

Trowbridge Civic Society NEWSLETTER

Spring 2021



In this Issue:
William Smith - a local architect
Modern Developments in Trowbridge
Newtown's Oldest Buildings
Margaret Stancomb Infants' School

Member of Wiltshire Building Record, ASHTAV and BALH
Registered Charity Number 276765 Website: www.trowbridgecivicsociety.org.uk

The History of Trowbridge

Stone age

Trowbridge has been inhabited for thousands of years. A Neolithic (stone age) axe was discovered in Hilberton

Roman Forts

Balfisbury & Bratton camp are thought to be two of twenty forts the Romans took to secure access to the lead and silver mines at Chateaufort in the Mendons

Saxons and Vikings

Trowbridge grew as a settlement in Saxon times and the battle of Edington (now Edington) took place with the Vikings

Trowbridge Castle

A powerful, wealthy Norman family the de Bohun's built a Motte and Bailey castle to consolidate their power base

John of Gaunt

Eventually John of Gaunt one of the most powerful people in medieval England became Lord of Trowbridge

The growth of the Woolen Industry

The woolen industry became more and more important to the town reaching a peak in the 19th Century where many of the cottages became very wealthy

County Town

With the arrival of canals and a railway the town became more important. Trowbridge became the county town of Wiltshire in 1869 and county hall was built in 1939

George Haden

George Haden moved to Trowbridge in 1814. He was a very famous engineer in particular for designing warm air heating systems.

A Growing Town

Trowbridge population has increased in recent years with lots of new houses built including the Rascals Mead estate

Francesca Lund

2013 was a brilliant year for Trowbridge because I was born!

Prehistoric Sites

Trowbridge is located close to the ancient burial monuments of Stonehenge and stone circles of Avebury

Imperial Estate

Some historians believe Trowbridge was used as an estate for hunting and pasture rather than a residential area when under Roman control

Normans

During the Norman Period the town had its name which simply means trow-bridge and a Church was built

King John

King John granted the de Bohun family the right to hold a market and fair in Trowbridge in 1200

Tudor Period

The manufacturing in the town grew steadily especially the woolen trade. The market became to thrive but the castle fell into disrepair

Georgian Architecture

Many beautiful houses were built during this time including the building which is now Lloyd's Bank which is considered to be the finest Georgian building in Wiltshire

Sir Isaac Pitman

Sir Isaac Pitman was born in Trowbridge in 1813. He invented 'shorthand' a quick way to write using symbols.

Shires Shopping Centre

The Shires Shopping Centre was built on the site of the old Trowbridge Castle in 1961

Castle Mead School

In 2014 Castle Mead School opened!

Charlotte Lund

On 24th July 2014 my sister Charlotte was born

By Francesca Lund

The History of Trowbridge

Francesca is in Ms Gray's 'Daubenton's Bats' Year 3 class at Castle Mead School. She has been home schooling since the start of January and has been taking part in a range of remote tasks and 'live' lessons. She has been developing her numeracy, literacy, writing, science, art, PE and IT skills but was also given the opportunity to produce a presentation on the History of Trowbridge. She thoroughly enjoyed learning about Trowbridge's interesting past.

Help! Does anyone know the history of these impressive gate posts in Dursley Road?



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EDITORIAL COMMENT

Many years ago, when I was researching the Somerset Coalfield, Roger Newman, who died recently, presented me with a large hand-drawn map. It showed the railways of the area between Radstock and Bath. But it not only showed the railways that had been constructed, but also the railways that at one time been proposed and never built. There seemed to be dozens of them. Roger had meticulously mined the archives to find all these plans and schemes. Unfortunately, I have lost this map, but I have found another of his maps centred on Midford. This shows the routes of the Somerset and Dorset Railway, the Coal Canal and other railways and tramways that converged there. I hope to reproduce this in a future issue.

Since then, over the years, I began to realise that he was an authority on railways, canals, and above all on local history. I could rely on Roger to write items for the newsletter, to answer queries about all kinds of Trowbridge matters and to correct me when I got some details wrong. He will be a great loss to me and the Civic Society.

In this issue we present the work of another historian, 7 year old Francesca. More details on page 2.

