

## ROUNDAABOUT RINGWOOD & FORDINGBRIDGE

# NOW and THEN

### Ringwood Workhouse

Ringwood Workhouse around the turn of the 20th century



**M**any people are familiar with the first few lines of the old Victorian poem, 'It was Christmas Day in the Workhouse', although probably very few could recite the entire rhyme. Workhouses in general have received a bad image from their portrayal by Victorian authors such as Dickens, but here in Ringwood the guardians and local tradespeople appear to have tried their best to give the inmates as good a Christmas as possible.

Ringwood's Workhouse was built in 1725 outside the town at Ashley on the Verwood



The remaining left side of the Workhouse in October 2009

road and was originally termed a Poorhouse. It became known as a Workhouse in 1834 following reforms to the Poor Law. Although much was demolished after it finally closed in 1936, parts of the original building remain today, including the impressive front door with a plaque above recording the date of its construction.

In Victorian times it was considered part of ones Christian duty to give aid to the poor and Christmas was seen as a particularly suitable period for doing so. In the early 20th century the late Dr Little was the last Medical Officer for the Workhouse. He recorded that on Christmas Day there was free beer and other extras donated by the Board of Guardians and kind friends to add to the Christmas dinner. He added that 'the food was always excellent, for all the vegetables were grown there, the bacon came from their own pigs and the House had its own poultry and eggs'.

Everyday life there was probably not a happy one for most of the inmates but it is good to hear that in Ringwood at least locals tried to give them a merry Christmas.

