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THE ENGLISH AND WELSH WORKHOUSES OF GEORGE WILKINSON

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INTRODUCTION

In the Print Room of the Victoria and Albert Museum, unnoticed by architectural historians since its acquisition in 1977, is an album of drawings for workhouses.¹ Nothing is known of its provenance, except that it was bought in that year from a bookshop in Wells in Somerset. The binding is loose, but the drawings in it, in pen and wash, are fresh and clear. A label on the cover reads 'DRAWINGS OF UNION WORKHOUSE BUILDINGS ERECTED IN ENGLAND AND WALES A.D.1835-6-7-8-9 — ARCHITECT'; the name of George Wilkinson has been heavily scored through, though there is no reason to doubt that the designs are his. Wilkinson (1814-1890; Fig. 1) is known as the architect of workhouses in England and Ireland, and of many railway stations in the latter country.² The album adds to his known body of work, it is the only contemporary group of drawings of a very large class of buildings erected following the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834,³ and Wilkinson's career as their designer, discussed in part II of this article, illustrates a number of issues relating to the architectural profession at the time: the status of the provincial architect, relations with official bodies at a local and a national level, how commissions might be won, scales of fees and the organisation of work. In addition, analysis of their plans and internal arrangements, discussed in part III, throws valuable light on the principles of workhouse design between 1835 and 1839.

GEORGE WILKINSON IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Before 1834 the relief of poverty in England remained on a basis that had been established in the sixteenth century. Responsibility for supporting the poor lay with the individual parish, and after 250 years the system was characterised by inefficiency, corruption and – of particular concern for ratepayers – huge expense. National concern for the problem prompted the setting-up of a Commission of Enquiry, which reported in February 1834, followed by the new Act in August of that year. Following the precedent of a permissive Act of 1782 (the so-called Gilbert Act), neighbouring parishes were to be united into unions, offered loans to build a new workhouse at the centre of each union, and were to refuse all relief save to those paupers who were willing to endure the deterrent disciplines of the workhouse regime. The essentials of this regime were a strict daily routine, and the inflexible imposition of what was called 'classification' – the separation of the inmates by age and sex regardless of family links. Each union was to be administered by a local board of guardians, and enforcement of the new legislation rested with a central Commission of three Poor Law Commissioners, with offices in Somerset House, in London.

In executing their policies, the Commissioners were to be helped on the ground by Assistant Commissioners, each responsible for a different area of the country.⁴ These Assistant Commissioners were to be well paid (£700 a year salary, a guinea a day subsistence, and travelling at 1s.6d. or 2s. a mile

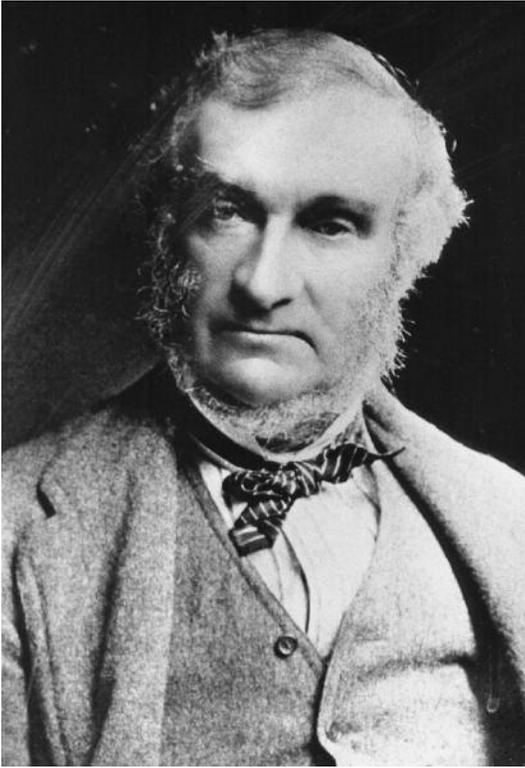


Fig. 1. George Wilkinson.
Courtesy of the Irish Architectural Archive.

for gig hire or coaches) in order that they might negotiate with the principal local landowners and ratepayers on an equal social footing. One of the first three Assistant Commissioners to be appointed, in October 1834, was Edward Gulson. Gulson had held the post of Director of the Poor for the United Parishes of Coventry, a Gilbert Union, since 1830, and by 1833 had reduced the expenditure on local poor relief from £20,361 to £12,441, mainly in the first year. He was to be instrumental in launching George Wilkinson's career.

Gulson entered with zeal on his task of forming unions, urging the enforcement of the Commissioners' Rules, and promoting the building of workhouses in the area for which he was responsible. One of the first of these was at Abingdon, and in December of

1834 he wrote to George Nicholls,⁵ one of the three Commissioners, 'I am sure I shall strongly advocate Mr Kempthorne's coming to Abingdon . . . I am sure he is very clever – and I hope he may meet his just reward – his plans are beautiful.'⁶ Sampson Kempthorne was the son of a friend of Nicholls, and specimen designs for workhouses designed by him were published in the Commissioners' first and second *Reports*.⁷ At Abingdon, Kempthorne's plans for a hexagonal building were adopted,⁸ though Gulson foresaw difficulties with his £300 fee (2½% for plans and specification, 2½% for superintendence, on a total estimate of £6,000) which he considered high: 'this is so large a sum that I fear [the Abingdon Union Guardians] will not pay it – and if so how are these excellent plans to be carried out? They would be allowed to build upon any bungling plan which any County Surveyor may fancy perfect – in fact upon the same plans as Workhouses have hitherto been built.'⁹

Another early union, centred on Witney in Oxfordshire, gave George Wilkinson his first professional opening. The first meeting of the Witney Union Guardians was held on 28 March, 1835, and their initial invitation to Kempthorne, to provide them with plans for a workhouse for 400 paupers, was probably on Gulson's urging. 'I hope he will attend to them as I think it is very material that he should do so', he wrote to Nicholls. 'Please let Kempthorne know that he must come by 8 o'clock on Thursday morning the 23rd [of April] at Town Hall . . . They want to advertise for Tenders directly, because of the time of Year.'¹⁰ Evidently things did not progress satisfactorily, and in June Gulson wrote again. 'Mr Kempthorne is in a scrape at Witney. I will tell you privately that I think he has been to blame himself in this matter. He disappointed them in an instance or two before – and he at last made a great blunder in the specification.'¹¹ Kempthorne's greatest mistake was in submitting a scheme for a workhouse to be built of brick, whereas Witney was entirely a stone-built town where brick

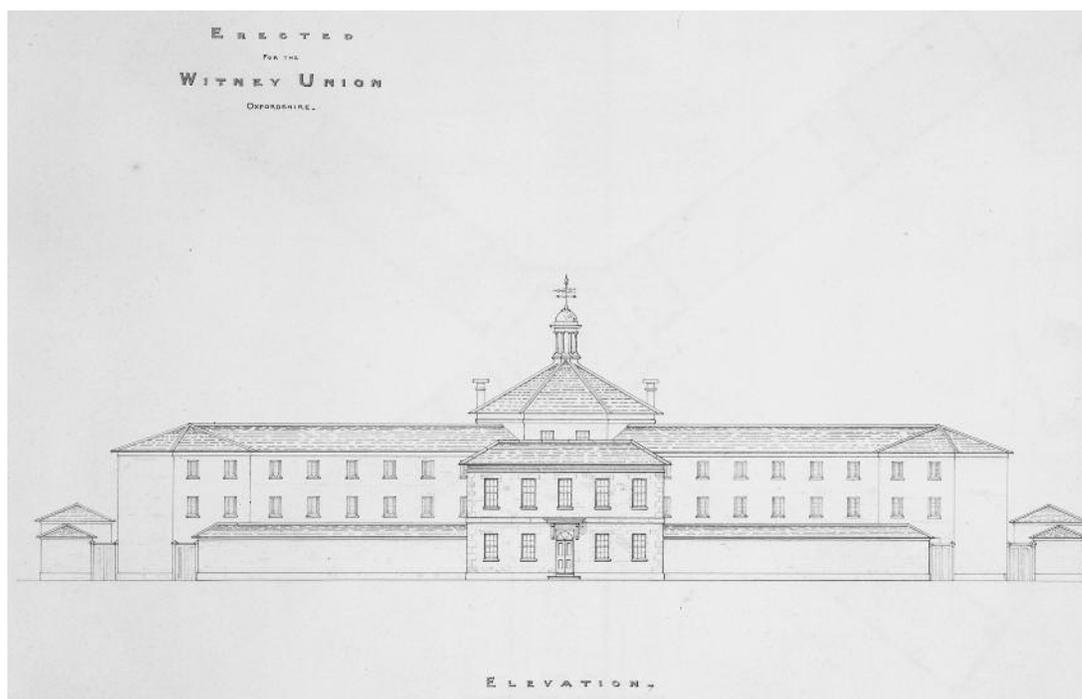


Fig. 12. Witney Union Workhouse: elevation. *V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1448.1.1977.*

would certainly be more expensive. To make matters worse, after promising to present new plans and specifications he had then failed to turn up. Gulson continued, 'I will go to Witney myself tomorrow – will attend their Meeting on Thursday – & try to get him out of the scrape.' Kempthorne's plans arrived in the end, but at the meeting summoned to discuss tenders 'several questions were put to him by some of the Builders for an Explanation of some parts of his Plan of the Workhouse which questions he declined to answer contending that as a professional man he ought not to do so.'¹² It is hardly surprising that the Guardians voted to advertise for alternative designs, with a prize of £20 for the best and two of £5 for runners-up.

