



**St Mary the Virgin, West Malling
St Michael & All Angels, Offham
and St Gabriel's Congregation on Kings Hill**

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Carole Ryan
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Monday, 14 September 2015

Dear Carole

Further to your letter of the 14th August and as you are aware, St Mary's Parochial Church Council (PCC), the owners of 'The Church Centre', have been undertaking a lengthy consultation and option appraisal process, following the departure of the last "educational tenant", a private pre-school, who vacated the site in 2014.

In recent days, and as part of its duty under Charity Law to explore the building's possible options, the PCC are seeking to obtain planning permission for conversion to three residential units plus two additional units to the rear of the main building. Seeking such permission is necessary as part of the appraisal process in order to ensure that the PCC knows the value of the property when they examine their options later this year. Should they decide to sell, with residential permission in place they also would be able to satisfy the Charity Commission's guidelines as to 'best value' in the disposal of a Charity's assets.

We assume that the application for listing is a reaction from a member of our local community to our proposals and to concerns that perhaps the building might be demolished; listing itself not necessarily prohibiting a change of use.

However, St Mary's PCC wish to assure you that at this stage we have no intention of demolishing the building. PCC recognised that whilst demolition and new build might, if granted permission, result in a far higher site value on the open market, PCC have agreed that this option is not in the best interests of St Mary's Church. The Charity Commission's guidelines allow for intangible aspects of 'best value' to form part of our decision-making, and we feel the reputational risk to the church and our relationship with our local community would be harmed by demolishing a building that many in the community still remember as their first school 60 years ago.

In terms of the information contained in your report the only really item we would question is the opening date of the original school. We summarise overleaf the results of our investigations into the history of the building:

CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOLS

- **'The Church Centre' - what was the Girls and Infants School in Churchfields was built in 1854.** Separately, **the Boys School in the High Street was built in 1857** (although a school is thought to have existed on the site of the Boys School from the seventeenth century).
- Children attended the Infants School until the age of seven and then transferred to either the Girls or Boys School until leaving school at the age of fourteen.
- From 1945 the children transferred to secondary schools at the age of eleven and in **1954 a new school was built in the Cricket Meadow and the Boys (18th December 1954) and Girls Schools closed.**
- The first Minutes for the West Malling Boys School seem to appear in a Log Book held by the Archives Library in Maidstone (P243/25/27 which covers the period 1857-1903, dated October 8th 1857). The school was in "an unused building in the High Street" and it is thought that this is the building next door but one to The Bull Public House. This building has always been known as 'The Boys School' but it is now a private house and it does not appear to be listed.
- Log Books for later periods at that school are not available to the public because of the Data Protection Act.
- The Boys School was a National School and appears in the Kelly's Kent Directory of 1855. There was also a Parochial School at that time (possibly the Church Centre).
- A Log Book for **the Infants' School 1896-1921 (C/ES/243/1/1)**
 - mentions work done in February 1900 to add a partition in the room to divide it into two classrooms, one for Infants and one for Babies. The Education Number is 22406.
 - In 1896 the school re-opened late after the holiday after work on the drainage system over-ran.
 - The Log Book for the Girls' School 1898-1921 (C/ES/243/1/3) mentions the classroom in "the old part". In 1904 the roof was re-tiled and a ventilator put into the roof.
 - In 1907 Gas was laid during the Christmas holidays.
 - 1908 a suggestion to put a dormer window on the south side of the roof was made – there is no information about when (and if) the work was done.
 - In 1912, 3 new large windows were put in during the summer months to improve light and ventilation.
 - In July 1913 the boys' lavatory basin in the lobby was inspected and fixed in May 1914.
 - In 1916 the partition was removed to improve the heating.
 - In 1917 the School Canteen was opened.
- While the Girls School left the Church Centre site in 1954, the Infants School continued until **1975 when it too was closed and transferred to the Cricket Meadow site of the new school.**
- The old Boys School and the headmaster's house do not appear to be listed with Historic England.
- From 1975 onwards the building has been known and used as the Church Centre with its main tenant being a private pre-school. A number of other community groups have used the Centre on a regular basis such as Sunday School, Brownies, Guides, Mother's Union, and the PCC.

If you are minded to list the building, then we would like to question as to which date you would consider the listing to be effective from, given the number of structural changes the building has undergone and how it has evolved in terms of layout, design and usage?

- Built in 1854 (1846?)
- Extended by 1885 (map based evidence)
- Extended again by 1896 (map based evidence)
- Extended a third time by 1908 (map based evidence)
- 1912 – three new large windows added (presumably to the “front” of the building facing the footpath)
- 1917 – addition of a School Canteen
- 1930's various window replacements

We have undertaken preliminary discussions with Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council planners in relation to our proposals for the building and development within its curtilage and I have copied below the response from TMBC's Conservation Architect – Geoff Pearson

*Geoff Pearson <Geoff.Pearson@tmbc.gov.uk>
To: Lucinda Green <Lucinda.Green@tmbc.gov.uk>
Date: Tue, 5 May 2015 15:38:18 +0100
Subject: St Mary's Church West Malling*

Lucinda, I confirm my view that the Church Centre, although not a listed building or likely to become a listed building, is important as an indication of the history of the Church and the West Malling Conservation Area. It appears to be a typical church primary school of the late 19th Century and as such could be converted to many new uses including housing. This is the development that I feel as Conservation Architect would be the most appropriate.

*Geoff Pearson
Conservation Architect*

Finally, we also enclose, by way of background information additional information we have sourced in terms of other educational establishments – whilst the list is, we believe, fairly comprehensive, it is quite possibly not exhaustive!

SCHOOLS IN WEST MALLING

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

From the beginning of the 19th Century and up to the beginning of the 20th Century historical records indicate that there were a number of private schools in West Malling.

