

THE ST PETER'S CONVENT & MEMORIAL HOME

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The old buildings of the Memorial Home can be seen from the Old Woking Road

In 1892 the St Peter's Convent and Memorial Home on Maybury Hill was extended with two more wards added to the original home. The convent was designed by John Loughborough Pearson (the architect of Truro Cathedral) together with his son Frank, and was opened in October 1885 for forty nuns and helpers of the St Peter's Sisterhood – an Anglican order founded in Kilburn in 1861 by Benjamin and Rosamira Lancaster for the nursing of 'ladies in bad health and narrow circumstance' (as the Victoria County History of Surrey put it).

The land was bought in 1883 by Matilda Blanche Gibbs, the wife of the wealthy merchant and philanthropist, William Gibbs of Tyntesfield in Somerset and given to the sisterhood to 'use as they saw fit'. The sisterhood decided to build a country home for 'incurables' and to admit patients that were refused by other homes. Benjamin Lancaster, who was a Governor of St George's Hospital, once again provided the money to build the 'Memorial Home' in memory of his wife, and the foundation stone was laid on the 17th October 1883 by the Bishop of Winchester.

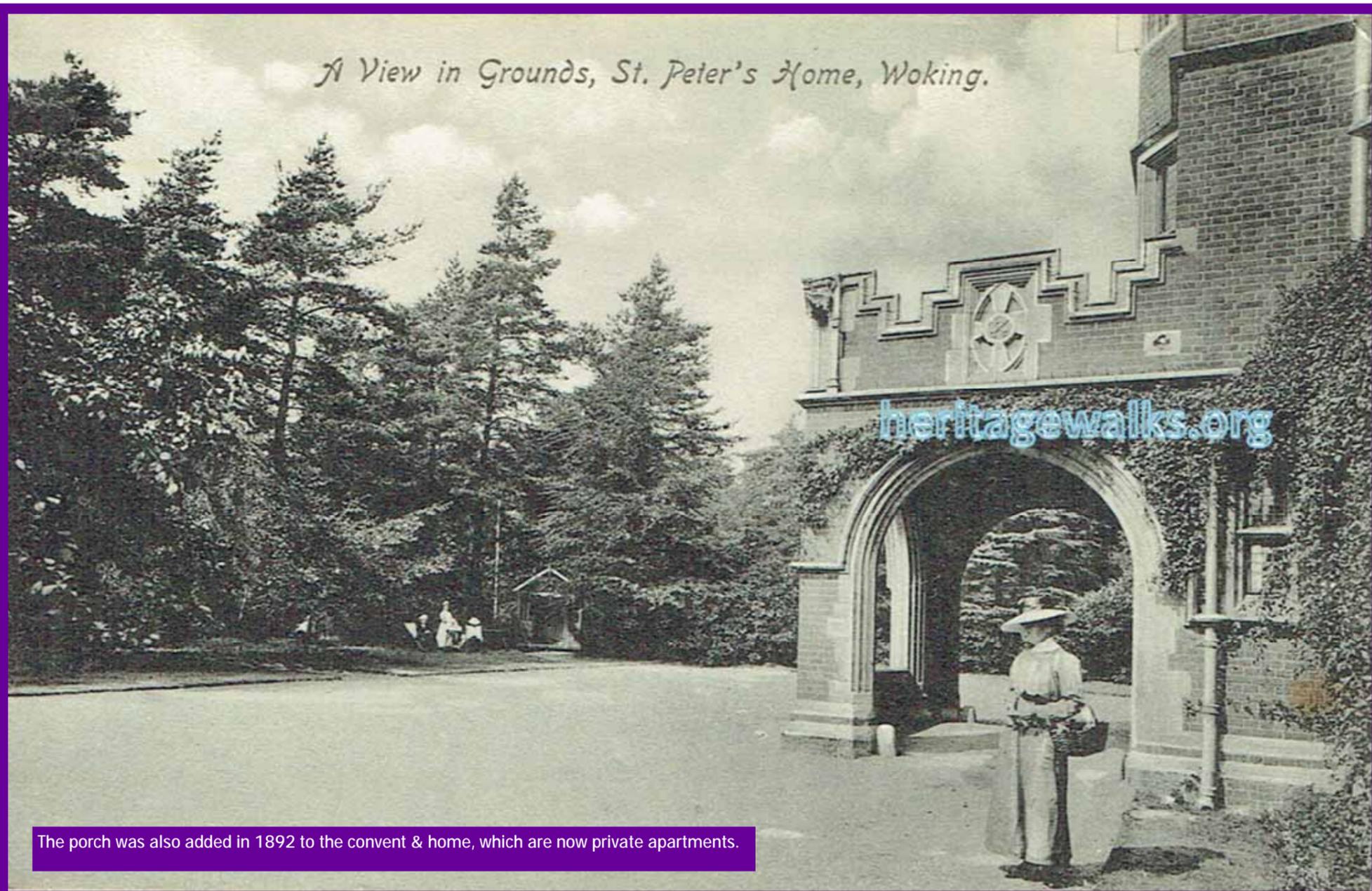
The original home catered for sixty patients, with two wards named the Rosamira and Lancaster Wards, and a small temporary chapel which was later turned into Lily Ward when another temporary iron chapel was added a few years later. More land was bought in 1889/9, including room for a 'kitchen garden' and in 1889 the porch and clock-tower were erected in memory of the first Mother Superior, Mother Susan, who died in 1887, followed a year later by Mr Lancaster.