The work on the old Margaret Stancomb School nears completion and Jean Rist has written about her early days at the school to go with a short history of the school.

Some of the most striking buildings in Trowbridge were designed by the architect, William Smith. Kevin Eames has written an illustrated appreciation of his work which will encourage us to look again and admire what we often take for granted.

TROWBRIDGE CIVIC SOCIETY INFORMATION

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Recorder: Kevin Hartley

We are now collecting subscriptions for 2021 . These support our ongoing work through the committee. As we are not able to run our meetings at present due to the restrictions our treasurer, Janet Carpenter, would be happy to receive these either by cheque, posted to the above address or by direct payment to the bank account below, or, if you do want to pay by cash, then either by hand delivery to the above address or to your magazine distributor to pass on if they are able to do so.
Bank details: Lloyds 30-98-97 AC No: 46956860 using your name as a reference

Single £7, Joint £12, Corporate £35

The AGM has been postponed this year until September.

Printed by
John Lamming, 3 Court Street, Trowbridge BA14 8BR

Chairman's Notes

2020 has been a difficult year for most people, but despite not being able to hold any meetings for our members the committee has nevertheless been busy. The newsletter team has continued to produce the newsletters and the planning team has kept abreast of planning matters by submitting regular comments on planning applications and our website has been kept up to date and, in addition, the Historic buildings Committee has continued to make grants.

The epidemic has slowed a lot of developments and, as usual in Trowbridge, we have to be very patient, but work on the Margaret Stancomb site has now been completed. It's unfortunate that despite being a landmark building in a Conservation Area the developers saw fit to remove the remaining ball finials from the gables at the side of the building and the ornamental, Victorian pedestrian gate. You may remember it as it was painted bright blue. These are only details, but nevertheless they are important. However, the lamp has been installed by Terry Simms close to St George's Works.



We were saddened to hear of the news of Roger Newman last November. With Roger's passing the Society lost a good friend and supporter. He will be remembered in many ways but his various articles, published by the Friends of the Trowbridge Museum, his work on the shops in the town centre and in particular his book on Cast Iron Street Furniture and Business Names are of particular relevance to us. These works provide us with a valuable reference and will be a useful resource in the refurbished Museum.



Planning Matters

Permission has been granted for two applications concerning buildings in the centre of Trowbridge. The first is a listed building, Court Hall, in Castle Street (20/04976/LBC). Air conditioning units are to be added inside and outside the building. It is reassuring that one of the conditions applied to the permission states that,

Within 6 months of the hereby approved air conditioning equipment being no longer required or in use, the equipment shall be removed from the building and any necessary remedial works be undertaken to the fabric of the building.

REASON: In the interests of preserving the fabric, character and appearance of the listed building.

The second application refers to Manvers House, Manvers Street(20/09061/FUL). Permission has been granted for the

Enlargement and reconfiguration of existing car parking area to provide 27 car spaces, provision of external bin enclosures and covered external cycle storage and minor external alterations to existing building following prior approval and notification for change of use of offices to residential

Below are the comments submitted on behalf of the Civic Society.

Trowbridge Civic Society is appreciative of the need to bring Manvers House back into use. However, we wish to put in a holding objection, as there is insufficient information in the application to form a reasonable judgement as to the merits of the application.

- 1. Although Manvers House is not the most attractive of buildings, the site is a very significant one in Trowbridge Town Centre. It is alongside the listed Lloyds Bank building and nearly opposite the former United Church, another listed building of architectural merit.*
- 2. The footway along Manvers Street is one of the busiest in Trowbridge, linking Fore Street with Sainsbury's Supermarket, so a great proportion of the population of Trowbridge will pass the site. We would like to ensure that the impression they form will be one of improvement.*
- 3. Section 7: The application mentions close board fences, which are likely to be inappropriate in the town centre. It mentions "Refer to drawings", but there are no drawings.*

4. *Section 7: The application mentions laying asphalt and "Refer to drawings" but again there is no drawing showing it.*
5. *Section 10: Trees. The trees and shrubs on the site are an important feature which helps to soften the contrasting style of Manvers House with that of the United Church and other buildings. A tree survey and landscape plan would be vital to understanding what is proposed, particularly as asphaltting was mentioned, which might affect tree roots.*
6. *Section 12: Biodiversity. "No" is answered to all the questions but no evidence is supplied.*
7. *Section 14: Waste collection. Again, drawings are referred to but not provided.*
8. *Section 16: Gain in residential units is said to be zero? Presumably this is an error, but further plans are necessary to appreciate the proposals.*
9. *There seems to be no mention of provision for electric vehicle charging points.*

Overall, this application appears to be incomplete.