BROOK HOUSE (1824 – 1858)

- Brook House in Swan Street (now the Westminster Bank) was a young ladies boarding school run by Misses Whittle & Gill from 1824 to 1836, then by the Mrs. Mary Pickett and her daughters Mary and Elizabeth from 1837 to 1848 and then by Mrs Sarah Hatch (whose late husband had been a farmer at Callis Court) from 1849 to 1858.
- This building is listed Grade II.

MERTON HOUSE (1832 – 1843)

- Merton House is recorded as a school in Trade Directories and Census Returns, firstly run by Christiana Towner in 1832 and then by Charles Box from 1835 to 1843.
- Charles was born at Tovil in 1806 and in the 1851 Census is recorded living at Newington, Surrey and described as a poet.
- Unsure of location in West Malling

CLOUT MEMORIAL INSTITUTE (1834 – 1887)

- The Clout Memorial Institute, then known as Melbourne House was run as a girls' boarding school by Miss Sarah Marden from 1834 to 1887. Miss Marden who was born at Meopham in 1802 lived in West Malling until she died in 1889.
- This building is listed Grade II and stewarded by the Malling Memorial Institute charity. MMI run the building as office space with surplus income used to support activities for young people in and around the local area.

ARUNDEL HOUSE (1858 – 1895)

- Arundel House was a ladies school run by Rebecca Diplock from 1858 to 1870. Rebecca was the widow of David Diplock baptised at Wrotham Baptist Church in 1824 and most likely a relative of Joseph Diplock at Eden Farm.
- By 1871 Rebecca was a Schoolmistress at Lambeth but had retired by 1881.
- Arundel House was then a mixed school run by Robert Eedes (born in Lambeth in 1836), from 1872 to 1887. Robert who had also run a school at Holyrood House in Swan Street from 1867 to 1871, died in 1887 and for a time his widow Emily lived at Ford House.
- From 1891 to 1895 Arundel House was a school run by Thomas Yerbury Bethell (born at Laverton, Somerset in 1859. Thomas had been an assistant master at a boys school in Banbury in 1881 but in 1901 was living at Bath and occupied as a Traveller.
- Arundel House is listed Grade II and vacant, waiting to be converted into flats, having been divided into two shops in a previous life.

NO.1 BRIDGE COTTAGES (1871 - 1878)

- A ladies school was run by Misses Elizabeth & Ann Cattell, two maiden ladies from Kidderminster in Worcestershire at No.1 Bridge Cottages on Town Hill from 1871 to 1878.
- Ann had been a governess in a private house in Sutton Coldfield and by 1881 she was lodging in Randall Street, Maidstone and described as a Schoolmistress.

NO. 28 HIGH STREET (1885 - 1905)

- No.28 High Street now occupied by Fine & Country and Period Homes and also formerly known as Wendycot was a ladies school run by Miss Alice Collings from 1885 to 1905. She was from a family of drapers who came to West Malling at the end of the eighteenth century and who at one time owned most of the premises at the bottom of Middle Row.
- This building is listed Grade II.

MARE'S NEST DAME SCHOOL (1851 - 1881)

- A Dame School, for young children was run by Miss Elizabeth Greening at her house in Mare's Nest from 1851 to 1881. Miss Greening was born at Chart Sutton in 1805 and in 1841 was living at Upper Street, Sutton Valence when she is described as a Schoolmistress.
- Mare's Nest was a terrace of houses demolished to make way for the car park behind Tesco's.

WAYNFLEET & ELWOOD HOUSE (1871 - 1930)

- Alfred Allchin ran a school at Waynfleet in the High Street from at least 1871 to 1905. Alfred was born in West Malling in 1847 but the premises had been owned by his family since 1799.
- The school was later taken over in 1905 by Miss May Butterick, who had also briefly taught at the Boys School, and appears later to have expanded it into Elwood House. The school continued until at least 1930 when it was known as St. Christopher's.
- Unsure of location in West Malling.

ABBEYGATE HOUSE (1930's)

- Miss Shirley Grant ran a Preparatory school for young children at Abbeygate House during the 1930's.
- It is a Grade II residential house.

UNKNOWN LOCATION! (1632 ???)

- The first Boys School was built sometime after 1632 when a certain Francis Tresse bequeathed a sum of £40 for the erection of a free school.
- Built somewhere between The Bull and the Clout Memorial Hall. It was taken over by the National Society in 1857.

OTHER SCHOOLS

- Picot's Kent Directory of 1839 mentions a Town Malling Free School along with three other schools – run by Charles Box, Sarah Marden and Mary Pickett (Dame schools).
- Picot's Kent Directory of 1824 mentions “two ladies boarding schools” only.

ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL

- A new Roman Catholic Primary School was built at Moore Park in 1972 along with the new Catholic Church.

We are aware that there are a number of examples locally of former ecclesiastical buildings that have been successfully converted, some are listed and some not. We are fully aware that listing the Church Centre would not prohibit obtaining planning permission for change of use to residential or to additional development within the curtilage, but we are aware that listing might result in limitations on what it is and is not possible to do in terms of renovation and conversion. It is with this fact in mind and the knowledge of the history of the building and how it has evolved over time that leads us to question whether or not this building is in fact the best example to merit such a classification and if so, then from which date.

In conclusion, whatever the outcome, we would just like to add that we are very keen to work with Historic England in addition to TMBC on this project. As custodians of the beautiful, grade II* listed and historically important building of St Mary's Church, we also have a need to ensure that the future of the Church Centre contributes positively to the local environment and enhances the setting in which it is placed.

We look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Our sincere regards

Mrs Clare Innes
on behalf of St Mary's, West Malling Parochial Church Council