

The story of a north-east England street: 1860 to 2000



Ian Newton takes us on a tour of 150 years of his street in Stanhope, exploring the lives and occupations of previous residents and using maps and local newspapers to help bring the street's past to life

Our Street' is less than 200 metres in length, has no name and comprises 16 households yet is steeped in Victorian social history with connections to a notorious gangland murder which was later the basis for an iconic British movie. It is situated within Stanhope (County Durham), an historic market town, on the edge of the Pennines in north east England. Stanhope, meaning 'stone-ye-dale', provides a clue to the local industries of limestone quarrying, lead mining and agriculture. Only the latter remains.

The Street, (although Lane would be a more accurate description), sits off Union Lane which again provides a clue as to the occupancy in times gone by. There are six separate buildings in the Street (Lane), made from local stone and slated roofs, all of which can be dated back to 1866 when the Guardians of the Weardale Poor Law Union agreed to build a new workhouse that could accommodate up to 80 inmates. Prior to 1866 it was open pasture. From an 1861

Ordnance Survey map, the workhouse can be found on the eastern edge of the town.

When we magnify the area of the map containing the workhouse, it is possible to more easily identify the various buildings which are now residential houses, cottages and apartments (see below).

The buildings have all retained their external early Victorian features, even the openings for the grates, where the broken stone was passed through to the waiting carts outside can be seen in some walls.

A visit to the Weardale Museum provided sight of the original plans and drawings that were commissioned in 1866, (they had been rescued from a skip in 1974).

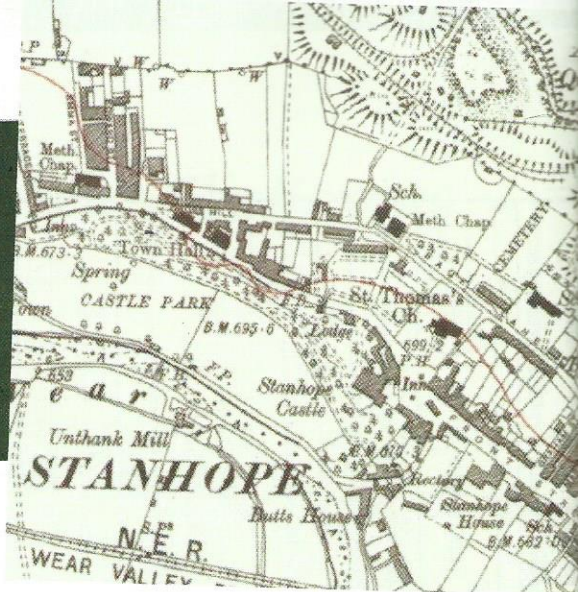
The external drawing (below right) is the building referred to as 'the Big House'. Closer inspection of the detailed plan (right) shows the left-hand side of the building was given to women and young girl paupers with Matron's office on the left as you entered the building. To the right is where the menfolk and young boys were accommodated, even the central

dining room was segregated, women to the left and men to the right. A nice touch are the two rooms on the bottom right-hand corner of the plan which were reserved for 'Aged married couples'.

The 19th-century occupants

The dominant declared occupation of the adult male inmates was one of quarryman, or stone-breaker or labourer. This was a constant throughout all the censuses reviewed. The numbers didn't vary much from one census to the next with 45 in 1871 and still 46 in 1911. What was noticeable was the age distributions, especially in the early and latter censuses. In 1871, it was mainly young families, aged 20-30 along with their children. In 1911, there were only two children, a brother and sister, with no parents, so presumably orphans. The average age of the remaining inmates would be close to 70.

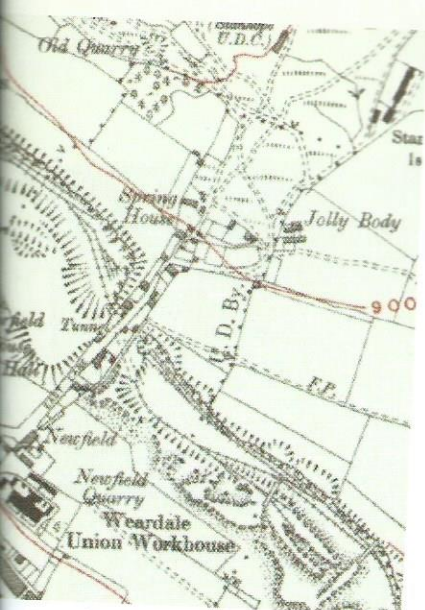
There could be many reasons for this, not least the increased mobility of the able-bodied workforce to find employment elsewhere. The migration from the rural countryside to the bright lights of the industrialised cities where employment was more readily