The Decision Notice states that approval was granted subject to certain conditions: While the conditions do not address in detail the comments made by the Civic Society, conditions 3, 4 and 5 (see below) are very much in the same spirit, in that they relate to the visual appearance of the building and the landscaped features being appropriate for the conservation area in which the development will be set.

3 The materials to be used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development hereby permitted shall match in material, colour and texture those used in the existing building. REASON: In the interests of visual amenity and the character and appearance of the area.

4 No development shall commence above ground floor slab level until a scheme of hard and soft landscaping has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, the details of which shall include measures for the protection of trees to remain, and plans of the proposed electric gates. REASON: To ensure a satisfactory landscaped setting for the development and the protection of existing important landscape features and setting of the conservation area.

5 All soft landscaping comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding season following the first occupation of the building(s) or the completion of the development whichever is the sooner, or to a timescale to be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority; All shrubs, trees and hedge planting shall be maintained free from weeds and shall be protected from damage by vermin and stock. Any trees or plants which, within a period of five years, die, are removed, or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size and species, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority. All hard landscaping shall also be carried out in accordance with the approved details prior to the occupation of any part of the development or in accordance with a programme to be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To ensure a satisfactory landscaped setting for the development and the protection of existing important landscape features and setting of the conservation area.

It is interesting that Wiltshire Council does not seem to have developed a policy concerning charge-points for electric cars, although other authorities have done so, for example Wokingham.

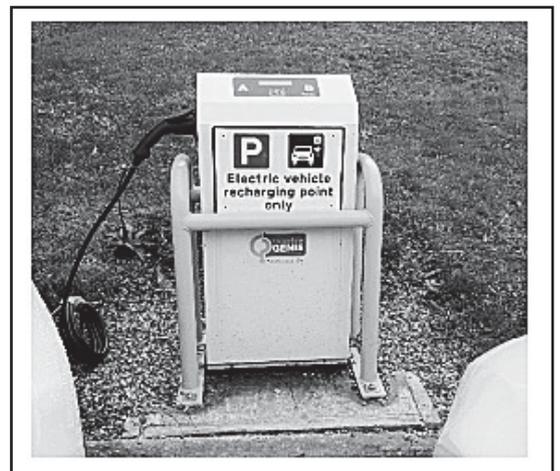
Wokingham acknowledges that *electric vehicles (EVs) are expected to largely replace existing petrol and diesel cars in the coming years and that a major barrier to ownership is the ability to have an accessible charging point at the drivers' home as charging overnight is reliable and efficient. They distinguish between two types of provision:*

'Passive': a wired in system that can be readily converted later
'Active': includes a direct changing point ready for use.

A distinction between passive and active is made because at new developments it is relatively low cost to introduce a passive system for upgrading to active. Retro fitting a system is costly and disruptive to developments.

Wokingham are adopting a phased approach to increase provision over a period between 2019 and 2030 All residential planning applications are required to provide as a minimum, the designated levels of EV charging facilities per dwelling. For non-residential land uses including employment, leisure, education and retail, EV charging points will also be required.

Let's hope our council is already working on a similar plan for West Wiltshire.



William Smith - a local architect

Kevin Eames

By 'local' I don't mean to suggest that Smith was a second-rate architect, for there are many outstanding practitioners who chose to stay in their own locality - for example, the Goddard family of Leicester, or Sir George Oatley, of Bristol (whose last building, I think, was the bandstand in Trowbridge Park, but without the ceramic plaques which have disfigured it over recent years). Rather, by 'local' I simply mean that the architect did not have a London office, which usually accompanied a nation-wide practice. William Smith of Trowbridge was one such architect whose business was focused on his own locality.