At the Guardians' meeting on 2 July, five sets of plans were produced, two from Kempthorne, two from John Plowman of Oxford, and one (Figs. 2 and 3)

from a local man, George Wilkinson. A week later, estimates were sent in. Wilkinson's (at £5,200) was lowest by £50 and the Guardians voted to accept his designs by 23 votes to 6.¹³ Gulson must have been considerably relieved. Wilkinson had got Gulson out of a 'scrape', and thereafter he seems to have enjoyed Gulson's support almost as freely as Kempthorne had done hitherto. On 27 November Gulson wrote to Nicholls, 'Witney is nearly roofed in . . . and I like the appearance of it better than Abingdon.'¹⁴

It is impossible to say how much the Witney Guardians were influenced in their choice by Wilkinson's estimate and designs and how much by the fact that he was a local man. His father, William Anthony Wilkinson, described as builder, carpenter and surveyor, was clearly well established in the town and had been able to find an architectural training for both George and his younger (and better-known)

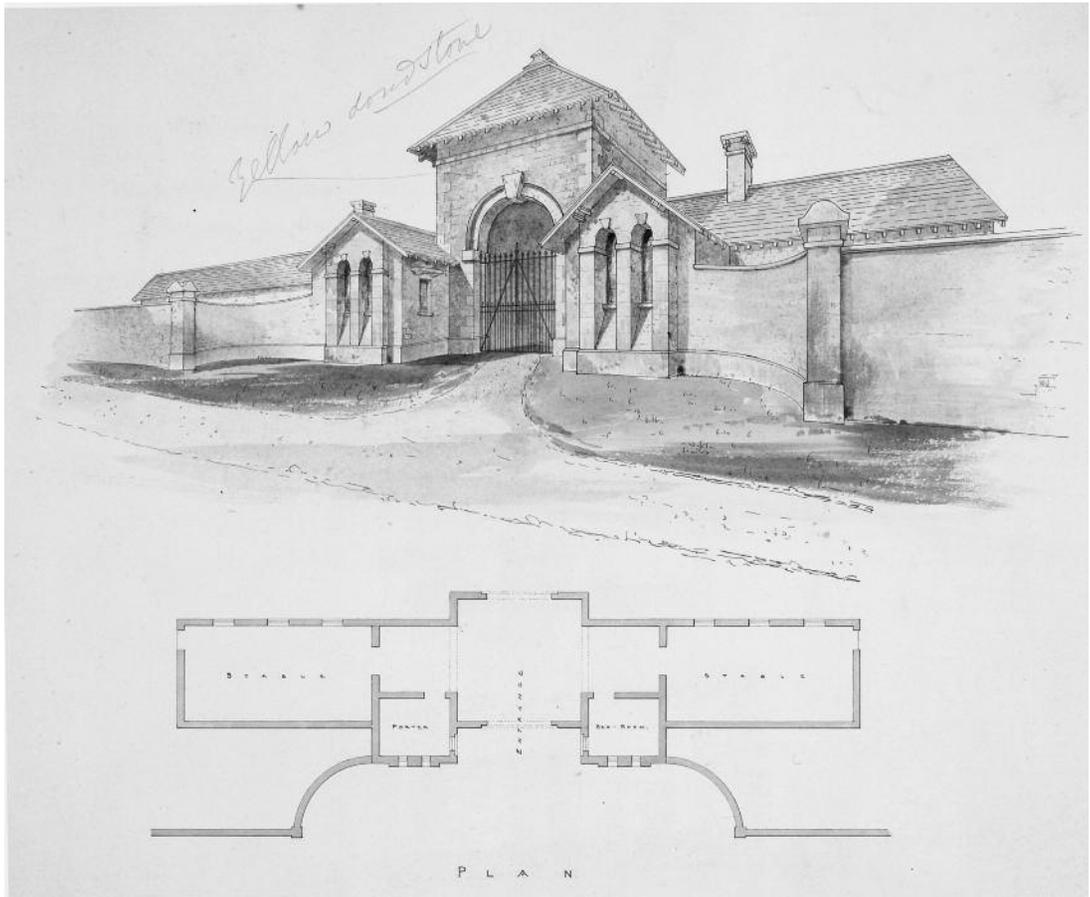


Fig. 3. Witney Union Workhouse: gatehouses and stables for guardians' horses.
V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1448.4.1977.

brother William; in neither case is it known with whom.¹⁵ In 1850 George Wilkinson married Mary, the daughter of John William Clinch, owner of Witney's biggest brewery and proprietor of Witney's leading bank; Clinch's father (or brother) James Clinch had been vice-chairman of the Witney Guardians when the workhouse contract was awarded.¹⁶ Perhaps the fairest way to view the situation is that when it seemed the job could be done satisfactorily by a promising young man of their own town, the Guardians felt it was their duty to give it to him rather than to someone with better

credentials but who seemed to use professional snobbery as a cloak for off-handedness.

They did not award the building contract to Wilkinson although he tendered for it (presumably with the backing of his father's business), but gave it to a Mr Fisher whose tender came in at £60 less.¹⁷ The rejection of Wilkinson's bid as builder may also have arisen from a proper reluctance to employ an architect with a business interest in the contractor whom he was supposed to supervise. Thomas Stevens, Assistant Commissioner, wrote to the Board in March 1836 on this point. Plans by

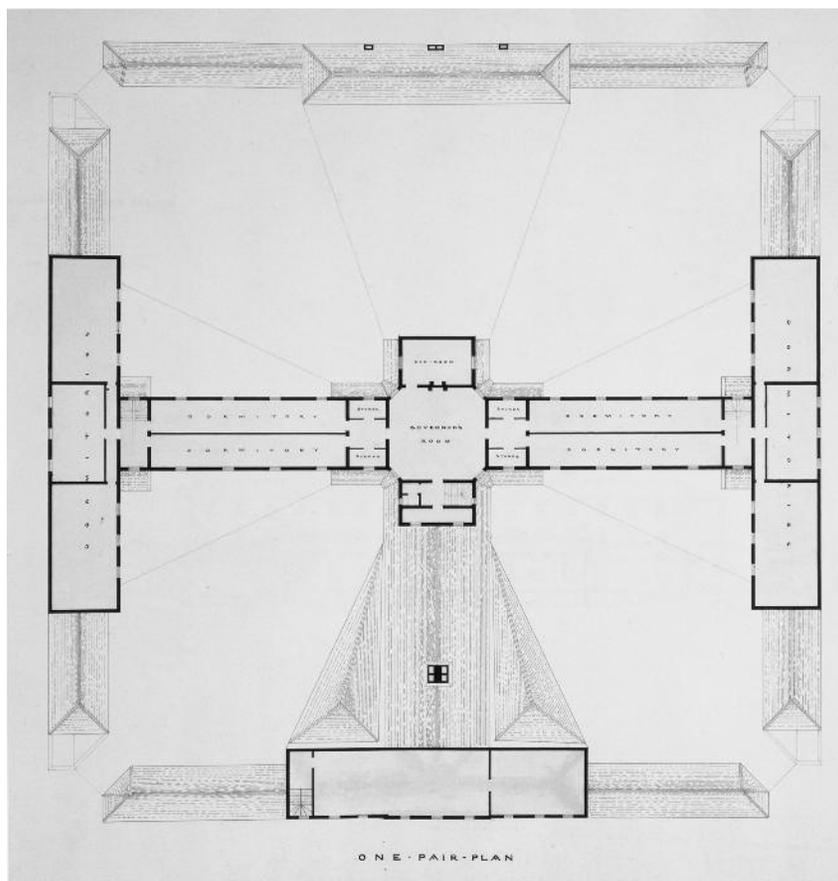


Fig. 4. Thame Union Workhouse: first-floor plan.
V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1448.13.1977.

Plowman had been accepted for the Bicester workhouse; both Plowman and his father were in business as builders in Oxford, and were thought to have an agreement with Long of Witney who had contracted for it, 'so that builder and architect are together and I have no doubt are playing into each other's hands. . . The surveyor [i.e. the supervising architect] should be a person quite unconnected with the trade of building himself.'¹⁸

In general Wilkinson seems to have won his commissions in open competition, known to have been held at Chard (where he apparently showed a

model),¹⁹ Radford, Thame, and Woodstock. However, several unions invited him to provide designs, presumably on the basis of existing knowledge of his work. At Woodstock there were mild irregularities. Plans were advertised for, with a £10 premium, but when these arrived, with only Plowman and Wilkinson competing, Wilkinson's were approved without there having been any prior notice that they would be on the agenda.²⁰ The vice-chairman (who had been absent) complained to the Commissioners, but was overtaken by events: the next meeting moved that Wilkinson's plans be sent

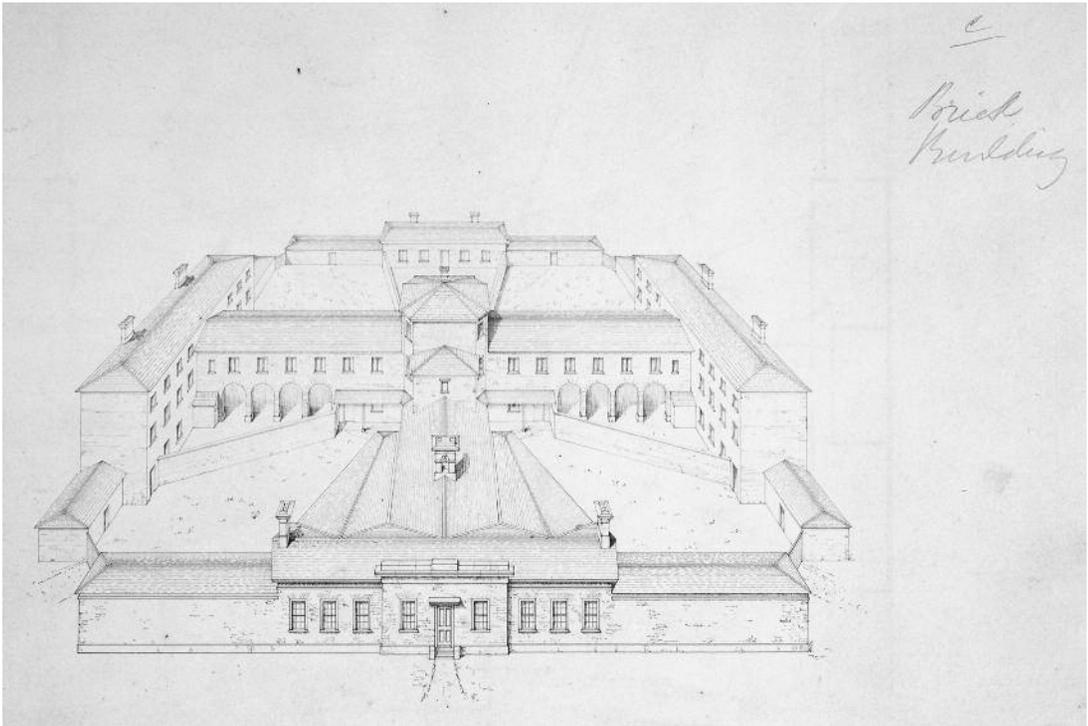


Fig. 5. Thame Union Workhouse: perspective view.
V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1448.11.1977.

forthwith to the Commissioners for approval ‘in pursuance of the orders of Mr Gulson’, while Gulson himself wrote to Nicholls to urge that the Commissioners give their approval to the Wilkinson scheme before the opposition had time to re-open the competition.²¹ At Cardiff, the Guardians invited plans from Wilkinson in October 1836. A month later, however, they advertised for designs in local newspapers, and in January 1837 awarded the contract to Samuel Daukes of Worcester.²² However, it was Wilkinson’s plans which were submitted to the Poor Law Commissioners in May;²³ it is not clear why the Guardians evidently changed their minds not just once, but twice.

