

Then and Now: From Monastic Tithe Barn to Worle Village Primary School



At the top of Hill Road, on the corner with Church Road, stands a building which is one of the oldest in North Somerset. It was constructed sometime in the early 13th century as a Monastic Barn and was used by the community at Woodspring Priory and the parish of Worle to store tithe grain. Only the original St Martin's Church, on the adjacent site, was known to be standing when the barn was built.

Sadly, by 1829 the building had fallen into disrepair, but it was visited by John Rutter, who made a sketch of the derelict barn [above left] and provided the following facts: superior masonry and the walls were almost entire, forming a parallelogram, with gable ends. It was 70 feet long by 30 feet wide. The height inside was from 26 to 30 feet, and full 40 feet to the apex of the roof. The north [road] side had 8 chiselled buttresses, and an arched window in the centre, nearly level with the road. The south side was level with the lower ground, and had also eight buttresses. At the centre of the south side only, was a door-way formed by a plain obtuse arch, nine feet wide and twelve feet high in the centre. This entrance would have allowed horse drawn carts to enter the building to unload their wares.

In 1865 this lovely old building was repaired, and a new roof was added. The picture in the centre shows the results of this work, which cost £890 and provided Worle with its first state elementary school. The official opening of the new school took place on 2nd November 1865 and was reported in local newspapers.

Until 1901 it was the only state school in Worle, catering for children aged between 5 and 10 years. When the Infants' School was built in Mendip Avenue the school on the hill became Worle V.C. Junior School and later Hillside School.

Now, in 2016, it is once again Worle Village Primary School. The school hall occupies the old monastic barn space and hundreds of pupils will have enjoyed morning assembly in this hall, and will have memories of singing 'Onward Christian Soldiers' with the vigour and enthusiasm of youth.

The central part of the existing building is around 800 years old. When the scaffolding for the maintenance work is removed, go up and touch the buttresses on Church Road – a direct connection with history.