Julian Orbach describes Smith as 'a man of exceptional talent', a 'leading Trowbridge architect and builder in later C19th to whom most of the Victorian Gothic buildings in the town are probably attributable' Smith was a builder and an architect, which suggests that he learnt

his trade through practical experience rather than through a more conventional route into the profession via articles and academic study. In 1842, the year after a census, he was identified as a carpenter in The Halve and later was the builder for Charles Davies's General Cemetery in Trowbridge, to which he also contributed a number of noteworthy monuments. In 1882, Smith was the builder for Bonella and Paull's Congregational Church in Church Street.

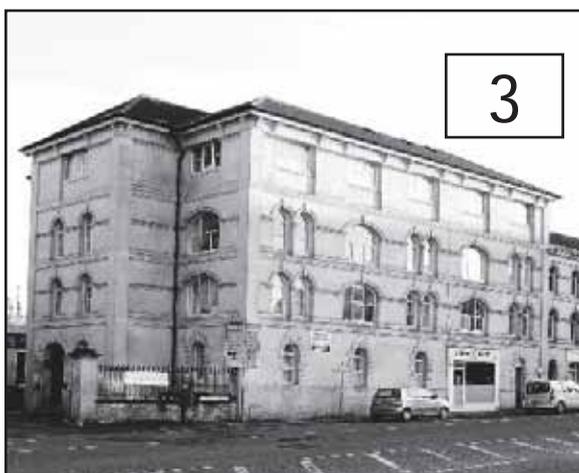
As an architect, though, some of his earlier work in Trowbridge was not in the Gothic Revival style with which Orbach associates him. The earliest building I could find for which Smith was the architect is the one which is now Costa Coffee, at 23 Fore Street (Figure 1).

Originally a shop for E.T. Beavan, ironmonger, it was built in 1864-ish, according to Ken Rogers, and a later photograph is given of the shop front in Figure 2.



I'm not sure when this attractive shop front was destroyed, but when I compare it with its current successor, I know which I prefer.

Julian Orbach has pointed out in talks about the architecture of Trowbridge that the Italianate style chosen is appropriate for commercial buildings, since that style denotes prosperity and reliability, associated with the great banking families of Italy (and, I imagine,



because Italy is where any self-respecting aristocrat would go on the Grand Tour, so that would also tick the 'toff' box to send a building's image 'up-market'). Another of Smith's earlier buildings in the Italianate style is Studley Mill offices on Stallard Street (Figure 3).

Orbach dates it to 1878, and the adjacent Cloth Hall for wool sales dates from 1869. I assume that the Cloth Hall is the building on the left, as it has large

windows, the better to illuminate the samples of cloth that were on sale.

In the 1850s, Smith was engaged as builder for architect Charles Davis's Trowbridge General Cemetery.

Figures 8 and 9 show the two chapels, both handsome buildings. The Non-Conformist Chapel is still in use, and the Anglican Chapel is used for storage. Both buildings are maintained and are comparatively in reasonable condition. But the quality of

Smith's work for the architect seems to have led to commissions leading to a series of monuments in the cemetery. Two were designed by Smith around 1870 and are shown as Figures 6 and 7.

The Kingston and Hastings Mausoleum (Figure 7) is in a confident Romanesque style and is listed Grade II by Historic England. The structure is segmental-shaped, and has a feature which looks like a strongly assertive Lombard frieze with an ornamentation of rosettes. The central entrance has pink granite nook shafts and wide palmette capitals, according to HE, and there are two blind flanking arches with single nook shafts having decoration similar to the central entrance but on smaller scale. The Rodway Mausoleum (Figure 6) was designed at about the same time and is also listed as Grade II. This mausoleum is in a Gothic Revival style and Historic England draw attention to its low barrel-vaulted structure with stone gargoyles at each corner and an ornamental facade composed of a triple-gabled arcade. There is also, they note, a trefoil-shaped opening containing doors with elaborate wrought-iron strapwork, surmounted by wrought-iron spikes which in-fill an oculus. The structure is entered by a wide flight of stone steps which descends from the level of the cemetery to reach the now derelict interior.