Approval from the Commissioners was required before a union could borrow the funds necessary for building. The plans and specifications submitted

would probably already have the support of the appropriate Assistant Commissioner. At Bromyard, E.W. Head was to write: ‘the design is exceedingly well arranged . . . the architect, Mr Wilkinson, has had several plans on the same principle approved by the Commissioners.’²⁴ At Radford, in Gulson’s area, the clerk wrote to the Commissioners that since Gulson had approved their choice, ‘all anxiety was removed under the impression that your approval would also be obtained when sought for.’²⁵ Received at Somerset House, the Commissioners normally referred designs to one of two professional advisors, a Mr Savage and a Mr Robertson, and then returned them to the guardians with the more important of their comments.

At Thame (Figs. 4 and 5), Wilkinson’s second workhouse, the Commissioners wrote that they

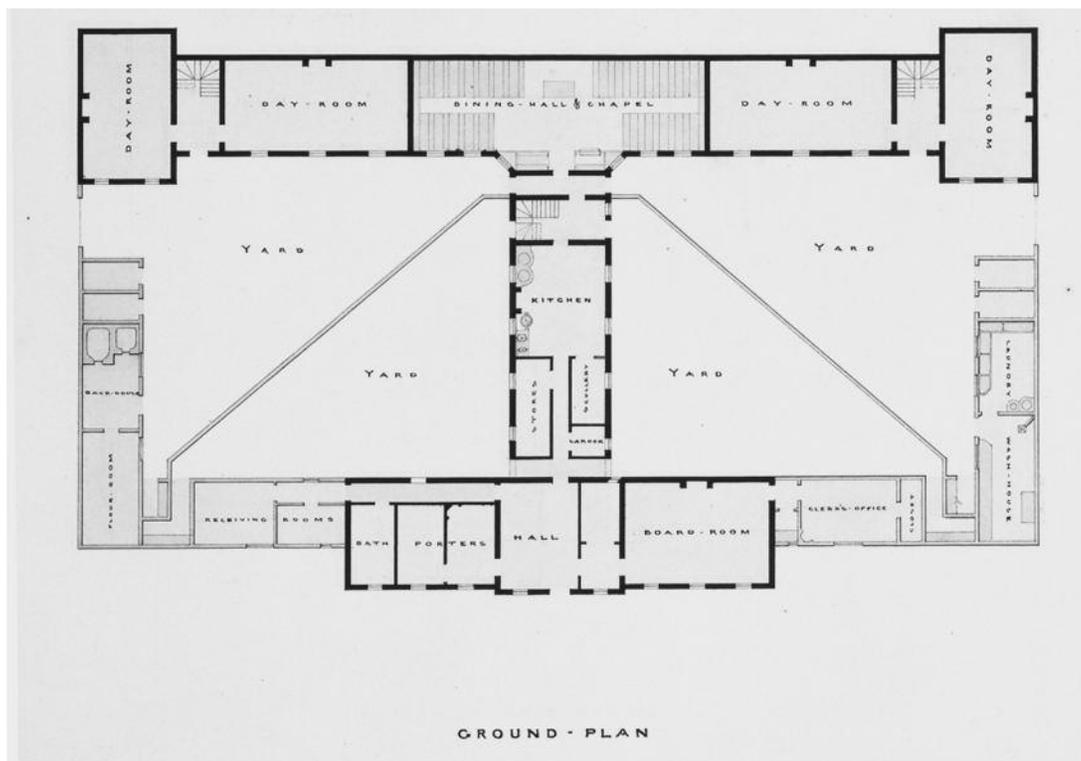


Fig. 6. Neath Union Workhouse: ground-floor plan.
V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1448.34.1977.

'desire to direct the attention of the Governors to the circumstance of the access to the different yards being apparently through the Dining Hall and Chapel, which is in their opinion bad, and ought to be remedied.'²⁶ The circulation proposed probably compromised the essential principle of classification, the segregation of men and women, old and young. It is likely that at this stage Wilkinson was still learning what was needed, and a number of minor alterations were made during and after building, including the enlargement of the board room (for the Guardians' weekly meetings).²⁷ At Woodstock, Robertson had commented that 'the arrangement appears to be exceedingly good; the Paupers are properly classified; and the Master's sitting room commands a full view of the different yards',²⁸ but he expressed some

reservations about the amount of accommodation provided. Thereafter, comments on Wilkinson's plans (when recorded) were in general favourable. On the Honiton scheme Robertson wrote, 'this is an excellent design, Mr Wilkinson has had 4 or 5 plans already approved',²⁹ and on Wolverhampton, 'the classification and general arrangement are very complete and the Estimate . . . is moderate.'³⁰

Where there were shortcomings these might often be ascribed to the original brief. At Chepstow (see Fig. 13) there was 'no Mill Room, Bakehouse or Work Rooms in Men's and Women's Yards . . . No Privies for Boys and Girls. A moveable Partition should be provided in School Room to separate Boys and Girls.'³¹ At Radford (despite Gulson's approval) 'no Mill Room, Bakehouse, Girls and Boys

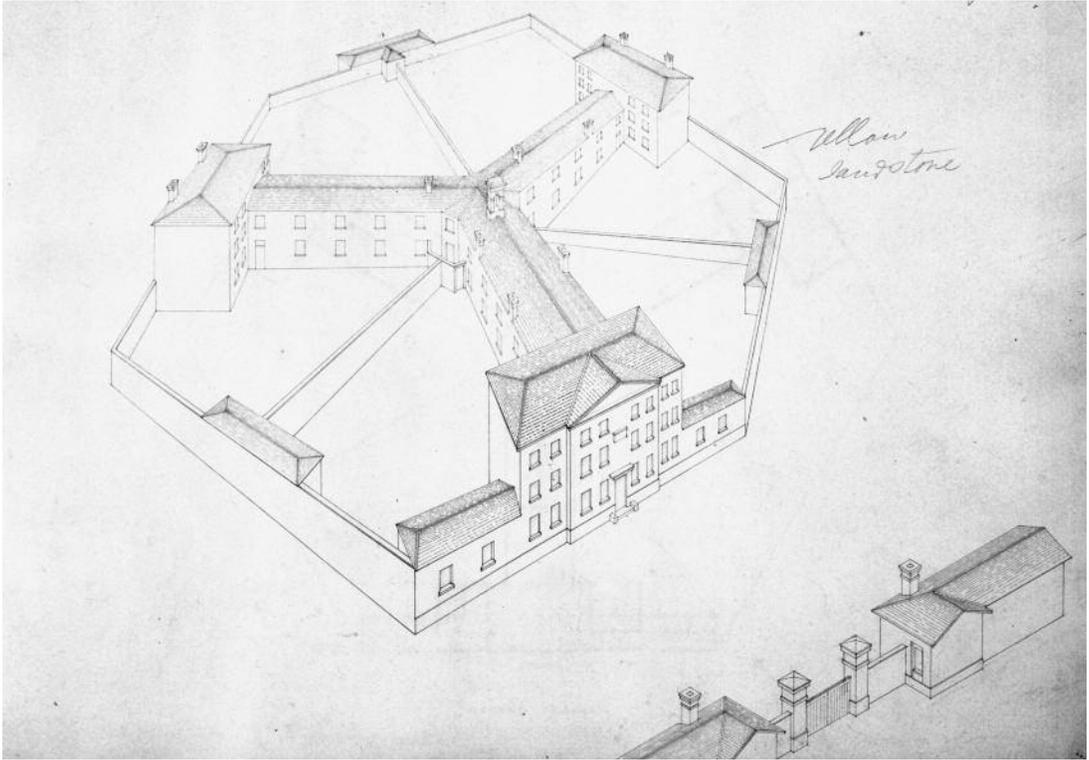


Fig. 7. A 'hexagon' workhouse, probably Headington Union Workhouse: perspective.
V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1448.8.1977.

Work Rooms or Lying-in Ward are provided, and one room only for Girls' and Boys' School, which they must pass through to get to their respective Dormitories'. More extensive deficiencies were noted in the Neath (Fig. 6) proposals, which the Board nevertheless approved and returned to the Guardians, merely remarking of their comments that the Guardians might notice 'any of them which they may think desirable'.³² The Commissioners made similar criticisms of a number of Wilkinson's other small workhouse designs, where it was disproportionately expensive to provide the ideal range of facilities that could be afforded in a large house. At Neath, a washhouse, coalhouse, refractory cell and a relocated bakehouse were added as soon as the new building was complete.³³

Though Wilkinson's planning was generally approved, the Commissioners seem sometimes to have found fault with his specifications (though Head preferred them to Plowman's: 'I suspect he is one who wants looking after. I have more confidence in Mr Wilkinson').³⁴ One detailed set survives, that for Chipping Norton (see Figs. 8 and 9), and this is fully and properly set out, with quantities, under the separate trades.³⁵ Dimensions were also to be taken off the contract drawings, of which again one set exists, for Stow-on-the-Wold.³⁶ More summary specifications exist for the majority of his workhouses.³⁷ Some deficiencies were almost certainly due to pressures on costs. At several, floor thicknesses, scantlings of roof timbers and the bore of down pipes were considered inadequate by the

Commissioners' advisers; it is uncertain whether these were failings common to all Wilkinson's designs, or whether dimensions were occasionally pared down, perhaps to save money, or to secure the contract.

The Commissioners' annual *Reports* gave the sums which individual unions borrowed to provide workhouses, but these are not an accurate indication of the amount spent on building. Occasionally (as at Radford and Tenbury, among those discussed here) a site was given free, but this often constituted a large expense; the loan had also to cover legal expenses and other items excluded from original contracts. Few seem initially to have included the necessary boundary wall to prevent the inmates from leaving the house without permission; at Cardiff the cost of the wall came to £772;³⁸ at Thame (noted below) nearly £3,000 (which included ornamental gate piers). Early workhouses were to be heated by hot water, but failure was general: at Woodstock this occurred even before the paupers were admitted to the new building, and at Witney only three months afterwards, at the beginning of winter, in November. At Chepstow, where the Guardians wrote to the Commissioners for advice, they were given the addresses of firms supplying apparatus for warming by hot air and told that hot water systems had very generally broken down over the previous winter and could not be recommended.³⁹ When the Neath workhouse opened in November 1838 the failure of water heating meant that the infirmary and children's room lacked any heating at all and fireplaces had to be added. Other extras frequently included a bell, and a cupola in which to hang it.