The buildings of the Union Workhouse, as depicted on an 1861 Ordnance Survey map

They are as follows:

1. Original workhouse buildings in Union Lane, built circa 1834
2. Boardroom and vagrants' quarters
3. the Workhouse, (stone breaking) - (No.12)
4. Laundry
5. Infirmary
6. Main living accommodation, 'the



Left: The OS map showing the Union Workhouse on the east of Stanhope

Top right: The grading grill where stone was pushed through for collection, and can still be seen beneath the windows today on the exteriors (see picture centre right)

...there are few places where the cold of winter is more felt than in this district which comprises Weardale Union and probably there are few places where the Guardians of the Poor have warmer hearts...

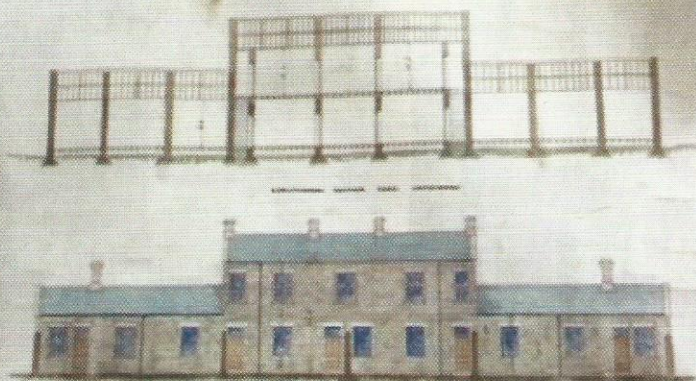
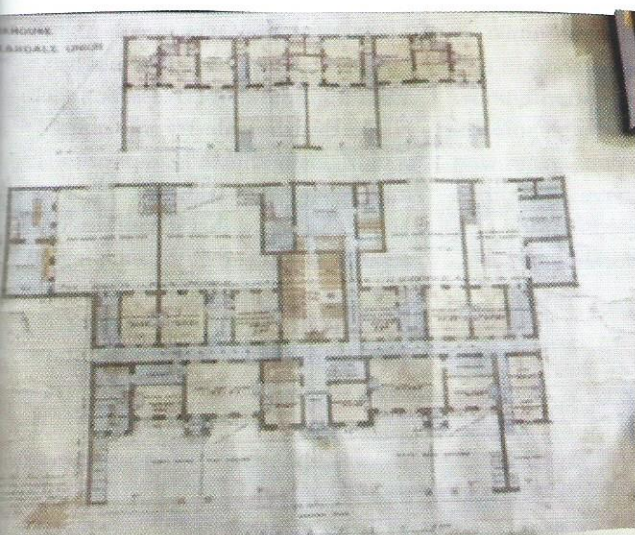
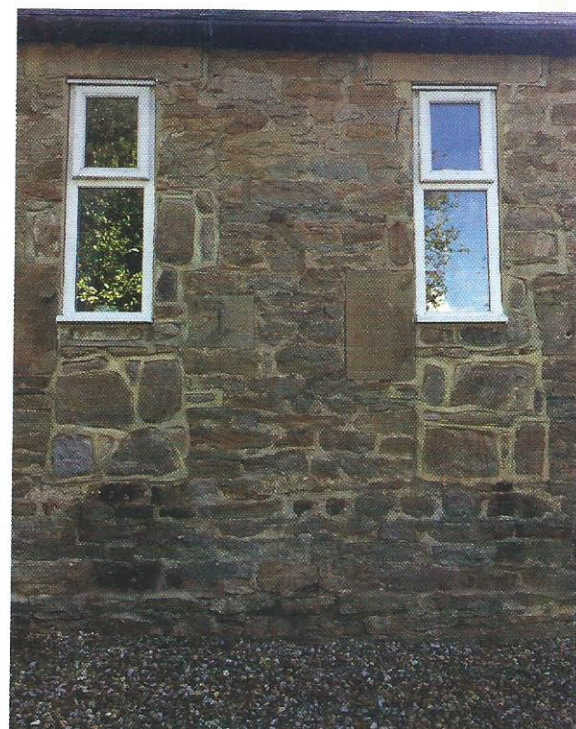
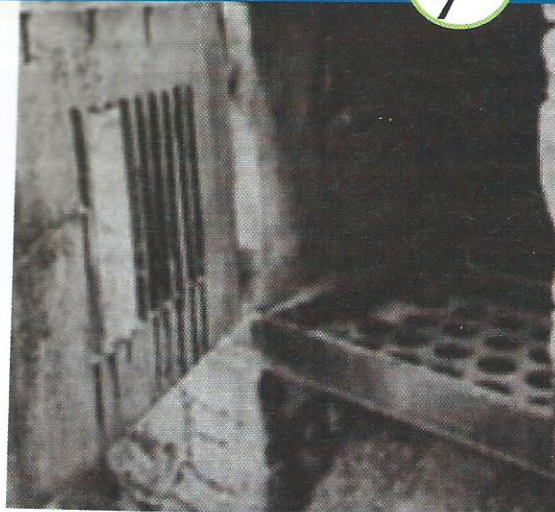
The article continues by describing how the elderly inmates were provided with new, warm clothing and extra food, and others with half a tonne of coal each for their stoves.