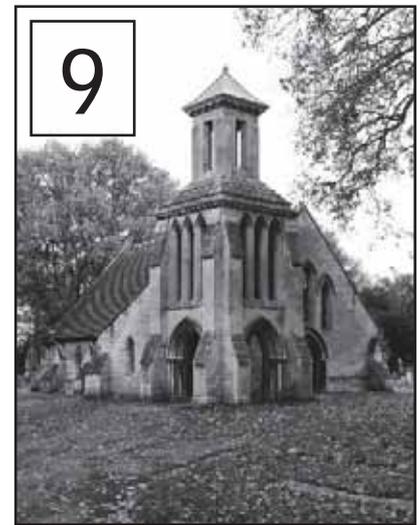
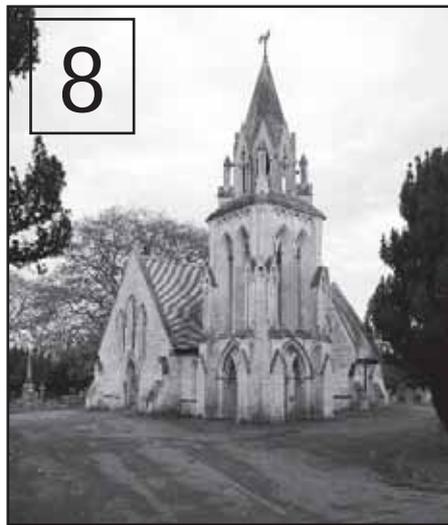
Also in a Gothic Revival style is another noteworthy monument by Smith in the cemetery, the Clark Family Monument (Figure 5).

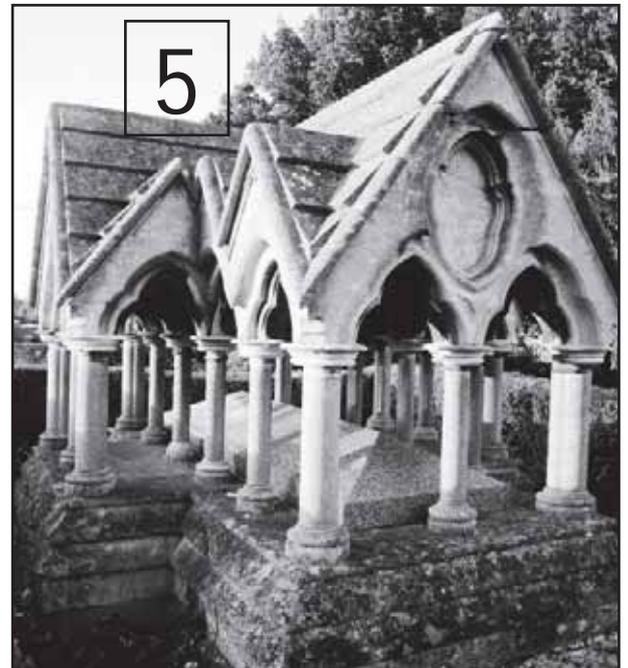
This building commemorates Thomas Clark the clothier who died in 1859. Julian Orbach suggests that you can see a 'trial run' for St Thomas's (Figure 4), and our first view of what is probably Smith's masterpiece (of 1868-70) reinforces this impression. Pevsner comments

that the church has 'Many gables ... with details in the style of c.1300', reminiscent of the Clark Monument. It is also, he thinks, 'An original design, certainly, but just a little nightmarish.' The fleche which can be seen in the engraving was taken down in 1970 and has unfortunately not been replaced.

Smith's understanding of the Gothic Revival style as an architect and his expertise as a builder fitted him to execute Bonella and Paull's designs for the Congregational Church and ancillary buildings in Trowbridge (Front cover and Figures 11, 12) in 1882.