The wing added in 1892 completed the originally intended quadrangle with St Raphael's ward and Blanche Ward (named after Mrs Gibbs who died in 1887) and eight separate



The clock tower was added in 1892 in memory of the first Mother Superior at the Home

A View in Grounds, St. Peter's Home, Woking.



The porch was also added in 1892 to the convent & home, which are now private apartments.

rooms 'for ladies who require nursing' - who received 'every care including medical treatment' for four guineas a week.

The majority of patients, however, did not pay for their care and in 1892 the Mother Superior reported on twenty-six cases of TB, two of which had died at the home in Maybury – one a girl of sixteen who died within six weeks of being admitted. Seven had recovered, however, including a needle-woman called Emily Stow whose seven sisters, her husband and four children had all sadly died of the disease.

In 1893 more land was added, funded by the

money left by Mr Lancaster in his will, including the purchase of adjacent properties known as 'The Lilacs', 'West Hill Lodge' and Merrington - a house in Lavender Road. The Lilacs was soon demolished and a house called Peterstowe built on the site (in 1894) for the chaplain, the Rev A D Burnett, but it would be a few more years before the magnificent chapel was built on the site – as we shall discover in a few weeks time.

Apparently the architect's drawings of some of the buildings by John Loughborough Pearson and his son (at Woking and at Kilburn) are held at the Canadian Centre for Architecture,

although why they are there I do not know (and I haven't had the opportunity to go and check them).

The registers of admission for the St Peter's Home are held at the Surrey History Centre, where some of the early ones can now be viewed (although later ones are still subject to the Data Protection Act). An index of the 1885-1908 records is available on line.

The old Convent buildings are now apartments, but the Sisterhood still run the St Columba's House complex in the grounds as a retreat and conference centre.

The St Peter's Sisterhood still run the St Columba's House Retreat & Conference Centre in the grounds of the old Convent & Home



LONG SERVICE AWARDS AT WEST END SCHOOL

There had been a National School at West End in Chobham since 1843, but the early records of the school appear to have become lost and the first teacher we know of is Miss Sarah Wood, who started in 1855 aged about twenty-one and went on teaching at the school until she retired in 1892.