Faced with such additional demands, cost overruns were normal and in very many cases the initial loan had to be increased. At Pembroke (see Figs. 12 and 14), costs rose from an estimated £2,650 to £4,596.⁴⁰ At Cardiff, from the original contract price of £3,800 costs rose to over £7,000, of which £1,000 was required by having to raise the entire structure by three feet because of the wet, low-lying site on

which it was built.⁴¹ At Thame, where the Guardians originally took out a loan of £6,990, the expenses by the end of 1838 had come to over £11,000, as follows:

Land (three separate owners)	£596
Winsland (builder): workhouse	£5693
fittings	£229
boundary wall	£2857
Hall (bells)	£58
Eckstein, Edwards & Hewitt (heating)	£346
Townsey ('moat' ?)	£40
Hollier (conveyance of land)	£86
Cobb (ground work)	£77
Read (plumbing)	£3
Furniture	£1063
Prosser (clerk of works)	£50
Wilkinson (architect)	£321
	<hr/>
	£11,449

Wilkinson's own fees ranged between 2½% and 3½%, apparently depending on how much pressure he was under to reduce them. At Llandilo Fawr – where his fees were disputed – these were made up of:

Preparing working drawings, specification etc & attending during erection	
31/2 on the expenditure	£75
Travelling expenses in attending the Building and the Board	£52
Making complete set of plans, section elevation etc.	£21
Making particulars of the fittings	£3.3s
Letters and parcels	£2.6s
Measurement and valuation	£10.14s.6d

The Commissioners, to whom Wilkinson's bill was referred, commented that travel expenses were high, that measurement and valuation (for extras) were normally included in the overall fee for attendance, and questioned why it was necessary to charge for a complete additional set of drawings. One suspects that on occasions Wilkinson profited by what must

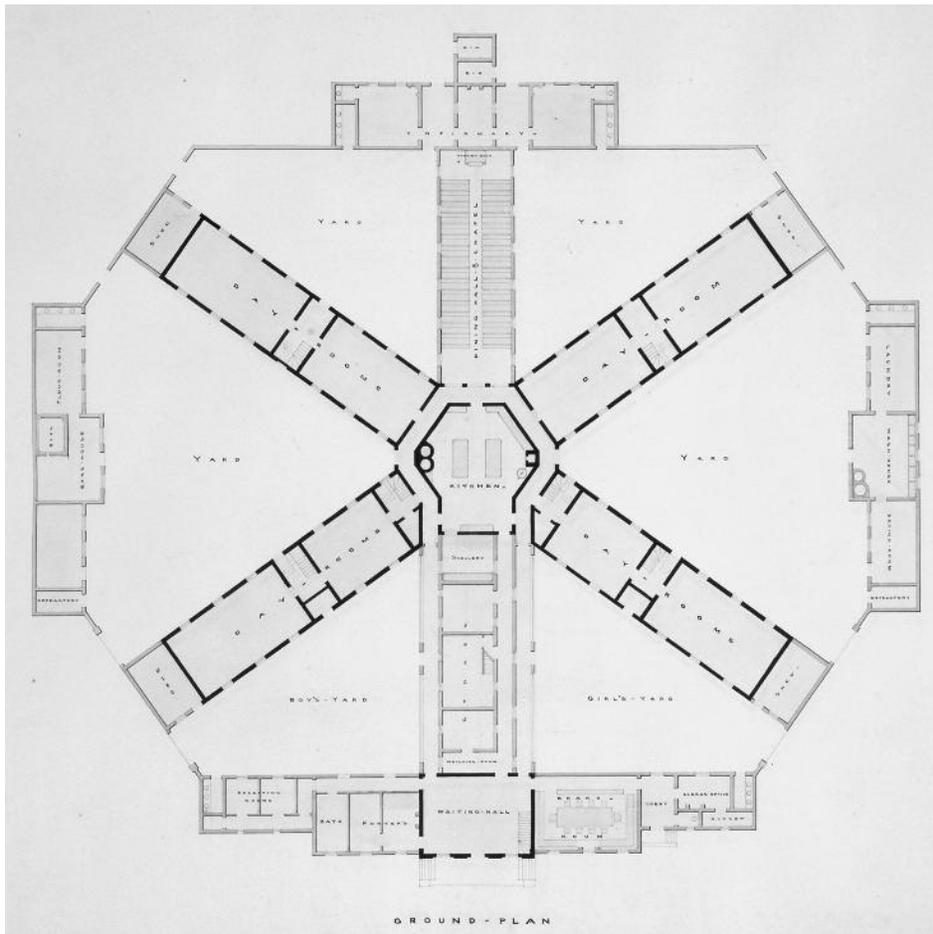


Fig. 8. Chipping Norton Union Workhouse: ground-floor plan.
V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1448.15.1977.

have been the complete lack of any experience in commissioning large contracts on the part of many boards of guardians. This was almost certainly the case at Llandilo Fawr, privately described by the Assistant Commissioner as ‘the most difficult Union in Wales.’⁴² Consisting almost wholly of small farmers, the Guardians were ‘all jobbers and would appoint anyone who had friends.’ It was reported that they ‘showed great inclination in favour of the contractor who was a man of a most indifferent character’ who, when Wilkinson complained that

there had been departures from the contract, had replied that:

a Party in the Position of the Board of Guardians having a veto in the question may possibly allow what they may consider an advantageous alteration or variation and whenever I vary or make an addition it will be where I am satisfied the Board will be able to comprehend the advantage.⁴³

It was obviously impossible for any architect to control a contract if the contractor felt free to depart from it whenever he could persuade the client to let



Fig. 9. Chipping Norton Union Workhouse, photographed in 2004. *Nicholas Cooper.*

him. The clerk to the Guardians reported harsh words between Wilkinson and the Board, and suspected that he had inflated his fees out of pique.

In Wales, opposition to workhouses was widespread. ‘The Welsh’ wrote Edward Senior, Assistant Commissioner, ‘are a people disinclined to Change; patient under old Evils and slow to comprehend new Pleasures’,⁴⁴ and at Llandovery the almost-finished workhouse was severely damaged by arson. Witnesses described how fire had broken out in the unattended building in the early hours of one morning, and the clerk wrote to the Commissioners that ‘in consequence of the scarcity of water, and we being without fire engines, little or nothing could be done to stop the fury of the devouring element.’⁴⁵ Depositions taken by the magistrates satisfied them that there was no negligence by the builder or his workmen, one of whom had reported mysterious tampering with a ladder a few days before. Having in vain offered a reward of £100 for information,

the clerk urged that ‘the presence of a police officer from the Metropolis completely instructed in the Welsh language [would be] highly desirable.’⁴⁶ It is not surprising that in the following month the Llandilo Fawr Guardians asked the Commissioners to sanction insuring their new building against fire.

The length of time taken in building varied with the size of the workhouse, ten to twelve months being a norm. Final fitting-up seems generally to have taken two or three months more, so that few were ready within a year of starting work. Most contracts proceeded with few recorded problems, though starts were sometimes delayed due to uncertainties over title to the site. At Chipping Norton (see Figs. 8 and 9) materials had been laid in by the contractor some months before work could start, and as a result he was in financial difficulties before he was entitled to payment on his first certificate. Completion might be held up, as at Chard, by want of vigilance by a clerk of the

works. Here no blame seems to have been attached to Wilkinson, who may have spotted the errors on a visit, and the Guardians at once appointed a new clerk recommended by him. But at two other workhouses, Headington and Radford, there was trouble that involved Wilkinson more closely.

At Headington (Fig. 7), Wilkinson's plans had been approved in January 1836, and a building contract signed. In April the following year the Guardians wrote to the Commissioners with details of a huge additional sum for foundations, and seeking sanction for a further loan. Savage, for the Commissioners, noted that:

the expense of £1470.16s.11d for extra Foundations to a Building amounting to £2795 appears to be a gross absurdity. The nature of the Situation, if known to the Architect before the Contract was made, ought to have struck his attention . . . there appears reasonable ground to question the accuracy of the value of these extra Foundations, and that there is very probably a great Overcharge in them, perhaps from deceptive statements. . .⁴⁷

Hall, the Assistant Commissioner, concurred, and wrote in the margin of Savage's note: 'The building of the Headington workhouse has been managed in the worst possible manner, no party concerned in it, or in the management of the Union, is free from blame.' He arranged to see Wilkinson at the Board of Guardians meeting the next week, and following that, Wilkinson and the clerk to the Guardians agreed to come to London to see George Nicholls himself.

What had happened at Headington was that the new workhouse had been built in a disused quarry. Wilkinson had evidently questioned the site, but had been assured by the Guardians that the ground was good. He clearly felt unhappy after what must have been a difficult meeting with Nicholls, and persuaded the Guardians to write to the Commissioners that:

it has been far from their intention to impute to Mr Wilkinson any blame . . . inasmuch as the Guardians themselves undertook to consult persons on the spot

whom they believed perfectly competent to give them an opinion . . . These persons confidently stated that in their opinion a depth of five feet [for foundations] would be sufficient upon which representation the land was purchased and the contract entered into.⁴⁸

The contract had provided for the builder to be paid for any extras certified by the architect, and therefore neither party had done anything beyond what they were required to do even though the new work evidently amounted to over two thousand feet of masonry, three feet thick and descending as much as eighteen feet in places. Wilkinson was exonerated, but grudgingly: when he claimed a percentage for supervising the extra works, the Commissioners quoted back at him the terms of his own contract which were that his basic fee on the original price was to include all necessary supervision and that he was entitled to no more in respect of extras.

