



# The Museum building

The land on which Weston Museum now stands was owned by the Smyth-Pigott Estate until 1852 when it was sold for development. The first buildings in the new Burlington Street were placed at the western end, nearest the seafront. They comprised a number of cottages (some of which can still be seen opposite the museum) and a coach house with accompanying workshops.

Sometime between 1898 and 1903 the various buildings, yards and stables at the eastern end of the site were bought by Charles T Baker, a local businessman and founder of Bakers Dolphin. The buildings were improved and given the name Burlington Mews.

The original cottage and coach house that formed Burlington Mews have been included in the existing building and can be seen inside the Museum.



*The building in its role as home to the Gaslight Company © Weston Museum*

In 1906 Mr Baker sold the site to Vowles and Sons who operated an omnibus company from the Wagon and Horses Inn on Regent Place. Their business was growing, and they needed extra stabling for their horses. The Vowles' also provided horses to the Fire Brigade and for all the transport required by the Grand Atlantic Hotel.



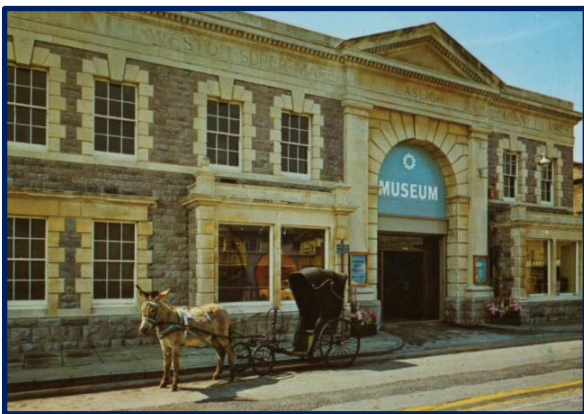
*Inside the museum before the recent refurbishment © Weston Museum*

However, the arrival of motor transport spelled the end of the horse drawn carriage. With their business in decline Mr Vowles offered the coach work premises to The Weston-super-Mare Gaslight Company in January 1911.

The wood block flooring, such a feature of the museum's ground floor, is an original part of the coachwork building. In fact, the change of use of the buildings explains why it was there in the first place. For many years it was wrongly thought that the wooden floor was a safety measure so that sparks would not be made on cobblestones by workers' hobnailed boots, causing a fire or explosion.

We now know that the wooden blocks were probably laid in the original coach works in an attempt to reduce the amount of noise made by iron coach wheels and horses' hooves, which might disturb the people living in the cottages just across the street. Wooden cobbles (also known as Nicolson pavement) were even used for roads during the early 1800s in some parts of the UK.

After buying the site for £795, the gas company asked William Jane (an employee of Hans Price's firm) to prepare designs for alterations to the building. The plans were approved and building work commenced in August 1911, comprising a new 5-bay 'grand façade' looking on to Burlington Street which spread across the original cottage, the courtyard and the workshops.



*The building after it was converted to house the museum © Weston Museum*

Later, the land to the western side of the street was also bought. At the time this comprised a coal yard and three cottages. All three cottages were demolished and Jane's new design was extended to form a 16-bay front 133 feet long with extra workshops and storage areas.

C & E Stradling were the builders on the second phase and it is proof of their skills that the joint between the two frontages is virtually invisible (it's 49 feet from the eastern end).

Beneath the cornice, a frieze was added with the words: 'Weston-super-Mare Gaslight Company Workshops MCMXII' and 'Weston-super-Mare Gaslight Company Stores'.

By 1913 the completed building was fully operational. The final works included a glass roof over the open courtyard between the two buildings and the relaying of the salvaged wooden block floor throughout both courtyards.

The business continued to grow, so that by 1937 the Weston-super-Mare Gaslight Company was stocking cookers, refrigerators, fires and water heaters. It also undertook cooker repairs, paint spraying, tinsmithing (re-lining copper pans with tin) and meter testing. Demonstrations were also given in cookery and laundry. Some 70 staff were employed on the site.

**Following the nationalisation of gas companies in 1948 the nature of the business began to change. The building became redundant when the gas company moved to the Drove Road site in 1970. It was eventually sold to Weston Borough Council in 1973.**

The building was then converted into a museum, with the opening ceremony held on the 30th June 1975. It was renamed 'The Woodspring Museum' after the Woodspring District Council (now North Somerset Council) and has been our home ever since.



Weston-super-Mare  
Town Council