There is a separate report in the same book by Sanderson that details how the 'rich and famous' came together in 1900 to ensure there was plenty for everyone to celebrate the arrival of the new century.

The local war memorial situated in the marketplace contains many surnames that can also be found in the 1901 and 1911 workhouse registers. Whilst those in the workhouse with shared surnames on the war memorial would have been too old to serve in World War I, it is more than likely that their sons and other relatives took up arms to fight in the war and sadly never returned home.

Post-workhouse history

Workhouses were formally abolished

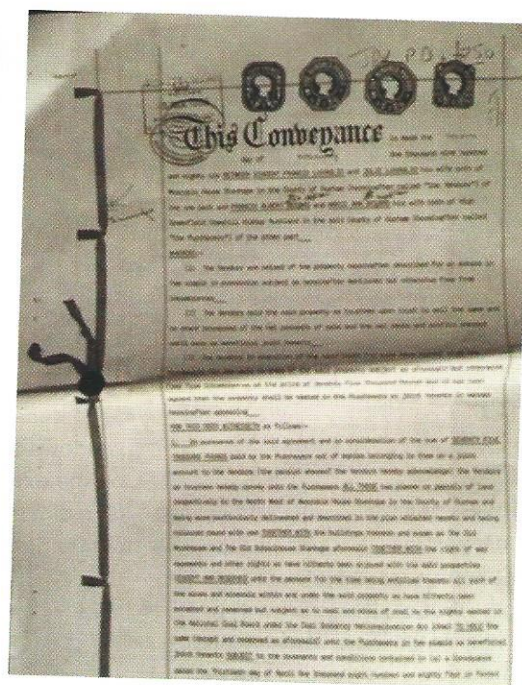
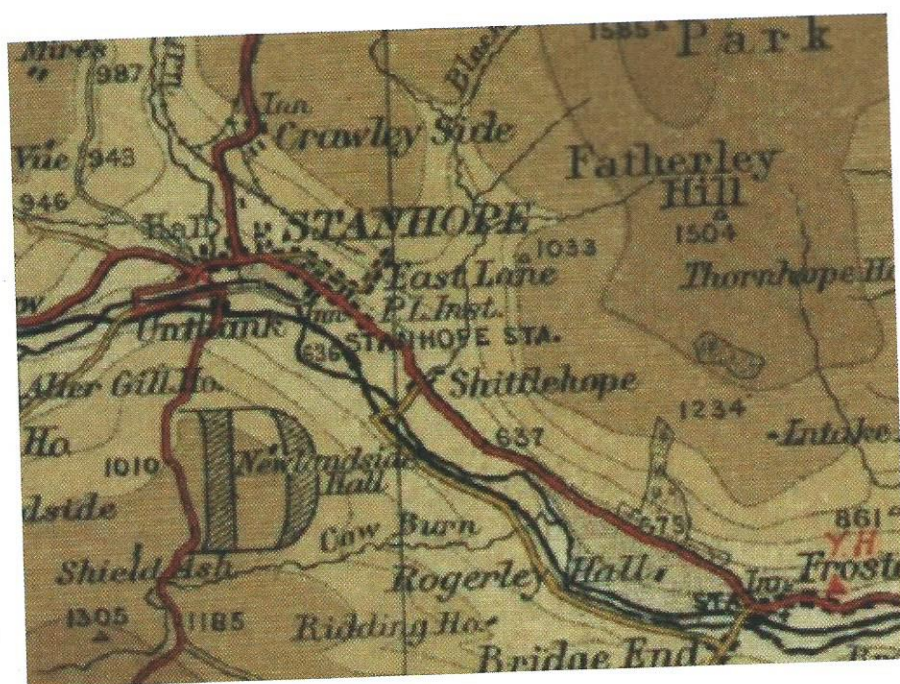