If there had been unpleasantness at Headington, things were still worse at Radford, outside Nottingham, and the Chairman of the Guardians himself took things up with the Commissioners. The building was unfinished, he reported, but walls were bulging, timbers had been given insufficient bearing and undersized beams had been used. Hall – the same Assistant Commissioner who had been so incensed at Headington – was also responsible for Radford, and was asked to look into it. He wrote to Wilkinson that:

great, and in my view very well founded dissatisfaction exists among the Guardians and Ratepayers . . . at the mode in which their Workhouse has been erected under your direction and superintendence. I was expressly requested to attend a meeting at the [work]House, which I did on Wednesday last; I was there shown a great variety of instances of most disgraceful departure from the specifications, and of work which is greatly discreditable to those who performed it, and not less so to those who ought to have seen that it was performed otherwise.⁴⁹

Walls were filled with rubbish and not bonded through, drains were unuseable, and slating laths

were half the size specified. In addition, Wilkinson was seeking payment of fees in respect of certified extras, and his lawyers were threatening to sue the Radford Guardians.

In reply, Wilkinson blamed the clerk of works, recommended by the Guardians, for careless supervision, adding: 'I have never certified [the contractor's accounts] with knowledge that any part of the work was improperly executed.'⁵⁰ It was hardly a very satisfactory answer, and the Commissioners reasonably asked – what steps had he taken to ensure that the work had actually been executed properly? None, it seemed. It was probably fortunate for Wilkinson that he had by then been appointed official architect to the Poor Law Commissioners in Ireland, where he was less easily reached for cross-examination.

The Irish Commissioners were asked to speak to him in Dublin, and perhaps it was also lucky for Wilkinson that the Commissioners made their request to his old friend Edward Gulson. Gulson, who had originally recommended Wilkinson's Radford designs, had by then been appointed Assistant Commissioner in Ireland and one may guess that it was partly through his advocacy that Wilkinson had got the Irish job. No detailed answer to the Commissioners' enquiries survives, but in February 1840 George Nicholls, now in overall charge in Ireland as Commissioner, wrote to the Radford Guardians and told them to pay Wilkinson's outstanding bill.

Wilkinson's Irish appointment, in February 1839, followed from Nicholls's two reports into the state of the Poor Law in Ireland in which he recommended the extension of the workhouse system to that country.⁵¹ It was presumably thought more economical to appoint a salaried official to design all the buildings needed than to pay an independent architect's commission on each one, although the appointment was the source of considerable dissatisfaction among Irish architects.⁵² Wilkinson himself may have felt that with the English building

programme approaching completion, there would be fewer openings in England for his particular expertise. In February 1839 the Poor Law Commissioners stated:

The Board in Dublin had long ago instituted inquiries, with the view of ascertaining which of the architects employed in the construction of the English workhouses had been deemed on the whole the most successful, and given the greatest satisfaction, as regards arrangement and economy; and from the information received, it was led to consider that Mr Wilkinson, an architect of Oxford, was best suited to superintend the erection of workhouses in Ireland.⁵³

In the following years, Wilkinson designed over 130 new Irish workhouses, at a salary of £500 a year. These, wrote Nicholls, were 'of the cheapest description compatible with durability; and effect was sought to be obtained through harmony of proportion and simplicity of arrangement, all mere decoration being studiously avoided.'⁵⁴ Specimen plans and a perspective were published in the Commissioners' *Report* for 1839.⁵⁵ Despite Nicholls's words, Wilkinson himself wrote of the design published by the Commissioners that 'its gabled roofs and elevated chimney-shafts give it a pleasing and picturesque appearance . . . [and] may be much improved by a few trees planted in the garden ground which surrounds them.'⁵⁶ He exhibited a drawing of the new workhouse at Carlow at the Royal Academy in 1843.⁵⁷

Wilkinson retired from the Poor Law Board (as the organisation had by then become) in 1854 and set up in private practice in Dublin. His later Irish work included numerous railway buildings, where his evident mastery of practical planning was probably of great value. He retired in 1888 and returned to England. His workhouses are not architecturally distinguished, but it is clear that they were thought at the time to perform their utilitarian purposes efficiently. He may be seen as one of many contemporary architects, on the lower margins of the emerging profession, who in an earlier age would

probably have remained practical builders with a capacity for designing as well. He remained a practical man, designing buildings which did what they were supposed to do, and his death at Twickenham in 1890 was unnoticed by any of the professional journals.

GEORGE WILKINSON'S WORKHOUSE PLANS

The pen and wash plans, elevations, perspective views and sketches in the V&A album (see Appendix 1) illustrate a representative selection of Wilkinson's English and Welsh workhouses, arranged in roughly chronological order. The album was clearly never completed, as it contains blank folios and unfulfilled pencil instructions to a draughtsman. The fact that at least one of the pencil annotations disappears into the binding suggests that some, if not all, of the drawings were made on loose sheets and bound up subsequently; the blank pages may have been intended for further drawings which would complete the record of Wilkinson's work in England and Wales.

Most of the 42 drawings are plans. They are executed in ink, with the walls of single-storey elements given a grey fill, while those rising above one storey are filled in black. One set of plans (drawings 38, 39 and 40) has a colour wash. With one exception, the elevations and perspectives have been inked up, but only that of a gatehouse (see Fig. 3) is coloured. As the drawings are grouped together to illustrate different workhouse types, only the first in a group, usually the elevation, carries a caption stating where the building in question was erected. This information, however, is occasionally merely scribbled in pencil, and is sometimes completely absent. More consistently, drawings are identified as 'elevation', 'ground-plan', and so on, as appropriate.

The drawings in this album are modestly accomplished by the standards of the time, but they

should be appreciated for more than their artistic value. Since few original plans and drawings of the hundreds of new workhouses that were erected in the wake of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 have survived, Wilkinson's album is an extremely valuable historical document. As well as providing an opportunity to examine the role of the provincial architect in the implementation of the new Act (see above), it reveals the degree to which the standards and layout of pauper accommodation in New Poor Law workhouses varied from union to union, while continuing to fulfil stringent requirements regarding the classification, segregation and surveillance of pauper inmates.

George Wilkinson is known to have designed 22 workhouses in England and 9 in Wales between 1835 and 1838.⁵⁸ Before the V&A album came to light, very few original drawings of these buildings were known.⁵⁹ Of the buildings themselves (see Appendix 2), 13 have been demolished and 18 survive, some in a more complete state than others. The newly-discovered drawings greatly enhance our understanding and appreciation of these surviving buildings and, where appropriate, may even contribute to a more sympathetic conservation of their fabric.

Sampson Kempthorne's model plans were not published by the Poor Law Commission until autumn 1835, but copies had been circulated and Wilkinson may have seen them. However, Wilkinson produced a highly original design for Witney Union Workhouse (drawings 1, 2, 3 and 4; see Fig. 2) in June-July 1835. Like Kempthorne's 'hexagon' and 'square' plans, the building comprised wings radiating from a polygonal core, but instead of having just three or four wings and the corresponding number of yards, it had six. This came closer to Bentham's panopticon than any other New Poor Law workhouse design. While the ground floor of the conspicuous hub accommodated the kitchen, the master's room on the floor above provided a superior vantage point for supervising the exercise yards.

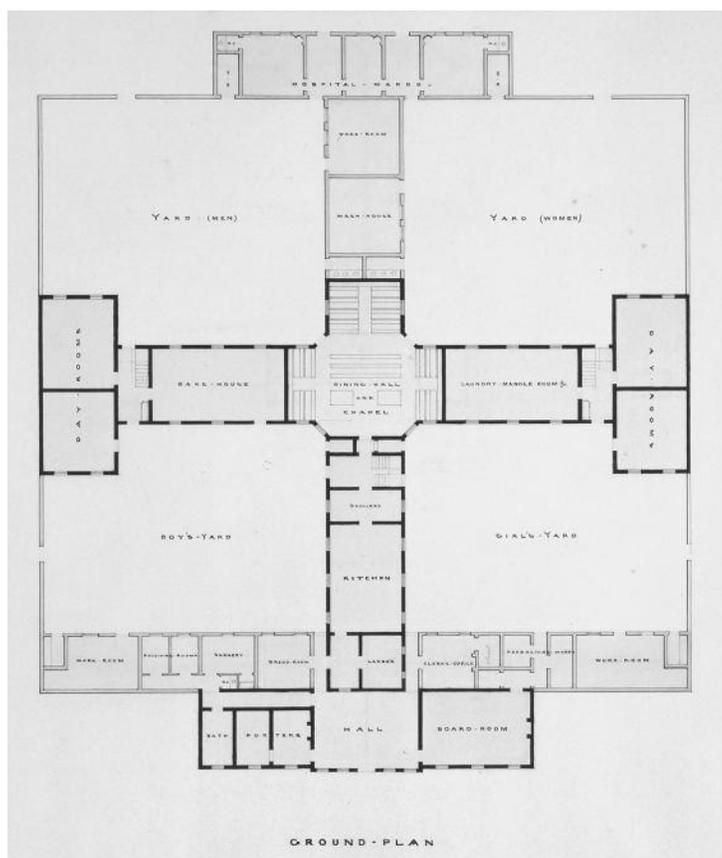


Fig. 10. Northleach Union Workhouse: ground-floor plan.
V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1448.18.1977.

The Witney design was praised by Gulson, the Assistant Commissioner for Oxfordshire, but was not taken up by other architects. However, Wilkinson himself repeated it on two further occasions: for Chipping Norton Union Workhouse (drawings 14, 15 and 16; Figs. 8 and 9), and for the much larger Wolverhampton Union Workhouse. Although Wolverhampton is not depicted in the V&A album, a schematic plan was published in a local newspaper in 1839,⁶⁰ making it possible to compare these three workhouses. Despite many similarities, Chipping Norton and Wolverhampton differed from Witney, and indeed from one another, in crucial respects.

Rather than simply reflecting local requirements, some of these differences can be seen as improvements, introduced in the light of experience. It is notable, for example, that the probationary (or receiving) wards at Chipping Norton and Wolverhampton were located in extensive entrance ranges, rather than being attached to the hub, thus reducing the possibility of new arrivals bringing infection or disease into the house. More importantly, Chipping Norton and Wolverhampton both had an infirmary (fever wards), while Witney did not, and only Wolverhampton provided casual wards for tramps. Before long, infirmary and tramp wards had become



Fig. 11. Northleach Union Workhouse, photographed by about 1890.
Reproduced by permission of English Heritage..NMR.

indispensable appendages to all but the smallest workhouses.

