

The Poor House at Bexley

It is sometimes said that the old vicarage was used as the parish poor house until it was demolished in 1766.

The Vestry minutes, though far from explicit, do not support this view, as the following resume shows.

First Volume

p. 43. 28/9/1766. It was agreed to buy two tenements then rented by the parish and occupied by the poor. A Mr. Morland had the disposal of them.

p.61. 8/5/1768. Agreed to pay Mr. Morland £100 for two houses near the poor house in order to enlarge it.

p. 62. 17/7/1768. This was confirmed.

p. 72. 6/4/1769. Purchase completed. Repairs proposed.

p. 75. 18/5/1769. Repairs commissioned.

p. 77. 30/7/1769. Repairs complete.

p. 91. 13/12/1770. Agreed to try to purchase the poor house of Bexley and a small messuage adjoining, to be sold by auction the following week.

p. 92. 7/2/1771. Proposed to exchange a messuage then occupied by Henry Harding, labourer, and Elizabeth Roberts, widow, for the one lately bought by Mr. Thomas Bradbridge of Bexley, which had been used for several years by the parish for their poor.

p. 93. 28/2/1771. As the parish could not make an effectual conveyance to Mr. Bradbridge, it was agreed to buy from him the poor house, then leased by the parish at £4 p.a.

p. 94. 1/4/1771. More about Henry Harding's house and garden, part of which was to be leased to Mr. Bradbridge for the garden of his intended messuage.

p. 102. 7/4/1772. Modifications to above lease agreed to.

p. 127. 31/7/1774. Proposal for a sick bay in the orchard or garden of the poor house.

p. 225. 6/1/1787. Agreed to advertise for and appoint a person to "farm and victual" the poor for three years, and to form a committee for the better regulation of them.

p. 228. 17/2/1787. Agreed to demolish the poor house and rebuild it.

p. 230. 10/3/1787. This was confirmed.

The implication of these minutes is that in 1766 there was a poor house in the parish, which was rented and not owned. Next to it were two houses also rented for the poor and these were bought in 1768 from their owner. In 1770 the poor house itself was put up for auction and the parish resolved to bid for it but apparently Thomas Bradbridge bought it. The parish then tried to get it from him in exchange for another house but later agreed to buy it from him. By 1771 therefore the parish owned both its poor house and the two adjacent houses.

In 1787 the poor house was demolished and rebuilt. It has recently been shown that the new poor house is the present numbers 34-36 High Street just west of the Railway tavern public house. There is no indication in the Vestry minutes of a change of site at the time of the rebuilding and it seems evident that the old poor house stood in the same position as the new. This is some considerable distance from the site of the old vicarage, which was near the church.

The subsequent history of the poor house reveals that in 1836 responsibility for the poor passed from the parish to the new Board of Guardians at Dartford, which at first decided to retain three of the workhouses inherited from the many parishes in the union. Dartford workhouse was to be for able-bodied men and for the aged and infirm; Swanscombe for women; and Bexley for children. At the end of 1837 it was decided that the Bexley poor house should be sold and the sale took place in 1838. At a later date the house was used as the Bexley stationmaster's house.