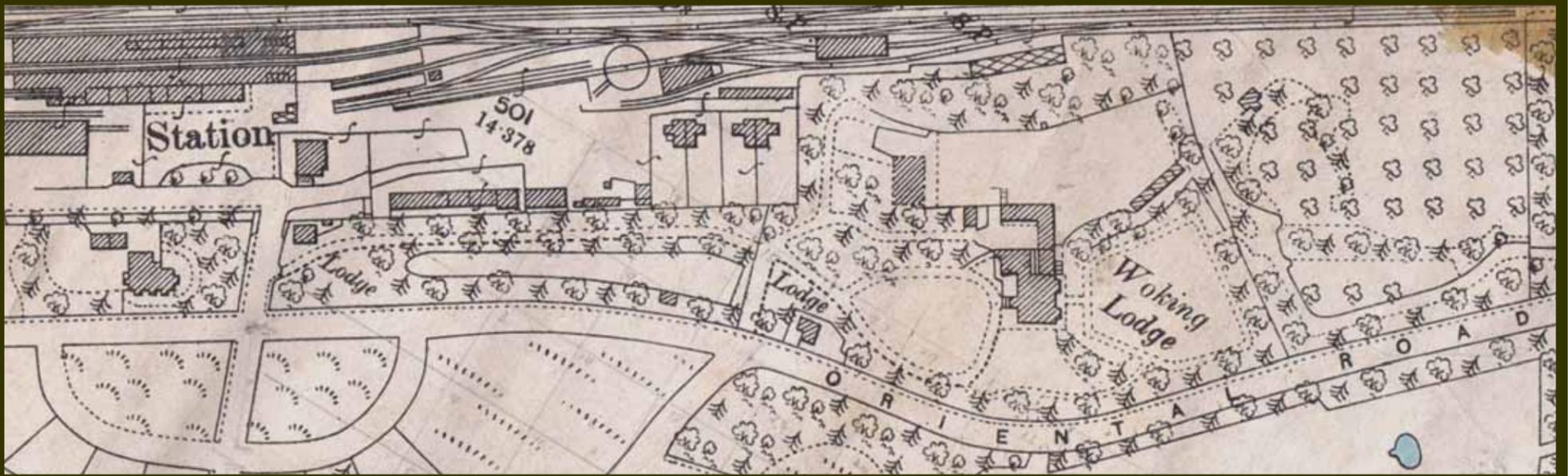
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WHY WOKING WAS BUILT BACK TO FRONT.

I also promised a couple of weeks ago to return to the subject of the Rastrick's – George and Henry – the sons of John Rastrick of Addlestone who had bought land immediately to the south of Woking Station from the Necropolis Company in the mid 1850's. They had added to his landholding over the years, but when George was persuaded to sell a small area of land on the corner of Chertsey Road, only to see it quickly sold on again at vast profit, he apparently refused to sell any more property in Woking and became something of a recluse.

In Victorian times the Rastrick's were accused by many of forcing Woking to be built 'back to front' – hence Henry Rastrick's back to front gibe in his garden wall behind the shops of Oriental Road. But as we have seen it was the Necropolis Company who sold the family the land and it is clear that they never intended the town to be built to the south where commercial properties would have de-valued the cost of their land around Heathside.

The Rastrick's were obviously quite eccentric and an easy target for those who needed someone other than themselves to blame for Woking's ills, and it was not until after George's death in 1905 that the Rastrick estate was sold and eventually developed.



THE WONDERFUL WALL-PAINTINGS OF PYRFORD

At Pyrford in 1869 restoration work by the architect Thomas Graham Jackson revealed some of the medieval frescoes that can still be seen on the walls of St Nicholas' Church. They show what is thought to be Christ bound to a column with 'a tormentor, clad in a tunic patterned with spots, wielding a scourge'. Next to it is another bearded figure and a third figure seated on a throne – both possibly more representations of Christ. There were apparently later, possibly post-reformation paintings on top of these, but they could not be preserved as they were on 'a very loose and tender coat of whitewash'. Nevertheless the frescoes give some insight into how colourful our local churches must have been in the medieval period, but are also testament to the fact that not every Victorian church restorer was over zealous.



Interior, Pyrford Church.