For his second workhouse, at Thame (drawings 11, 12 and 13; see Figs. 4 and 5), Wilkinson produced yet another novel design. This was based on Kempthorne's 'square' workhouse, but deviated significantly from the model. In particular, Wilkinson came up with a triangular-plan front (service) range and located the dining hall/chapel in the centre of the establishment. External covered passageways that enabled the dining hall to be bypassed may have been an amendment, following criticism from the Poor Law Commission (see above). Instead of having their own dayrooms, aged inmates were provided with arcaded spaces under the main accommodation ranges. Above these, the dormitories were arranged

back-to-back, to either side of a spine wall: a much less healthy option than the cross-ventilated dormitories advocated by Kempthorne.⁶¹ Wilkinson replicated the Thame design at Devizes and Chard. Elsewhere, he made widespread use of back-to-back dormitories and invariably located either the dining hall or the kitchen, rather than the master's room, on the ground floor of the hub, always making sure that it could be circumvented by internal or external passages. Covered yards for the elderly failed to become popular, but by the 1840s children's play sheds, a comparable feature, had become a common feature of workhouse design.

Thame Union Workhouse survives as Rycotewood College, and is approached by a drive flanked by pepper-pot gatehouses. A faint sketch for these, on

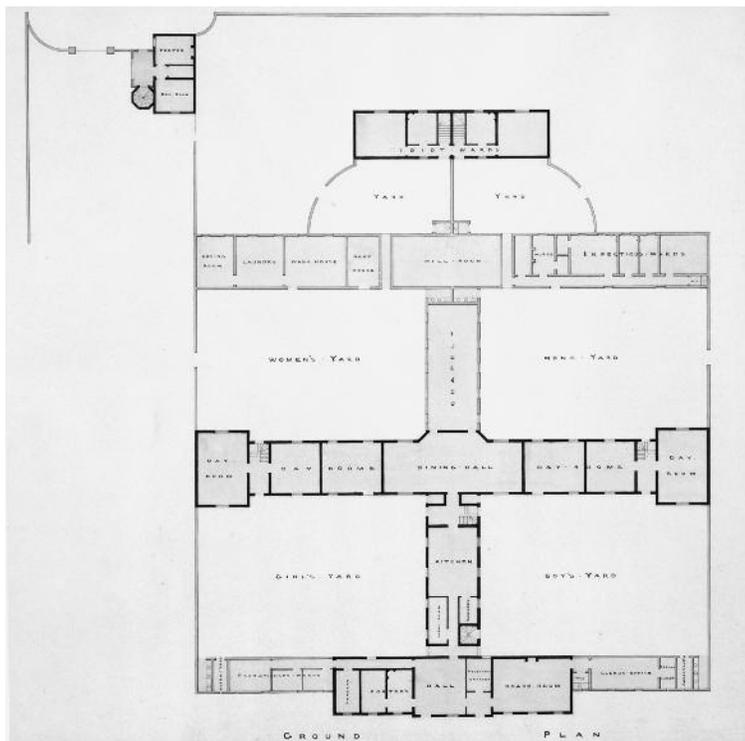


Fig. 12. Pembroke Union Workhouse: ground-floor plan. *V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1448.27.1977.*

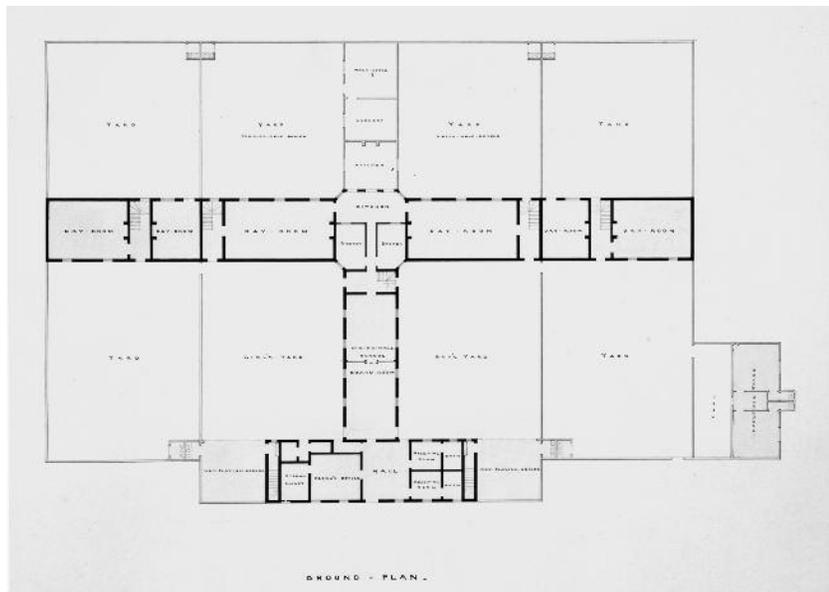


Fig. 13. Chepstow Union Workhouse: ground-floor plan. *V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1448.31.1977.*

the back of another drawing in the V&A album (drawing 20v), shows that they are an original feature of the establishment, designed by Wilkinson. A much more finished drawing of a different gatehouse and stables (drawing 16; see Fig. 3) is unidentified but conforms to the outline, shown on the 1st edition of the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map, of a since demolished building which stood at the entrance of Witney Union Workhouse. This building must have been an afterthought, as it superseded the porter's accommodation in the main house. Detached gatehouses were a relatively unusual feature of New Poor Law workhouses, but the V&A album shows that they existed at two other Wilkinson workhouses: at Headington (see Fig. 7) and at Pembroke (see Fig. 12). That at Pembroke, designed around the time of the Registry Act of 1837, was used as a registry office.

Drawings 8, 9 and 10 are not captioned but must represent Headington Union Workhouse (see Fig. 7), the only 'hexagon' workhouse known to have been designed by Wilkinson. This was Wilkinson's third workhouse, approved in January 1836. Although the form of the structure, possibly dictated by the *Guardians*, was very similar to Kempthorne's 'hexagon' model, the accommodation was arranged quite differently: in fact, only the positions of the waiting hall and porter's room remained unchanged. Most significantly, building costs were reduced by locating workrooms on the ground floor of the main ranges rather than in detached structures, a layout repeated by Wilkinson in many of his future workhouses.

Like Thame, Wilkinson's fourth workhouse – Woodstock (drawings 5, 6 and 7) – took Kempthorne's 'square' plan as its starting point, but diverged from the model in several respects. The bake-house and wash-house lay to the rear of the central kitchen, and were separated from one another by a narrow alley overlooked by an oriel that projected from the back of the master's room on the first floor of the hub. This oriel is one of the few features used by Wilkinson which bring to mind the

grim courtyard-plan workhouses designed by Assistant Commissioner Sir Francis Head for Kent unions.⁶²

Wilkinson's ideas on workhouse design had matured by spring 1836, and his later buildings generally developed concepts tested in his first workhouses, rather than breaking new ground. Most of these later workhouses, including Northleach (drawings 17, 18 and 19; Figs. 10 and 11) and Weobley (drawings 20, 21 and 22), were based very loosely on Kempthorne's 'square' or '200 pauper' plans. While Kempthorne's '200 pauper' plans had no supervisory hub, Wilkinson never abandoned the principle of supervision, providing canted bays to overlook the adult exercise yards even in his smallest workhouses. This can be seen at Tenbury (drawings 23, 24 and 25), built for 70 inmates, and Aberayron (drawings 36 and 37), for between 80 and 100. Both of these workhouses had T-shaped ranges within a rectangular boundary; compared with Kempthorne's designs, they provided little in the way of workrooms, and ingeniously separated children's accommodation from that of the adults. Neath (drawings 33, 34 and 35; see Figs. 6, 15 and 16), another small workhouse, had a compact double courtyard plan, with each square courtyard overlooked from the master's room and divided into two triangular yards by walls.

Pembroke and Chepstow, two Welsh workhouses designed in 1837, have particularly interesting features. Pembroke (Fig. 12) was the only one of Wilkinson's workhouses to have a chapel that was distinct from the dining hall, and the album contains a perspective drawing of the proposed interior (drawing 29). Chepstow (Fig. 13), on the other hand, appears to have had no chapel at all, although a large multi-purpose room with a central partition was labelled 'dining hall, school and boardroom' and may also have served as a chapel.

Chepstow provided no less than eight yards by extending the main accommodation ranges beyond the confines of the notional 'square'. In theory, all

workhouses were supposed to provide separate accommodation for seven classes of inmates, including infants; in practice, some provided six yards, but most had four, compelling the aged and infirm to share their yards with the able bodied. The extra yards at Chepstow may reflect an unusually high population of aged paupers, or provision for an unspecified class, such as 'idiots'. A curious, even unique, feature of Pembroke, was a detached two-storey block to the rear of the establishment labelled 'Idiot Wards'. This is one of the earliest instances of such accommodation being provided at a workhouse, as the mentally handicapped were usually mixed with paupers classified as able bodied at this date, and were even employed to look after babies and young children.

The arrangement of the workrooms at both Chepstow and Pembroke was odd. Chepstow provided the usual wash-house and laundry for women, but no workrooms for men. Even after comments from the Commissioners (see above), nothing seems to have been done to correct this omission. At most workhouses, a bake-house and either a flour room or mill room were located in the men's or boys' yards, but at Pembroke the bake-house was located on the women's side of the institution, between the wash-house and a central mill room. Despite its ambiguous location, the mill room was probably accessed from the men's yard. Instead of other workrooms, the men's yard was equipped with a suite of infectious wards. As female inmates were usually appointed to nurse patients, this would have threatened the strict segregation of the establishment, and it is surprising that it was permitted. Infirmaries, or infectious wards, were usually located to centre rear, where they were accessible from both the male and female sides of the establishment. At Woodstock, however, they could be entered only from the able-bodied women's yard, and at Chepstow they appear to have been entered through the aged men's yard. Neither of these positions would have been as objectionable as that at Pembroke.

Detached infirmaries were not included in Kempthorne's model plans, and many first generation workhouses had no means of isolating, let alone treating, sick inmates. While early workhouse infirmaries usually comprised a small room, or ward, to either side of a nurse's room, at Northleach (see Fig. 10) and Chipping Norton (see Fig. 8) the wards were in the form of detached pavilions, separated from the central nurse's room by small yards. This was a very sophisticated arrangement which would have discouraged the spread of infection. However, none of Wilkinson's infirmaries had cross-ventilation, a principle which he does not seem to have appreciated, and their water closets usually abutted other structures, sometimes (rather alarmingly) closets serving adjoining yards. Only at Chepstow did the infirmary closets project freely away from the institution.