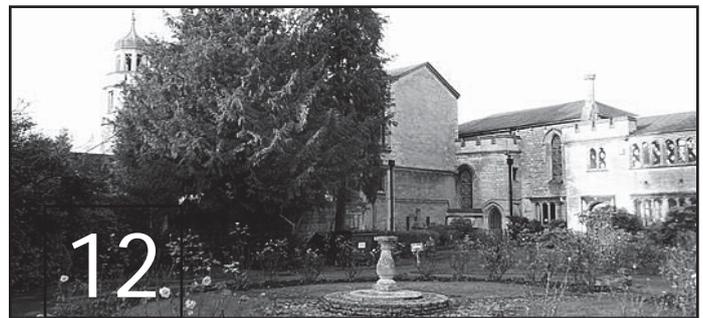
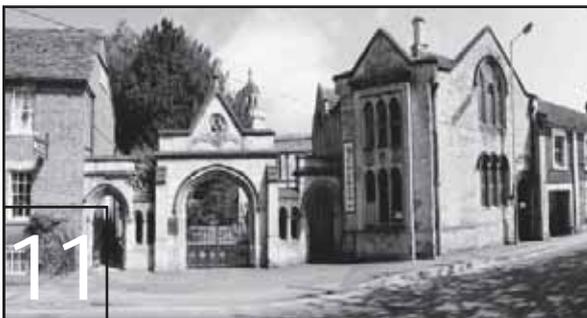
The buildings, designed by a nationally renowned practice of church architects, are listed Grade II. Historic England in their listing note the Tudor-style architecture, with perpendicular tracery





in the West windows of the church, and the Tower capped by an octagonal stone-roofed cupola with traceried openings. The third stage of the tower is octagonal with parapet and gargoyles. Currently, there are proposals to return this fine group of buildings to use, this time as accommodation, with due respect paid to its listed status. I can only hope that the application will succeed in bringing the former church back into use while preserving its architectural qualities to remind us of a local architect and builder of such ability and originality.

[All photographs by Kevin Eames, except Figure 2 - Trowbridge Postcards and Ephemera on Flickr]



Modern Developments

I have noticed some recent property advertisements in the many free magazines that we pick up from the supermarket, that show some modern design of housing. Just outside Corsham there is Wadswick Green Retirement Village [Right].



David Feather



Then at Shaw, near to Swindon, there is this small development of bungalows [Left].

I wonder what the Trowbridge reaction would be to similar designs being built in Ashton Park or the site next to the White Horse Business Park.

Goodbye to a pair of Newtown's oldest buildings Dorothy Treasure

[This is an article from the Wiltshire Buildings Record]

Back in October I was asked to look at no 4 Newtown, a pair of tiny houses, each with a chimney in advance of their demolition. Ken Rogers, former archivist and authority on Trowbridge History was concerned that these unassuming buildings at the north end of Newtown would disappear without record.



These single-room cottages were once on the edge of the 'waste' or common land; a place where a squatter cottage could be informally built on. They were only of single-storey height, and each had a chimney for heating and cooking. The Trowbridge tithe map shows Newtown in the 1840s well before the grid-like streets of the 'new town' had been added. The 'new church' dedicated to the Holy Trinity, is visible at the top of the map extract. The

cottages are partly shown at the top end of Newtown in a group with others, now gone. Later terraced housing added subsequently is shown further down.

4 Newtown is the building closest to the plot number 95 The upper walls of the cottage are of brick, a late 18th



Trowbridge tithe map of 1840.



century/early 19th century English garden wall bond type especially visible in the south cottage, but the lower walls are of rubblestone which look of at least two separate sections which might suggest a plinth for timberframing originally.

The interiors of both cottages were unavailable, but from shots taken through the very grimy windows both appear disappointingly devoid of features. The interior shot is of the south cottage at the fireplace end.

By c1900 the cottages are seen as part of a dense cluster of similar buildings, some back-to-back, named as Harding's Yard on the 1880's.

The poor conditions can only be imagined at the time. By the mid-20th century all but two of these small buildings were gone, transformed into small shops, one occupied in the 70s and 80s by a key-cutter and shoe-mender named Semeraro. It seems that as far back as 2009 the Bethesda Baptist church, who own the building, were trying to rebuild the site as something more user-friendly to the local community. It seems they will soon get their wish.

