



Victoria House Rural Business Centre

The Moor, Hawkhurst, Kent TN18 4NR Tel: 01304 366 628

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History

FROM HOME-COOKED HAMS TO THE WORLD-WIDE WEB

One Hundred Years of Development on The Moor



Victoria House, focal point of the The Moor Conservation Area, was built as a village general store more than 100 years ago by local craftsmen builders John and James Message. The first shopkeeper was John's son-in-law Albert Cooper, who set up as a grocer and draper. In 1895 he sold to Robert Lester, who occupied the premises for only two years before selling the business to Alfred Piper in May 1897. Thus was born the widely-known and fondly-remembered Pipers Stores.

In 1924 Alfred retired, to be succeeded by his son Louis. More than 30 years later, in 1958, the stores passed to Brian Piper, who traded with great flair and enthusiasm until 1986, when he retired and sold the building to antiques dealer Roy Massingham. Roy reinstated the original name, Victoria House, before moving to a larger shop in Brasted, selling the premises in the autumn of 1988.

Thanks to the generosity and foresight of Brian Piper and his wife Karin, many of the fixtures and fittings of the original grocery store are now in the possession of the Museum of Kent Rural Life, near Maidstone.

A New Role in Village Life

Long suffering local residents on The Moor will recall the dust and bustle of spring 1989, when the new owner of Victoria House, Philip Evemy, began work on a major refurbishment programme. Rotting weatherboards and sash windows were carefully replaced, and every square inch of paint, some of it more than a century old, was stripped back to bare wood and metal in preparation for gleaming new coats and colours.

Internally, building inspectors and fire officers had demanded new arrangements so the building was gutted and painstakingly restored, in authentic Victorian style.

But now it incorporated all the latest devices for security and safety, and state-of-the-art technology for world-wide communications. For Victoria House was about to become the country's first Rural Business Centre, aimed at local business professionals needing serviced, high-tech, fully equipped offices at affordable rents in a classic period building.

Today Victoria House is home to a dozen thriving businesses who share running costs and enjoy all the benefits of an office in the country - next to the village green and its pub, close to all services and amenities, in touch daily with every corner of the globe, yet far away from the stress and strain of commuter queues, traffic jams and the ever-worsening urban problem of where to park the car.

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