by legislation in 1929 under the Local Government Act, although many continued under their new appellation of 'Public Assistance Institutions' under the control of local authorities.

Viewing the map of Stanhope from 1943, the outline of the workhouse buildings are not shown, however it is clearly marked on the map, where the buildings would have been, 'PL Inst'.

There is no key to the abbreviation, although if the PL was for 'Public', then Public Assistance Institution would fit. They provided accommodation for the chronic sick, elderly, unmarried mothers and vagrants. It was not until the National Assistance Act of 1948 that the last vestiges of the Poor Law disappeared, and with them the workhouses. Many of the workhouse buildings were converted into retirement homes run

EXPLORING YOUR LOCAL AREA



by the local authorities.

It is not clear at this stage of research whether this was the case with Weardale House, although we do know that North Region Health Authority was managing the property at this time and that deeds refer to what was the boardroom and vagrants' quarters as a 'medical block', indicating that it was used for health care purposes during the 1960s and 70s.

Ownership history of the street

Title deeds yield further information not found elsewhere, some of intrigue and interest indirectly linked to the property. They include an outline plan of the Street and Workhouse complex and confirms the previous usage of the ancillary buildings by naming them

laundry, workhouse etc.

The deeds also provide a schedule of previous conveyancing, the dates and names of the vendors and purchasers. The schedule goes back to 1865, which corroborates the date of the new building which was designed and commissioned in 1866.

- Feb 1865 – Vendor, Rev W Darnell, Purchaser, Guardians of the Poor of Weardale Union
- Nov 1978 – Vendor, Durham County Council & North Region Health Authority, Purchasers, James and Agatha O'Connor, John and Anne O'Reilly.
- Aug 1984 – Vendor, James and Agatha O'Connor, John and Anne O'Reilly, Purchasers, Bondjem Blomfeld Limited
- Sept 1984 – Vendor, Bondjem

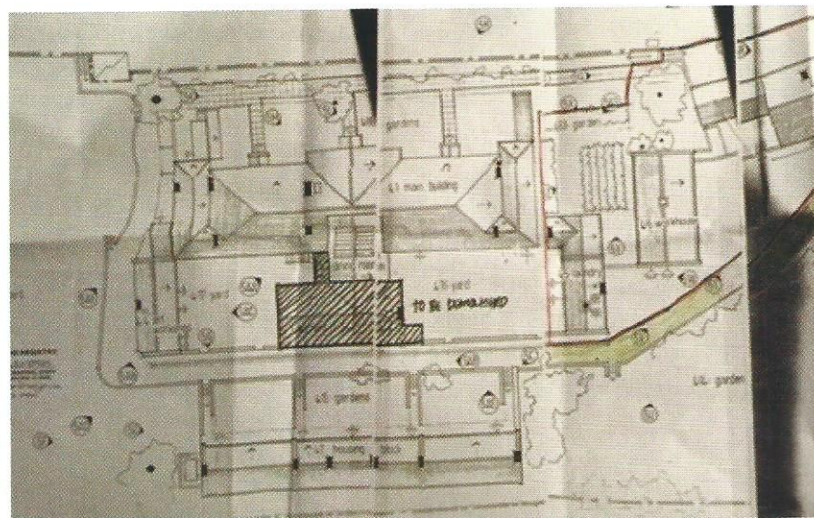
Above left:
Map showing the location of the former workhouse, now designated Pl. Inst. (Public Assistance Institution seemingly)

Above: The deeds for the Workhouse

Blomfeld Limited, Purchasers, Vincent Francis and Julie Luvaglio.

- Feb 1886 – Vendor, Vincent Francis and Julie Luvaglio, Purchaser, Francis and Marie Ann Beddard, Frederick and Margaret Brown.

