

Two arrests after fire devastates h

History of iconic building

THE building itself dates back to 1837, having been designed by architect George Morgan, the man behind many religious and public buildings across Wales.

It was the setting for one of the most important events in Welsh social history when the Rebecca Riots stormed the building on June 19, 1843. Hundreds of rioters trashed the workhouse in protest

against the Poor Act Law 1834. During the protest, the rioters were attacked by a squadron of Light Dragoons who galloped up Waterloo Terrace in what remains the last ever cavalry charge on mainland Britain.

Since it was closed as a workhouse it has been used as a military hospital, a Second World War base for soldiers and offices for the BBC and Carmarthenshire Council.

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TWO people have been arrested by police investigating a fire that ripped through an historic building in West Wales.

Shortly before 5pm on Friday evening, a blaze broke out on the second floor of the Penlan Workhouse on Brewery Road in Carmarthen and within minutes flames were piercing the roof of the 19th century building.

Smoke could be seen from miles away as it belled from the second floor of the building and into the freezing Carmarthen air.

Fire crews from Carmarthen, Tumble, Kidwelly and Swansea West were all at the scene and it took almost four hours to



Above and right, the fire at the former workhouse in Carmarthen.

Picture: Hannah Graham

“This fire illustrates the danger of leaving old buildings unoccupied and neglected for many years

Carmarthen Mayor Alun Lenny

get the blaze under control with the use of six main jets, hose reel jets, a

water bowser and an aerial appliance. Despite initial fears that there may have been homeless people seeking shelter inside during freezing conditions, it has been confirmed that there was nobody inside and that nobody suffered any injuries.

Police have started an

investigation into the fire and have confirmed that they are treating the incident as suspicious and that two youths from Carmarthen have been arrested following the incident.

A spokesman for Dyfed-Powys Police said: “Police in Carmarthen are investigating a fire which

occurred at approximately 4.50pm on Friday, March 2, at the Old Workhouse, Penlan Road, Carmarthen.

“The fire is currently being treated as suspicious. No-one was injured

during “Two arrests with the release tion.”

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The damage caused by the blaze.

Picture: Alun Lenny

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Historic site of former workhouse

Picture: Aysha Taylor and Stephen Davies



by a very strong wind. The firefighters are to be highly commended for preventing the flames from spreading to nearby houses and other buildings, including the workhouse gatehouse, where there's a blue plaque noting its historic importance."

Mr Lenny used to work inside the historic building himself during his career as a journalist, and says what happened on Friday night highlights the danger of leaving old buildings unoccupied and neglected.

"Police officers have been examining the site," he added.

"There's a high fence around the building, and the doors and windows were sealed by wooden panels. It's not been revealed yet if the fire was started deliberately."

"The workhouse has a unique place in Welsh history. On a personal note, I worked as Radio Cymru's first reporter in Carmarthen from a tiny BBC studio in this building from 1978 to '81."

"It was a shame to see the place, which is in private ownership, falling into a derelict condition before the fire, despite the efforts of local ward councillors to try and get it restored."

"This fire illustrates the danger of leaving old buildings unoccupied and neglected for many years."

Mr Lenny, in his role as chair of the planning committee at Carmarthenshire Council, said on Monday morning: "Notices were served on the owner of the site in November 2017 to tidy up the land and put the building back into good repair, with an eight month compliance

period."

"The owner has appealed against both notices and a hearing is due to be held on April 18."

"In the meantime, emergency measures have been taken by the county council under a section 78 order to make the site secure so as to ensure that there is no danger to the public."

"This has consisted primarily of erecting fencing and warning signs."

The police investigation into the cause of the fire continues and anyone with any information is asked to contact Dyfed-Powys Police by calling 101.



Picture: Mike Walters

the incident. Local youths were in connection with the incident and later under investigation. A resident who lives

nearby said on Friday: "I heard a huge bang and I ran out of my house and saw the workhouse on fire."

Carmarthen Mayor Alun Lenny says the town

has been left "dismayed" by the blaze.

"The people of Carmarthen have been alarmed and dismayed by the destruction done to the old Penlan Workhouse,

which looks down over the town centre, after it went up in flames on Friday," said Mr Lenny. "The only blessing is that no one was hurt in the conflagration, which was fanned

at Morgan of John Mihell from How, Barry riding a Harley-Davidson.



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