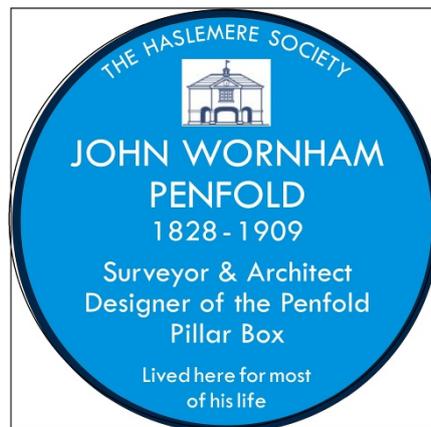




John Wornham Penfold

Blue plaque at Penfolds, Sandrock, Haslemere



JW Penfold 1888

John Wornham Penfold

J W Penfold was born the son of a farmer at Courts Hill, now Penfolds on 3 December 1828. He attended school successively at Petersfield, Rogate and Wandsworth Common. On leaving school, he studied architecture and surveying in London, setting up his own practice after qualification. He initially set up offices near the Mansion house in Charlotte Road, later moving to Parliament Street and ultimately Great George Street.

His most significant project seems to have been to in his capacity as surveyor to the Goldsmith company, to oversee a vast construction project in Cripplegate, around Jewin street following a destructive fire in 1889. Sadly, this area was again destroyed by bombs during World War II and is now the site of the Golden Lane estate . He also designed the former naval training school in New Cross, a site taken over in 1890 by the Goldsmith company, and now part of Goldsmiths, University of London.

Throughout his career, he seems to be have been an active participant in a number of professional bodies. He was a fellow of *The Royal Institute of British Architects*, an early supporter of *The Architectural Association*, a member of *The Old Surveyors Club*, *The Surveyors Association* and *The Land Surveyors Club*. Apparently he rarely missed any of their social gatherings and he also had some connections with *The Honourable Artillery Company*, although it is unclear what these were.

It is for his connection with *The Surveyors Institution* (today *The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors* or *RICS*) for which he is most noted. When the establishment of *The Surveyors ' Institution* was first mooted in the early part of 1868, he threw himself at once into the movement, and according to the obituary which appears in the Institute's *Transactions*, threw himself zealously into the project. At the first ordinary general meeting in 1868, he was elected honorary secretary, an office in which he served for a further 36 years. On retiring from this position, due to failing health, he nonetheless remained as a vice president until his death in 1908.

The Surveyors Institution's obituary gives us the greatest insight that we have into Penfold the man.

In truth, reading between the lines it is not altogether a flattering picture.

On the positive side, the picture is of a man who was extremely generous, endowing significant prizes for qualification in the Institute exams. This generous nature is further reinforced by his activities in Haslemere discussed below.



We also identify a man with some humour, as he apparently often told amusing stories about *The Honourable Artillery Company*. His obituary praises him for 'the qualifications needed to pioneer the setting up of the Institute, a clear view of essentials, a rooted mistrust of the new and experimental and an enthusiasm to establish methods'. However this enthusiasm for the traditional, meant that he was resistant to change, and he is described as a reluctant convert to any new departures suggested by the committee. He doggedly resisted the introduction of 'provincial committees', and his obituary notes that he never attended any of their meetings, even though, by the time his death, many local committees were in place. Reference to Penfold in the minutes of the Society's meetings is conspicuous by its absence, and his obituary notes that his words were few and if his interventions proved ineffective he would make no further attempts to enforce his views. The obituary concludes that he was in reality a shy man who sheltered himself behind a manner that suggested stoical composure. It goes on 'he was not without his emotional side, which showed itself, though he was at pains to conceal it, on the occasions when he became the subject of generous appreciation'.

The high regard in which he was nonetheless held by the Institute is demonstrated by the presentation to him on his retirement of a portrait, which hangs to this day in the lecture hall at the RICS, although sadly at the present moment it has been removed for redecoration.

Curiously, his most significant contribution was at the first meeting, when he tabled an abstract on the Land Drainage Act of May 1861. Perhaps his interest stemmed from the fact that in 1859, he taken part in the Mordon and Sheen Valley drainage project, which failed due to be a lack of interest of parties through whose land the drain was scheduled to pass. Apparently the 1861 act would have negated the impact of these objections.

Penfold and Haslemere

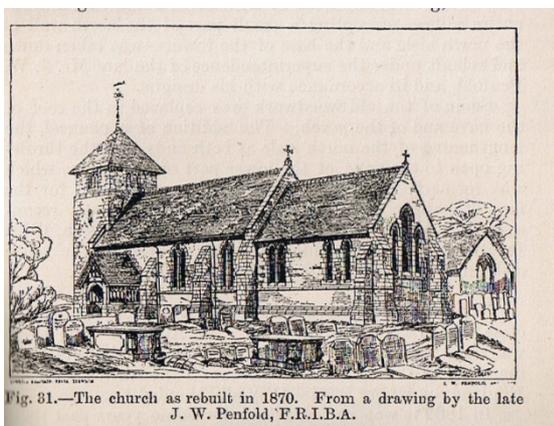
The Penfold family has been in Haslemere since 1650, when Francis Penfold of Petworth purchased land from the Court family in the area where Penfolds now stands. Courts Mount Road is of course named after this family. The house that is now Penfolds, was owned by the Penfold family until around 1800, and then repurchased by Mr. Thomas Penfold in 1814, thereafter remaining in the family until after Penfold's death. JW Penfold was born in the house, and grew up there, before moving to London to assume his career. It is fascinating to reflect that in his youth the house would have been in a remote inaccessible corner from London, so when the railway arrived in 1859, and the station was built a mere five minutes' walk from his childhood birthplace, it must have been a source of great excitement to him to realise that he could visit his childhood home from London in little more than an hour.