When she started there were just over sixty pupils on the register (29 boys and 32 girls), of all ages and abilities and all taught by her in one room! Perhaps not surprisingly an inspectors report later noted that the

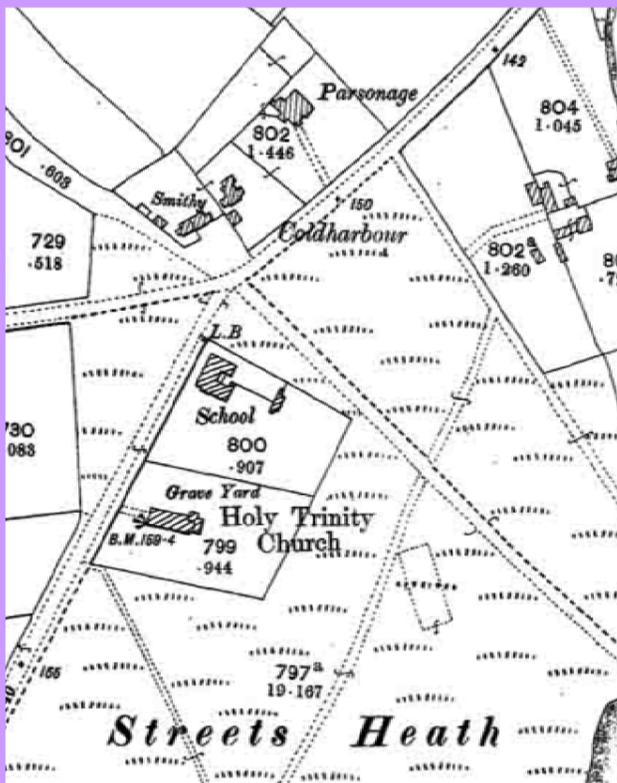


'attendance is too numerous for the available space', but went on to note that 'the children are notwithstanding unnaturally quiet and orderly', so she obviously was more than able to cope. It was not until 1882 that a new 'upper school' was added with further extensions in 1886 (to the Infant School for £250), by which time a pupil teacher and a 'monitress' were engaged to help look after the youngsters.

The monitress was Elizabeth Chandler, who at the age of twelve started work in the school in 1885 for a shilling a week, rising to £18 per

annum in 1892 when she became a pupil teacher. The following year she passed her examination to become a certified teacher, taking over from Miss Wood - a job that she would continue to do all her working life at West End until she too retired aged sixty in 1933.

I wonder how many of the teachers at the new Holy Trinity School will match their two predecessors' records – and whether the children could still be described as 'unnaturally quiet and orderly'!



BITS OF BISLEY FROM 1892

In 1892 the Vicar of Bisley, the Reverend Cater, published a history of the village entitled 'Bisley Bits'. Few original copies now survive, but I was fortunate enough many years ago to be lent a copy by an old resident and as we have now reached the early 1890's in our chronological history of the Woking area, it seems appropriate to quote a few passages from its pages here.

'Bisley, as it is at the present time, has been described as peculiar, and the statement is capable of some justification. To begin with the residences of the inhabitants. The eighty houses in which the people dwell are scattered indiscriminately over the ground, more as though they were the result of mere accident than indicative of any purpose or design. There is not the least approach whatever to the ordinary village street – in fact there is scarcely a couple of dwellings in conjunction.'

'Commercial enterprise has never located in Bisley, for there is not a single shopkeeper in the parish – not even a 'store' in which the trader may vend his varied wares. The nearest approach to anything of the kind is displayed in the two village inns, and even these by their rural signs, The Hen and Chickens and The Fox, seem to disown the trader. Or, in humble retirement in a window at the end of some



cottage garden may be seen indications that a few sweetmeats are procurable for sufficient consideration. No tradesmen, no dealer, no huckster, no market-place, no fair – one seems to read here 'Caveat emptor.'

I wonder what the good Reverend would make of developments in the village today – would he see the inclusion of shops and the building of houses 'in conjunction' as progress, or would he see the halving of the number of inns in the villages a step backwards?