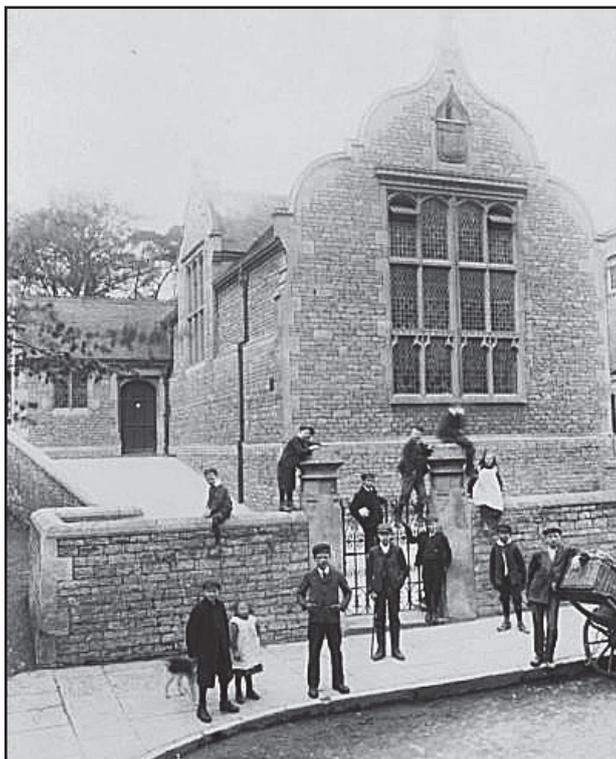


Margaret Stancomb Nursery and Infants' School

The school was built in 1893 as the Margaret Stancomb Memorial Infants' School and was opened on February 19th 1894 by J.F. Stancomb who had donated the cost of the building. It was designed for a maximum of 139 children. The first headmistress was Leah Horne and there were also up to 3 pupil-teachers and also an assistant mistress. The pupils ranged from ages 3 to 7 years. It was a non-denominational school and was transferred to Wiltshire County Council in 1908.

Miss Horne resigned in 1922 to be succeeded by M. H. Collier. In 1931 a new building was added. This was because of the amalgamation of three schools on the site, the other two being St Thomas' Infants' School and the Parochial Infants' School. There were now 7 classes and five teachers assisting Miss Collier.

During World War 2 evacuees came from the Woodford Green school in Essex amongst others



and they were taught in separate classes while they attended the school. Air raids were common interruptions to the school day and the summer holiday in 1940 was taken, not as one long block, but as a series of long weekends. In the following summer, the holiday was lengthened by order of the government so the children could help with the harvest, as the original reason for the lengthy summer break had been.

Miss Collier resigned in 1950, after 28 years, to be followed by Doreen Howard.

In January, 2008, Margaret Stancomb Infants' School amalgamated with the Parochial Junior School to become the Bellefield Primary School.

When Margaret Stancomb closed, the local authority intended to sell the site for housing. The Wiltshire Rural Music School then said it had an interest in using the original school building to extend its cultural mission within Trowbridge. The local authority agreed they could have it pretty much free of charge. It was intended that the Music

School would reopen the building in September 2010. That did not happen and in May 2012 it was announced that the Music School did not intend to proceed with the transfer.

Selwood Housing Group secured planning permission to develop the site in summer 2019 and works began straightaway. The first homes were due to be completed in summer 2020, but, following a break during the first lockdown, were delivered in the autumn instead.

The original school building has been converted into 3 shared ownership houses, with another 18 homes built in the grounds of the site. These are a mixture of flats and houses for shared ownership and social rent.

Early memories of Margaret Stancomb Infants' School

Jane Rist

April 1965

Dressed in a navy cable cardigan and pleated skirt, I approached the enormous dark doorway and had a small square of paper with my name on it safety pinned to my knitwear. I turned right just inside the door to Mrs Waistie's classroom. I must've been earlier than the other new pupils, because I remember being alone in the large room; it was the one with the big front window in it and was divided into two with a folding wooden screen. I don't remember being at all worried about any of this, and I think I found it all rather thrilling (my brother was two years ahead).