He moved to the house on the death of his father in 1873, treating it as his home or headquarters, although it is doubtful that he was a daily commuter.

His obituary in *The Times* notes that his more intimate friends would associated him with Haslemere. He became a significant figure in the community, and demonstrated an enthusiasm for the preservation of the town, and the capturing of its past life. Amusingly, the Times obituary notes that it was largely due to his taste and ingenuity that Haslemere has been saved from 'the rawness and garishness too often characteristic of a growing place'. In similar vein, The Surveyors Institution

obituary notes ' he had a large and, probably, a predominant share in its development (of Haslemere), and it was owing in a great degree to his good taste and sound judgement that it was saved from the hand of the architectural Philistine who has done so much to destroy the natural charms of so many of the picturesque neighbourhoods within 50 miles of London'. The Haslemere society would have been proud of him, and one wonders whether he was an active member, although sadly the records of the society from this period have been lost.

His interest in and contribution to Haslemere was significant. He restored and made significant alterations to Penfolds and was largely responsible for the house we see today. His principal local work was the reconstruction of the parish church of St Bartholomew's, and he was responsible for the replacement of the old Saxon Church, and the construction of the structure which we largely see today. Another important work was the hospital on Shepherds' Hill, now a block of flats. The first hospital in Haslemere, this was built and presented to Haslemere by Mr. Penfold and his two sisters in 1898 in memory of their father and mother.



He also helped James Stewart Hodgson build the working man's club in the High Street.

He was a diligent collector of Haslemere history and gave a number of lectures on bygone Haslemere. He also wrote a paper on the curates of Haslemere for the parish magazine in 1996.

During the latter years of his life, he shared a particular interest in the rotten borough struggles of mid-18th century Haslemere, but sadly his plans to go to press did not come to fruition. In 1907 he fell ill, dying at Sheringham in Norfolk on July 5, 1909. He is buried in the new portion of the Haslemere churchyard

Penfold and the Hexagonal Pillar Box

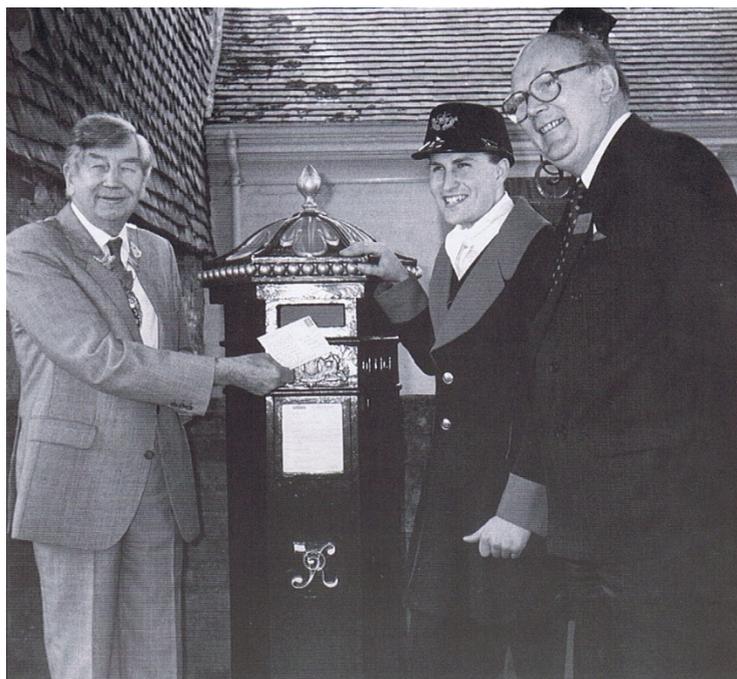
Penfold is probably best known for the design of the Penfold hexagonal postbox, painted green, a replica of which can be found outside the Georgian hotel. The picture to the right shows the posting of the first letter in the replica box in 1993.

In 1866 Penfold submitted his design for the pillar box. The Post Office had been attempting to standardise letterboxes throughout the country for some time and made several attempts to produce a national standard. Penfold's design was accepted, and a further attempt was made to

create a national standard. The box, hexagonal in shape, was adorned with acanthus leaves and balls and although far less ornate than some of the earlier designs, it was nevertheless expensive to produce, and was mainly replaced by cheaper and plainer boxes within about 13 years of its design.



The box again achieved a degree of modest fame in the cartoon series danger mouse. Danger mouse's sidekick was named Penfold after JW Penfold since the duo's secret hideout was in a postbox in Baker Street. Unfortunately the hide out was not a genuine Penfold postbox!



Posting the first letters in the commemorative Penfold postbox on Tuesday 27th of April 1993 the then Mayor of Haslemere, William Bailey and Colin Childes from the Royal mail, assisted by 'Victorian' postman Malcolm Bray. The site is under the 200 year old horse chestnut tree in the High Street, Haslemere

