

DOWN MEMORY LANE

Continuing our series looking at Stewkley past and present

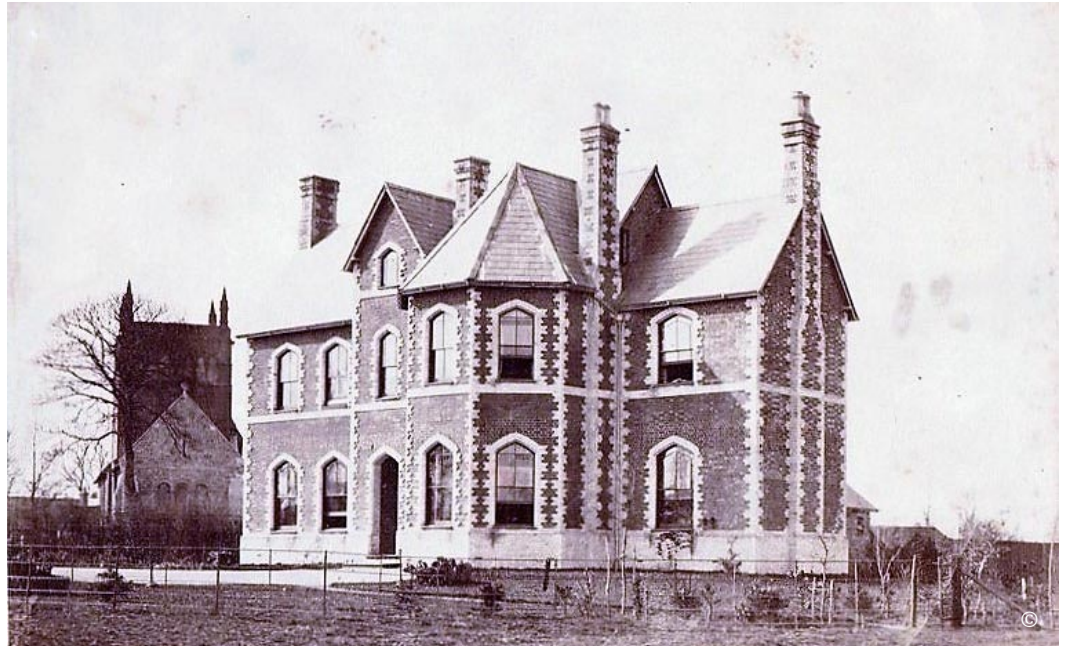
Whatever Happened to the Old Vicarage?

Our regular 'Stewkley Past and Present' series has so far compared an old scene with one that is still recognisable in a contemporary image. This is manifestly not the case this month, the only constant being St Michael's Church in the background, less its 14th century Perpendicular pinnacles on the tower.

The magnificent Victorian Vicarage was swept away in the 1960s to make way for development of the modern housing of St Michael's Close.

The new Vicarage, designed by James Durley of Aylesbury, had been commissioned by Reverend Charles Travers soon after his arrival in the parish in 1859, to become his residence and that of future Stewkley vicars on its completion in 1860. It was a considerable pile, set in its own extensive grounds, the scene of May Day celebrations, amongst other events. The building was freely used for the many activities and meetings of both church and village groups for the next hundred years. The Vicarage had plentiful accommodation too. At the 1911 Census, it was the home of Reverend John Smith-Masters, his wife Eliza, son Harold and the occasional home of their three older sons away at school, college or in the Army, as well as two domestic servants, Jane Willis and Edith Callis. It gave its name to the adjacent Stewkley Vicarage Cricket Club and Stewkley Vicarage Tennis Club, members of the latter playing on the front lawn.

By the 1960s, the passage of time, maintenance costs, and the simple economics of running such a large Victorian house had taken their toll. The Diocese decided the best financial solution was to demolish the old building and to develop the site for modern housing, taking the opportunity to build a more modest and cost-effective Vicarage for the incumbent on a smaller plot.



1960s aerial view of the Church and Old Vicarage site courtesy of Ron and Julia Sims