Coloured Formica tables were laid out in threes. There was a shelf under each red, yellow or blue surface which contained a flat cardboard box. In each of these was a blackboard slate and a re-purposed tobacco tin containing a piece of chalk and a small felt rubber. Each table had two names taped to it, hand written in a careful, clear script on a piece of card. I must've been able to read my own name because I knew which



one was mine and next to me was Penny Thompson, one of a twin with whom I am still in touch today.

None of these were needed for my first lonely morning, however. To pass the time until the other children arrived, I was furnished with a brand new set of wax crayons which hugely impressed me, and a large sheet of paper and told to draw. I can still see the picture I produced; a garden of bright flowers, with a particular emphasis on pink - I loved that pink crayon.

I think I went home at lunchtime, and even when I was full time, I didn't have school meals which were considered by the adults in my life (my parents and friends' parents) to be rather second rate. Like many children, I went home for lunch all through my time in the infants despite the considerable distance to Hilperton without a car, and I'm not sure how that was managed.

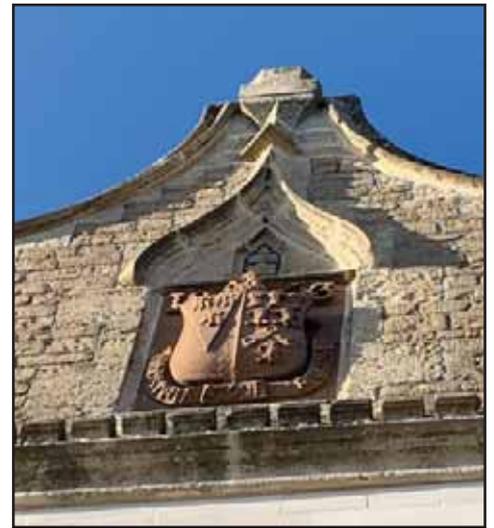
When I stayed full days, I came and went in Clapham's Taxis, an old London taxicab driven by Mr Clapham, of whom we were slightly afraid despite his Cockney jollity. About 15 of us crammed in the back, all fighting for prime position kneeling on the back seat for the journey distributing us around the villages; we absolutely loved it.

The highlights of the school term as far as the children were concerned were the rare occasions when we had use of the hospital field to play on. The big gates were opened and, rather than only having quite a small, hard playground, we were allowed to run out across the expanse of grass among the big trees. It only happened when there had been an exceptionally dry spell, and I only remember the sun shining.

Another highlight for me was the treat of joining the top class to listen to their story time, last thing before home time. The one I particularly remember was Rudyard Kipling's "Riki Tiki Tavi, the mongoose", read by Mrs Mortimer. Happy days!

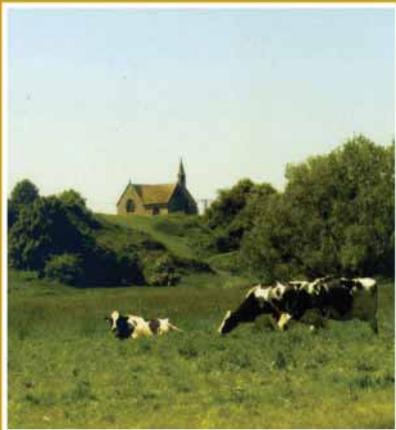
Thanks to the Selwood Housing Group for these photographs and those on the next page.-





WHADDON and the Longs

A West Wiltshire History



PAMELA M SLOCOMBE

Pamela Slocombe's new book begins with the early origins of this remote hamlet near Trowbridge which was affected by the Black Death. It describes its heyday under a branch of the Long family, prominent clothiers whose seat was Whaddon House and how they emerged onto the national scene in the turbulent years of the mid-17th century. Whaddon was gradually reduced to a farming community in the 18th and 19th centuries and the histories of the families who lived there and in the wider estate at Paxcroft, Hilperton and Melksham are explored.

This wide-ranging and comprehensive village history also includes domestic details of everyday life and the running of an estate, and the compelling early 17th century love story of a widow and widower, told through surviving letters.

Published by Hobnob Press in December 2020, as a 620pp, illustrated (including colour) paperback, at £25.00, ISBN 978-1-906978-98-3.
www.hobnobpress.co.uk

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