A number of inferences could be taken from the above transactions. Firstly, that the property and land was originally church land prior to it being conveyed to the Weardale Union. Secondly, that it confirms anecdotal reports that the buildings were used as a hospital/ medical centre by the NHS for a period from the early 1960s, which would stem from the Local Government Act of 1929





that provided for local authorities to take over workhouses as municipal hospitals.

It is when we start to research the owners of the property, 1984-86, the Luvaglio family, that it starts to get interesting. In 1967, Michael Luvaglio, along with Dennis Stafford was convicted of murdering Angus Sibett in what became a high-profile murder trial known as 'the one-armed bandit murder' and used as the basis for *Get Carter*, a cult 1970s gangster film, set in Newcastle starring Michael Caine.

Sibett, found shot three times in the back seat of his Jaguar, was syphoning off takings from one-armed bandit machines, owned by Michael Luvaglio. His brother, Vincent, was owner of 'the Street' and its buildings between 1984 and 1986.

Vincent Luvaglio turned up in Newcastle on the day his brother was charged but fled the country after the trial and stayed on the run for 12 years. He lost his fortune and died alone and broke in 2011 aged 78 in a flat in Chelmsford, Essex, where his body lay undiscovered for three weeks.

Michael always denied the charge, claiming it was the Kray twins trying to muscle into the north east. Up until this year, Dennis Stafford lived in Stanhope Castle, a short walk from 'the Street'.

From the papers

A search in British Newspaper Archive

Explore the story of your street

Family Tree's #StoryOfOurStreet project helps you to explore stories about the street where you lived, or your ancestors called home. Get started at <http://familytr.ee/ftstory>

The main workhouse living accommodation, now residential apartments

THE STORY OF A STANHOPE PAUPER.

A CHEQUERED CAREER.

There has just been interred in a pauper's grave in the churchyard attached to the old church at Stanhope a man pretty well-known in the whole of the district, and who in his time played many a part on the world's huge stage. The person alluded to is William Hammond Ambler, who died on Sunday in Stanhope Workhouse, at the age of 79 years. The deceased was formerly proprietor of several large drapery establishments in London and the provinces, and at one portion of his career occupied the premises in Newgate-street, Bishop Auckland, now tenanted by Mr John Armstrong. He also owned Tees Cottage, Darlington, as well as a large estate adjacent to Carlisle. The estates he frittered away in litigation to prevent a line of railway passing through his property. His greatest losses were sustained through the failure of the North of England Joint-Stock Bank, he being one of the shareholders. The bank in question failed in 1847, and had its chief office in the Arcade, Newcastle, and branch offices at Sunderland North and South

The newspaper report of William Ambler's death

www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/ provides further insight into the life of 'the Street' over the years. Taking just a few examples – in September 1874, sadly a 21-year-old pregnant woman set fire to herself in the workhouse and died of her injuries. Amazingly the coroner recorded there was not sufficient evidence to prove her state of mind.

The *Durham Advertiser* reported in January 1887 that the inmates were treated to a supper of bread and butter and spiced loaf served with tea courtesy of Doctor Arnison.

One of the stranger ones appeared in April 1890 in the *Middlesbrough Daily Gazette* which reported the death of workhouse inmate William Ambler – a self-made millionaire who had owned several drapery shops in London and an estate in Cumbria. He lost his money through a failed investment in a bank and pursuing a litigation case against the railways who wanted to build through his land. He died penniless in the workhouse and is buried in the nearby church.

On a lighter note, there is a report of a couple in their sixties who tried to elope to nearby Barnard Castle by scaling the workhouse wall at night. Unfortunately, the woman fell

whilst climbing the wall and injured her ankle, was caught and charged with attempting to abscond in her workhouse uniform which cost £1. Instead of marrying her partner in crime, she spent the following month in Durham prison. Perhaps illustrating that the previous occupants of our street all had their own, often tragic, story to tell.

Nick Barratt offers advice and guidance by saying, 'don't be afraid to experiment with many sources and let the history of the local community guide your approach'. How true.

A casual passer-by to our street wouldn't possibly give it a second thought as to what stories these fine stone buildings could tell, amazing what can be found when you start to try and unlock the secrets of the past. 🌿

About the author

Having taken early retirement a few years ago, it has provided the opportunity for Ian Newton to develop what was a passing interest in social history and genealogy into one that consumes large parts of his time. Enrolling on the IHGS correspondence course has been a great stimulus in learning what records are out there waiting to be discovered