At the very back of the V&A album are drawings representing two unidentified workhouses. Three drawings are simply captioned 'Design B' (drawings 38, 39 and 40). This building, which may never have been erected, was clearly destined to hold a large number of paupers. From its size, it is tempting to suggest that this was an early attempt to design an Irish workhouse. If so, it is very different from the final version.⁶³ Another drawing depicts a 'square' workhouse, shown with two alternative elevations, one plain, the other more ornate. This closely resembles several of the other workhouses in the album, and indeed several of Wilkinson's workhouses such as Bridgend and Cowbridge which are not mentioned in it, but so far efforts to identify it have proved unsuccessful.

Most of Wilkinson's English and Welsh workhouses were plain and utilitarian, well proportioned, with minimal classical detailing. At a time when the costs of building materials depended greatly on transport and local availability, the choice of either brick or stone was determined by whatever was most readily to hand: Kempthorne's specification of stone at Witney will be remembered. At



Fig. 14. Pembroke Union Workhouse: elevation.
V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, E.1448.26.1977.

Llandoverly, the Guardians sought and obtained permission to spend an extra £45 on ‘durable stone [perhaps ashlar] for the front of the building instead of rough cast, in order to meet the wishes of the Rev. Mr Williams on whose property it is being built’.⁶⁴ A few of Wilkinson’s workhouses adopted a Tudor or Elizabethan style, having steep gables with kneelers or bargeboards, cast-iron diamond-paned casements, mullions and transoms, carved corbels, shaped chimneys, stone slates and even cruciform arrow loops. These included Aberayron, Abergavenny, Bridgend and Cowbridge, Pembroke (Fig. 14) and Tenbury. Of these, Tenbury was executed in red brick with stone dressings, while the others were of stone. A Tudor or Elizabethan style appealed to boards of guardians who wanted their workhouse to look more like an almshouse than a prison, and was not necessarily more expensive than a classical treatment. A simplified version of this Tudor style – not unlike that employed at the time for asylums by the Irish Board of Works – was adopted subsequently in Ireland. Most Irish workhouses were of dark grey limestone, and were characterised by steep gables with either kneelers or

shaped wooden bargeboards, and with diamond-paned casements. The intention, according to Wilkinson, was to make the buildings as unobtrusive as possible within their setting, which was usually urban or suburban, and to produce ‘a pleasing and picturesque appearance’.⁶⁵ That appearance was at odds with the extremely basic conditions that prevailed inside Irish workhouses.

Internally, Wilkinson’s workhouses were essentially economical, though they had to withstand high levels of wear and tear. Ground floors were generally covered with flags or quarry tiles, upper floors boarded in 1¼ inch boards, Baltic deals always specified, sometimes English oak, and sometimes an explicit ban on American timber. Internal walls were lime-washed, though ceilings were lathed and plastered. Only the board room, clerk’s room and master’s rooms had plastered walls with a coloured wash. The principal sleeping and work rooms were without ornament of any kind; at Neath, the Revd. Henry Knight complained to the Board of ‘the awkward and unsightly protrusion of the couples beneath the ceilings’ (Fig. 15).⁶⁶ Stairs were generally of stone, with plain iron balusters (Fig. 16); roofs



Fig. 15. Neath Union Workhouse, a dormitory photographed about 1985.
Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

were slated. While land and building costs could be funded by loans (from the Exchequer or from private sources) the cost of furnishings had to be borne on the rates – a stipulation that several unions seem not to have been aware of until the building was ready to be fitted up, and a further motive for frugality.

Only seven of Wilkinson's English and Welsh workhouses do not appear in the album, either in their own right or represented by a similar building. Of these, Abergavenny, Bridgend and Cowbridge, Cardiff, Llandoverly and Llandilo Fawr had relatively

standard 'square' plans. Leominster and Malmesbury, on the other hand, seem to have been special cases. Wilkinson may not have considered Leominster Union Workhouse worthy of inclusion, as it involved the conversion and extension of an existing building, Leominster Priory, rather than an entirely new build. Malmesbury may have been excluded because the design was dictated by the Guardians, who wanted a single south-facing range with two wings, something not ideal for the purpose.⁶⁷

Between 1839, when Wilkinson moved to



Fig. 16. Neath Union Workhouse, a staircase photographed about 1985.
Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

Dublin, and 1854, when he left the service of the Poor Law Board, his small department was responsible for building or adapting no fewer than 163 Irish workhouses. Shortly after his appointment, the Poor Law Commissioners stated that Wilkinson had been prepared for this work by his experience in Wales ‘under circumstances, and with materials not very dissimilar from what exist in Ireland’.⁶⁸ Most of these Irish buildings adhered to standard plans which were drafted by Wilkinson in spring 1839, but modified following the famine of the late forties.

They differed from his English and Welsh workhouses in many ways. In particular, they were a great deal larger, and offered more primitive accommodation for inmates. The Commissioners’ comparison with Wilkinson’s much smaller Welsh workhouses does not stand scrutiny beyond superficial stylistic similarities, and while Wilkinson’s English and Welsh workhouses cost an average of £23 per head, his Irish workhouses cost £12.⁶⁹

Questions remain about the history of the V&A album. How did it pass out of George Wilkinson’s

hands? Did he leave it behind when he went to Ireland, or did it stay with him until his death in England in 1890? Who was the subsequent owner, and why did someone gouge his name from the title plate with such apparent ferocity? Was the introductory map of England and Wales removed because it, too, bore his name? And how did it end up in the Wells bookshop, where it was purchased by the V&A in 1977 for £16?

APPENDIX I

Album of Workhouse Drawings by George Wilkinson
[V&A Print and Drawings Department:
E.1448.1-41.1977].

Title (tooled leather panel on cloth cover):
‘DRAWINGS OF UNION WORKHOUSE
BUILDINGS ERECTED IN ENGLAND AND
WALES AD — 1835-6-7-8-9. ~~GEORGE~~
~~WILKINSON~~ ARCHITECT’.

Unpaginated.

Five blank pages: no watermarks.

Page torn out: offset of image on verso of previous page shows that this was a map of England divided into unions, with a key (now indecipherable). It may have shown the locations of Wilkinson’s workhouses.

1. ‘Erected for the Witney Union Oxfordshire. Elevation’. Watermark: J. Whatman 1836.
2. ‘Ground-plan’. Watermark: J. Whatman 1836.
3. ‘One-pair-plan’.
4. ‘Plan’. Shows plan and coloured view of a gatehouse, annotated in pencil ‘yellow sandstone’ (Watermark: J. Whatman 1836). This building, which accommodated stabling (for the guardians’ horses) and a porter’s lodge, was erected at Witney Union Workhouse (source: OS 1:2500, Oxfordshire, XXXI.8, 1875).
5. ‘Erected for the Woodstock Union Oxfordshire. Elevation’.
6. ‘Ground-plan’.
7. ‘One-pair-plan’. Watermark: J. Whatman 1836.
8. No caption. Perspective view of a hexagon workhouse, annotated in pencil ‘yellow sandstone’. Watermark: J. Whatman 1837. Drawings 8 to 10 probably represent Headington Union Workhouse, which was Wilkinson’s only hexagon workhouse.
9. ‘Ground-plan’. Watermark: J. Whatman 1837.

10. 'One-pair-plan'. Watermark: J. Whatman 1836.
11. No caption. Perspective view of workhouse, annotated in pencil 'brick building'. Drawings 11 to 13 represent a plan used by Wilkinson at Thame, Devizes and Chard.
12. 'Ground-plan'.
13. 'One-pair-plan'.
14. 'Erected for the Chipping Norton Union Oxfordshire. Similar design erected for the Wolverhampton Union Staffordshire. Elevation'. Annotated in pencil: 'E yellow sandstone'. Watermark: J. Whatman 1836.
15. 'Ground-plan'. Pencil annotation 'C. Norton'. Watermark: J. Whatman 1836.
16. 'One-pair-plan'.
17. 'Erected for the Northleach Union Gloucestershire. Similar designs erected at Stow-on-the-Wold Gloucestershire, Ledbury Herefordshire, Purton Wiltshire, Wincanton Somersetshire, Dorchester and Honiton Devonshire. Elevation'. 'Purton' refers to Cricklade & Wootton Bassett Union.
18. 'Ground-plan'. Pencil annotation 'Northleach'.
19. 'One-pair-plan'. Watermark: J. Whatman 1836.
20. 'Erected for the Weobley Union Herefordshire. Similar designs at Bromyard Herefordshire, Radford Nottinghamshire and Gainsboro' Lincolnshire'. Although there is no caption reading 'elevation', that is what is shown.
- 20v. Uncaptioned pencil sketch of two pepper-pot gatehouses. Gatehouses of this type survive at Thame.
21. 'Ground-plan'. Pencil annotation 'Weobley'.
22. 'One-pair-plan'. Pencil annotation 'Weobley'. Watermark: J. Whatman 1836. Blank page (no watermark). Possibly reserved for Tenbury elevation.
23. 'Ground-plan'. No formal caption but annotated in pencil 'Tenbury'.
24. 'One-pair-plan'. Pencil annotation 'Tenbury'.
25. 'Design made to suit the same plan as Tenbury. Elevation'. Blank page (no watermark).
26. 'Elevation'. Pencil annotation: 'Pembroke'.
27. 'Ground plan'.
28. 'One-pair-plan'. Watermark: J. Whatman 1837.
29. No caption. Pencil annotation: 'f — query, could this be coloured'. This sketch shows the interior of the chapel of Pembroke Union. Workhouse. Watermark: J. Whatman 1836.
30. 'Erected for the Chepstow Union Monmouthshire. Elevation'.
31. 'Ground-plan'. Watermark: J. Whatman 1836.
32. 'One-pair-plan'.
33. 'Erected for the Neath Union Glamorganshire Elevation'.
34. 'Ground plan'. Pencil annotation 'Neath'. Watermark: J. Whatman 1837.
35. 'One-pair-plan'.
36. 'Erected for the Aberayron Union Cardiganshire'. Although there is no caption reading 'elevation', that is what is shown.
37. 'Ground-plan' and 'One-pair-plan'. Pencil annotation 'Aberayron'. Three blank pages (no watermarks).
38. 'Design B. Drawing No 1. Ground plan'. Tinted wash. Watermark: J. Whatman (no date).
39. 'Design B. Drawing No 2. One pair plan'. Pencil annotation: '...shape of the Governor's House disposed to be altered so... to have an angle inspecting several yards in a...t point of view'. Watermark: J. Whatman 1834 (?).
40. 'Design B. Drawing No 3. Two pair plan'.
41. 'Ground-plan' and 'elevation'. Both elevations, one in a Tudor or Elizabethan style, the other in a plain or classical style, relate to the plan. This drawing has been pasted into the album. Five blank pages (no watermarks).

APPENDIX II
WORKHOUSES IN ENGLAND AND WALES DESIGNED
BY GEORGE WILKINSON

Union Workhouse ¹	Date of Design ²	Contract prices	No. of Inmates ³	Survival ⁴
Aberayron (Card)	Jan 1838	£1200	80-100	s
Abergavenny (Mon)	July 1837		150	s
Bridgend & Cowbridge (Glam)	Feb 1837	£2700	200	s
Bromyard (Heref)	June 1836		120	s
Cardiff (Glam)	May 1837	£3800	250	ps
Chard (Som)	July 1836		300	d
Chepstow (Mon)	May 1837		150	d
Chipping Norton (Oxon)	Feb 1836	£4993	350	s
Cricklade & Wooton Bassett (Wilts)	Apr 1836		200	ps
Devizes (Wilts)	Feb 1836	£6000	400	d
Dorchester (Dorset)	April 1836	£3000 (est.)	250	ps
Gainsborough (Lincs)	May 1837		200	d
Headington (Oxon)	Jan 1836	£2795	250	d
Honiton (Devon)	June 1836		200	d
Ledbury (Heref)	July 1836		150	ps
Leominster (Heref)	July 1836			s
Llandilo Fawr (Carm)	May 1837	£2243	120	d
Llandovery (Carm)	May 1837	£2295	120	ps
Malmesbury (Wilts)	Jan 1836	£3000 (est.)	250	d
Neath (Glam)	May 1837	£2600	150	ps
Northleach (Glos)	Mar 1836	£2600	200	s
Pembroke (Pem)	April 1837	£2650	180	ps
Radford (Notts)	Mar 1837	£2394	200	d
Stow-on-the Wold (Glos)	Mar 1836			d
Tenbury (Worcs)	Oct 1836	£1200	70?	s
Thame (Oxon)	Dec 1835	£5693	350	s
Weobley (Heref)	May 1836	£2295	80	s
Wincanton (Som)	May 1836		140	d
Witney (Oxon)	July 1835	£4940	450	ps
Wolverhampton (Staffs)	Nov 1837	£4850 (est.)	500	d
Woodstock (Oxon)	Jan 1837	£3100	300	d

1: old counties used. 2: date design approved by BG or PLC. 3: information from annual reports of Poor Law Commission 1836-1839. 4: s - survives; d - demolished; ps - partly survives.

NOTES

- 1 London, Victoria & Albert Museum, E.1448.1–41.1977.
- 2 For his work on Irish railways, see Stanley Jenkins, ‘George Wilkinson of Witney’, *Records of Witney*, I, 17 Jan 1984, 3–8, and Michael Gould and Ronald Cox ‘The Railway Stations of George Wilkinson,’ *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies, The Journal of the Irish Georgian Society*, VI, 2003, 183–201.
- 3 Kathryn Morrison, *The Workhouse. A Study of Poor-Law Buildings in England*, London, 1999, *passim*.
- 4 For the work of the Assistant Commissioners, see Thomas Mackay, *A History of the English Poor Law*, 1904, III, 162–200; M.A.Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834–1929*, 1981, 30–41.
- 5 [Sir] George Nicholls, 1781–1865. George Nicholls pioneered the essentials of the post-1834 system in Southwell, Nottinghamshire.
- 6 London, National Archives, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), MH32/28 25.12.1834 Edward Gulson. Though Gulson had built no new workhouse at Coventry, he may have had one in mind and it is possible that he was aware of Kempthorne’s plans before their publication. ‘As to your remarks upon Mr Kempthorne’, he wrote to Nicholls in a letter dated January 1834, ‘the success of our new measure partly depends upon the plans of new workhouses being perfect . . . [and on] . . . that classification absolutely necessary to afford a fair test of pauperism.’ [*Ibid.*, 18.1.1834, Edward Gulson.] The letter is so dated; but it may be that (written in January) the year is mistaken for 1835. It appears as the first letter in the guard-book of his correspondence as Assistant Commissioner, but there is evidence that these books were made up at a later date and a January 1835 date for this letter is perhaps more likely, particularly in view of the reference to ‘our new measure’. The point is important for the date of Kempthorne’s plans, but not for the work of George Wilkinson.
- 7 *First Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners* 1835, 28–9, 407–14; *Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners* 1836, 636–7.
- 8 Kempthorne’s building is illustrated in Morrison, *op. cit.*, 74.
- 9 PRO MH32/28 11.1.1835 Edward Gulson.
- 10 PRO MH32/28 16.4.1836 E. Gulson.
- 11 PRO MH32/28 16.6.1835 Edward Gulson.
- 12 Oxfordshire Record Office [hereafter ORO] PLU6/6/1A1/1 15.6.1835.
- 13 *Ibid.* 2.7.1835; 9.7.1835.
- 14 PRO MH32/28 27.11.1835 Edward Gulson.
- 15 Andrew Saint, ‘Three Oxford Architects’, *Oxoniensia* XXXV, 1970, 54.
- 16 St. Mary’s church, Witney, marriage registers, 1850.
- 17 ORO PLU6/6/1A1/1 23.7.1835.
- 18 PRO MH 32/68 14.3.1836 Thomas Stevens.
- 19 PRO MH12/10285 30.6.1836 Guardians’ Minutes.
- 20 ORO PLU7/G/1A1/15.1.1836.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 12.1.1836.
- 22 PRO MH12/16246, 20.10.1836, 27.10.1836, 12.1.1837, extracts from Guardians’ minutes.
- 23 PRO MH12/16246, 19.8.1837 T.Watkins.
- 24 PRO MH12/4285, 29.6.1836 E.W.H[ead] [?].
- 25 PRO MH12/9511, 23.3.1837 W.Wilson.
- 26 PRO MH12/9732, 21.12.1835 Secretary to PLCs.
- 27 ORO PLU6/G/1A1/1, 17.4.1836.
- 28 PRO MH12/9775, n.d. [Jan.1836] J.Robertson.
- 29 PRO MH12/2273, 22.6.1836 J.Robertson.
- 30 PRO MH12/11674, 5.12.1837 J.Savage.
- 31 PRO MH12/8031, 3.6.1837 J.Savage.
- 32 PRO MH12/16354, 13.5.1837 Poor Law Commissioners.
- 33 PRO MH12/16354, 20.11.1838 *et. seq.* Revd. Henry Knight & others. Knight, vicar of Neath, was a known opponent of the workhouse system and was particularly incensed when Senior, the Assistant Commissioner, came with George Wilkinson to view the shortcomings of the building, unannounced, on a Sunday morning. Knight was also opposed to strict classification and wished for cross walls in the girls’ and women’s yards to be demolished; Senior defended the segregation of ‘the young and still virtuous female from the depraved mother of illegitimate offspring’ [*Ibid.*, n.d. (2.1839) Senior].
- 34 PRO MH32/44, 11.7.1836 E.W.Head.
- 35 ORO PLU3/G/2A1.
- 36 Gloucestershire Record Office, G/STO 32.
- 37 In the PRO MH12 files for each union.
- 38 PRO MH12/16246, 19.8.1837 T.Watkins.
- 39 PRO MH12/8031, 27.3.1838 Poor Law Commissioners. Specifically, the enquiry related to ‘Dr. Arnott’s system.’ This, combining heating and ventilating, was described in the Commissioners’ *Second Annual Report*, 1836, 493–4, from which no doubt the Chepstow Guardians had learnt of it.
- 40 PRO MH12/16667 J.Jones.

- 41 PRO MH 12/16246 14.3.1839 T.Watkins.
- 42 PRO MH12/15922 E.Senior.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 15.10.1838 G. Wilkinson, quoting (unnamed) contractor.
- 44 PRO MH32/66, 30.11.1838 Edward Senior.
- 45 PRO MH12/15937, 28.7.1838 R. Williams.
- 46 PRO MH12/15937, 28.7.1838 R.Williams.
- 47 PRO MH12/9658, 17.4.1837 A.W.Savage.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 2.6.1837 Walsh.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 8.3.1839 Richard Hall.
- 50 PRO MH12/9511, 16.3.1839 George Wilkinson.
- 51 George Nicholls, *A History of the Irish Poor Law*, 1856, 176–8, 239–40, 243.
- 52 Frederick O’Dwyer, ‘Architecture, Politics and the Board of Works 1760–1860’, *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, V, 2002, 155.
- 53 *Fifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, 1839, Appendix B, no.6.
- 54 George Nicholls, *A History of the Irish Poor Law*, 1856, 244.
- 55 *Fifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, 1839, 127–44 & plans A–D.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 134.
- 57 Algernon Groves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors*, VIII, 1906, 278: 1843, no.1212.
- 58 Wilkinson may have designed other workhouses which have not yet been identified as his work. The workhouses of Wales have not been studied to the same extent as English workhouses. Two of those described here were discovered through their chance mention in Wilkinson’s correspondence about other workhouses.
- 59 These drawings are: Aberayron Union Workhouse, four drawings including two plans, two sections, six drawings of doors and windows [Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, PZ 4419/1–5]; Gainsborough Union Workhouse, elevations [Lincoln, Lincolnshire Record Office, PL4/109/1–2]; Leominster Union Workhouse, elevation and ground-floor plan, approved by PLC July 1836 [Hereford, Hereford & Worcester Record Office, A58/1–2]; Stow-on-the-Wold Union Workhouse, ground-floor plan, first-floor plan, second-floor plan, two alternative elevations, approved by PLC May 1836 [Gloucester, Gloucestershire Record Office, G/STo 32].
- 60 *Staffordshire Examiner*, 5.10.1839 n.p.
- 61 Morrison, *op. cit.*, 46.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 54–57.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 66, fig.63.
- 64 PRO MH12/15937, 39.12.1837 R.Williams.
- 65 *Fifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, Appendix B, No 9, 82.
- 66 PRO MH12/16354, 1.12.1838 Revd. H.Knight.
- 67 PRO MH12/13776.
- 68 *Fifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, Appendix B, No.6, 34.
- 69 John O’Connor, *The Workhouses of Ireland*, 1995, 92. Approximately 2,500 drawings for Irish workhouses survive in the Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin.