

# Trowbridge Civic Society NEWSLETTER

Summer 2017



**In this issue:**  
**Courtfield House    Bridges - Quiz**

Member of Wiltshire Building Record, ASHTAV and BALH  
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The Quiz - Bridges  
Do you know where  
these bridges are?  
Answers on page 10  
All images from  
Google Maps



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## TROWBRIDGE CIVIC SOCIETY INFORMATION

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Subscription Rates:	Single £6, Joint £10, Corporate £30 New members welcome - please contact Membership Secretary

**If you do have subs still due for 2017, you might want to consider setting up a standing order or direct payment to our new bank account which is Lloyds 30-98-97 46956860. Grateful thanks to the many of you who have paid. Let Janet know if you need a receipt.**

**Deadline for next issue - End of September**

## EDITORIAL COMMENT

Much of our newsletter this time is about Courtfield House, perhaps better known to some of us as Roundstone School. Some of the photographs, including the cover photograph have been kindly supplied by Kavanagh's estate agent, with the permission of Ashford Homes.

Courtfield House has now been sold and we look forward to seeing what plans the developers have for this site.

If you have any memories of the school and would be willing for us to publish them, please contact one of the editors.

On the back page are photos by Kevin Hartley which show some of the many developments in Trowbridge.

Several photos we have used in other parts of this issue are from Google Maps, which is a very useful resource.

In the next issue we have an article about Workhouses with a feature on St George's, Semington.

**Remember, we are always looking for contributions from members on any topic.**

## New Member

We have received this email from Jim Keniston who has recently joined the Society. (I hope he won't mind us quoting some of what he wrote)

I now live in Caerphilly South Wales.

I will tell you a little about my family as some of you members might recognise the name. My father, Ted Keniston, worked for Knees for over 50 years, firstly on the removals then in his late 60s to his mid 70s in the shop. My mother Gert worked for over 20 years as a dinner lady at Newtown school and they lived opposite the school from 1943 to 1998. I was an apprentice panel beater at Hebden Knee Motors and then made hand made bodies for vintage cars until 2000 when I retired and moved to Wales.

The spring newsletter was very interesting as I lived in Wyke Road after I was married but I can remember the old brick works (which you got to by walking through the lane past the hospital which is now Cannel road) with their kilns in the early 50s. I think Knees owned the land then.

**Corporate Member:  
The Trowbridge Museum**

## From the Chairman

Glyn Bridges

After many emails we have finally got the Conservation Officer to agree that the ornamental iron gate piers at Rosefield House (Grade 11\*) are part of the listing and must be replaced. It is unfortunate that the stone column has been replaced without its rustication and the Conservation Officer says he is quite happy with this, something I believe would not be allowed in Bradford or Salisbury. You almost get the feeling that anything will do for Trowbridge. The same applies to the pavements throughout the town where County Officers are content to allow the utilities to use asphalt instead of replacing the York stone or block paving. There is a problem too with commercial bins. The Town Council has been trying for well over a year to persuade the County to do its job and have these removed from the highway but with little success so far - then, anything will do for Trowbridge.

## Planning Matters

Sue and Kevin Eames

The planning decision that will be observable by the majority of the newsletter's readers concerns the construction of external roof access stairs on the north east elevation of the Asda supermarket. The staircase (with an approximate height of 13 meters) will provide safe access and a means of escape if required. It will sit tight against the building within an existing secure service yard area. The staircase will be finished in a black colour. In terms of impact on the surrounding conservation area, the Conservation Officer did not feel there would be any significant harm inflicted on the character of the area, due to the relative secluded location of the proposal on the building. The application was approved with conditions, including future maintenance of the staircase.

Approval has also been granted for a change of use application, relating to the existing car breaker/scrap yard on the Canal Road Industrial Estate (J W Ransome and Sons Ltd). The applicants would like to erect a new apex building to be used as a waste transfer station for recycling materials and a scrap yard for the collection of ferrous and non ferrous metals.

The final small scale development, not being situated in a very public area, will not be seen by as many readers as the previous two. It concerns the construction of 4 dwellings to the rear of 61/63 Drynham Road. This too has been approved with conditions, relating to building materials, access, landscaping and parking provision.

## Halve Health Clinic

A planning application for 16 flats in the old Halve Health Clinic has caused some controversy. As you can see from the plan, an extra floor will be added. A resident said, "This is a conservation area and an important road with a number of listed buildings." The clinic has also been described as "one of the ugliest buildings in the town."

What do members think? Are there other buildings in Trowbridge which could be described as eyesores? We would like to print photos of the ones you nominate.

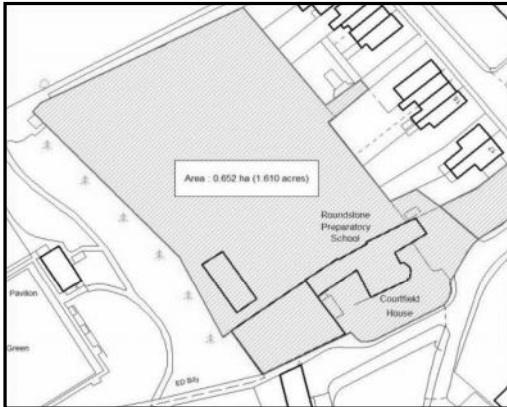
**Editor**



# Courtfield House and Courts Mill - Past, Present and Future - An Appraisal by David Feather

(David's appraisal was written before Courtfield House was sold. See below for more information on what the purchasers intend).

## Introduction



This briefing note has been produced with the intention of promoting informed debate and minimising confrontation. The objective is to provide information on the status and history of the Courts Mill/Courtfield House complex to help reach a development compromise that is acceptable to the new owners of Courtfield House, Wiltshire Council Planners, Historic England, Trowbridge Town Council, Friends of Trowbridge Park, Trowbridge Civic Society and the community at large.

## Why are Courtfield House and the buildings around it important?

There are two aspects to the importance of Courtfield House. The first is that it is an excellent example of 18<sup>th</sup> century building. It is a rare example of a clothier's house with the workshop still standing. As such it has merited a listing grade of 2\* in the Historic England National Heritage List for England (NHLE). The second is perhaps more significant in that the group of buildings comprising the house, the adjoining workshop, the wool store and the remaining mill building are the remnants of one of the largest woollen mill complexes in Trowbridge. Ken Rogers has researched the woollen industry in Trowbridge and, thus, the history of Courts Mill is known in great detail from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. (See below)

## Present Situation

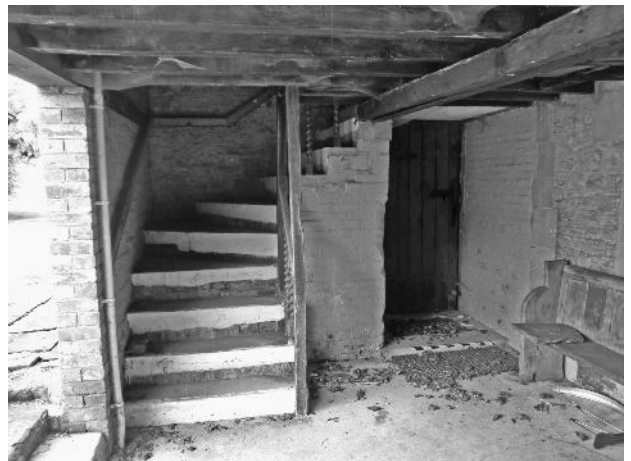
Mary Pearce, the last owner of Courtfield House, died at the end of 2015. Very little maintenance had been carried out for very many years and the house is structurally in a very poor state. Redevelopment should take place as soon as possible to avoid further deterioration. The grass is being cut in the garden, but little other work is apparent. The garden contains an orchard that contains some heritage fruit trees. However, this does not appear to have been surveyed. There is a mixture of standard trees and espalier. The Wool Store looks to be generally in reasonable condition, but needs some reinstatement of lost brickwork on the southern corner. It has been used as the Mophew School of Dance. The Courts Mill building lies empty with the ground floor doors and windows boarded over.

The listing for the wall in front of Courtfield House appears to be somewhat in error as the two curved wings are in brickwork. Some concrete coping has been used to repair the east side and cement may have been used to repoint the brickwork. One of the gateways is filled in with stonework. It is not possible to fully appreciate Courtfield House from the road because of the height of the shrubs and trees in the front garden.

There is a considerable amount of parking around the triangular landscaped area in front of the house. It is not clear whether it is caused by patients to the Lovemead Surgery or commuter parking.

## Future

Whilst one could consider Courtfield House in isolation, there is the opportunity to provide Trowbridge with an enduring memorial to its wool cloth manufacturing heritage. It would be more desirable to look at the complex of Courtfield House, The Wool Store, Court Mills Centre, the triangular grassed and treed area in front of Courtfield House and the forecourt of the Magnet store. There appears to be a good opportunity of creating a much better visual aspect than exists at present, enhancing the approach to the Town Park and



importantly providing a passer-by with information about the Courts Mill past. This area could then be included in some historic town trail.

### **Courtfield House**

Anyone with the objective of preserving the whole of the listed buildings in the Courtfield House curtilage would be faced with a very large cost. If there was some community use for the building it may be feasible to attract a lottery grant to repair and redevelop it. However, Trowbridge Museum has already turned down this possibility and the Trowbridge Town Hall is developing as an Arts Centre. Thus, it is very difficult to imagine a community use for the buildings.

One possibility that should be considered is to take down some parts of the building complex and develop the original house and the workshop, as residential units. Further residential units could then be built within the garden and on the old school car park to produce an economical outcome for the new owners. If the single storey extension on the east side were taken down this would permit a suitable drive to be created into a development within the garden.

### **Garden**

There is an orchard in the area of the garden adjacent to the Town Park. Consideration should be given to gifting it to Trowbridge Town Council as an extension to the park. Some heritage fruit varieties might be lost, particularly those on espaliers near the house, but this might be an acceptable compromise to the owners and the community. Cuttings could be taken from heritage varieties if they can be identified.

### **Wool Store**

If there is still a demand for a School of Dance then there is no reason why it should not continue as such as a community facility. If not it should not be too difficult to find a use for such a useful amount of undercover space and still retain the features of the exterior.



### **Courts Mill**

Could this be converted to a residential retirement facility? Allocated parking could be provided in front. Its ready access to the park, town centre and surgery would make it quite attractive.

### **Magnet Frontage**

The front of the Magnet store is particularly bleak with a large expanse of concrete. There is a small amount of planting at the western corner of the car park. Could this be supplemented by a yew hedge extending a short way across the car park, as far as the nose of the triangular landscaped area.

### **Triangular Island Area.**



This area offers a real opportunity to relate the site to the past. Bradford on Avon has recently put its “Iron Duke” on public display. This relates to the history of rubber manufacture in that town. It should not be impossible to find a piece of cloth manufacturing machinery that could be mounted in suitable landscaping on the Courts Mill island with an historical narrative to remember the mill's past.

An alternative would be to commission a piece of sculpture with the theme of the cloth industry.

## Development Brief

After some appropriate consultation it would be desirable if the Planning Officer of Wiltshire Council could draw up a development brief - or similar. This would then be a fundamental guide to architects working for a future developer and avoid - or at least minimise - public criticism of the development.

## History of Courtfield House and Courts Mill

**Ken Rogers**

The site of Courts Mill was a three-acre close of pasture called Pyrry Croft or Perry Croft, which no doubt took its name from a family called Pyrry mentioned in records. The first we know of it in detail comes from a survey of the manor of Trowbridge Dauntsey made in 1593, when it was held on a copyhold tenancy by William Browne by a grant made in 1589. Browne was probably a servant of the Lord of the Manor, as the admission fine was pardoned 'in consideration of good and faithful service done and to be done' by Browne.

No more is known until 1692, when Mary Collett, widow, surrendered a lease made in 1675 to her late husband William, and took a new one on the lives of her daughter Mary, wife of William Holloway of Wilsford, and John and Sarah, their children. Mary Holloway (then of Trowbridge) died in 1729 leaving everything to her son John. In 1733 John, who was a tanner living in Trowbridge, assigned the lease of the house only to Aaron Richman, rough mason. A year later Richman took a new lease of the house and the close, adding his own life and that of Jane his wife to that of the John Holloway, who still held the leasehold interest in the close. Finally, in 1735, Richman bought that too, paying Holloway £29. These transactions are recorded in a survey of the manor made in 1752, and it is only from that that we learn that the house and the close were in separate locations – the house was on the site of the present Nos. 13-14 in Church Street.

Jane died in 1743; her lengthy will left her prized possessions in clothes and furniture among nieces and nephews, and ordered that Perry Croft should be sold to help to pay her legacies. A day before she made her will she had mortgaged the close to Avery Thompson, vicar of Steeple Ashton, for £30, and she made him one of her executors. It was no doubt because of this that in 1746 Thompson bought the freehold of the Church Street house and the close from the Duke of Kingston. Two days later Thompson sold the close to Jeffry Hicks the elder of Seend, baker, for £100. Finally, in 1752, Jeffry Hicks and John, his son (a Steeple Ashton lawyer), sold Perry Croft to John Cokes, a Trowbridge clothier, for £87, a sum which makes it clear that there was no house on it. The deed notes the boundaries of Perry Croft in detail: East, the road from Trowbridge to Ashton Common; West, the Lower Court; North, a close of pasture belonging to Mr William Temple; South, the brook.

Within a year of his purchase of Perry Croft Cokes built a dyehouse equipped with furnaces for the dyeing and scouring of wool. He financed this by mortgaging it for £200 to James Toogood of Trowbridge, carrier (to whom the Fore Street house had already been mortgaged in 1749). Further insurance policies of 1758 insured Cokes's stock in trade and utensils for £800, and the brick, stone, and tiled dyehouse for £100, and show that two other clothiers, Jacob Roberts and James Selfe, were using the dyehouse too, and that dyeing was being undertaken for others as well.

The house in which Cokes was living can be identified as the large one, known many years later as The Limes, which stood on the site of the Town Hall. When it was advertised for sale in 1761 it was rented by Cokes for £48 a year. It was sold to William Whitaker the younger, who no doubt moved in, so presumably Cokes needed somewhere to live; the rate book suggests clearly that it was at this point that he built Courtfield House. The entries from his purchase of Perry Croft in 1752 until 1761 simply refer to a close and rate it at 2d. In 1762 the entry appears to have been re-written as 'his dwelling house and a close of ground late Richman's' and the rating doubled to 4d. This interpretation is backed up both by the description of 1752 in which no house is mentioned, and by that in a deed of 1771 mentioned below, which speaks of the house 'built by John Cokes on part of the close.

Cokes died in 1764, leaving his personal possessions equally between his widow and his daughter Ann and the residue in trust for Ann. In 1771 the daughter Ann was living at Bradford when she married Richard Atwood, a clothier of that town. The marriage settlement shows that

her portion was 'several hundred pounds' and that the house, workshops and dyehouse were occupied by John Bullocke, clothier, about whom nothing has been found. The Atwoods retained ownership of the Trowbridge premises until Ann, then a widow, sold them to the tenant, James Edgell, in 1812.

James Edgell bought the house, workshops, and dyehouse from Ann Atwood in 1812 for £2000. He built a factory on the close immediately; in 1833 he gave the dates 1812, 1815, 1818 back part. It must have been steam-driven from the beginning; the later owners claimed that an engine was obtained from Boulton and Watt, but no record has been found. Edgell was in the forefront of a movement which made Trowbridge pre-eminent among the western textile towns in the use of steam power. Edgell occupied the factory alone for some years. In 1828 his daughter Elizabeth married her first cousin William Edgell, son of James's brother William, the butcher. William did not, however, join his father-in-law, as might have been expected, but instead began his own trade in Courts Mill. The 1830 directory has separate entries for them at Polebarn Lane, and they made separate replies to the queries of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children in 1833.

By 1838 James Edgell had taken his only surviving son John into the business. They lived at Courtfield, and William Edgell at the large house now No. 13 the Halve. Both described themselves as cassimere manufacturers. James died aged 69 in 1841. In 1843 his son John Edgell sold the house and the factory to his brother-in-law William Edgell for £1650.

William died in 1845, aged 45. The factory was then put up for sale. It still had the 20 h.p.



engine and three 20 h.p. boilers. The factory was described as a double building of four floors, the front 66 ft. by 24 ft., the back 44 ft. by 24 ft. There was a detached building of three floors used as a counting house and workshops, and dyehouses with three copper dye furnaces. Drying was provided by wrought-iron pipes over the boilers, and there were three oak racks in the meadow. The house had workshops and a warehouse. The advertisement emphasized that it was the first factory on the stream, and that it was calculated for 40-50 cassimeres a week. It offered the 'opportunity for doing a first-rate business in the far-famed manufacturing town of Trowbridge.' William's former house in The Halve, occupied by a tenant, was also for sale.

The factory and adjoining house were sold to Samuel Brown for £2,800. He financed it by a mortgage for £2,500 to John and James Kemp, drapers in Roundstone Street. He moved to Courtfield House.

In 1847 Samuel Brown went bankrupt. The assignees in bankruptcy immediately sold the house and factory to Henry Edmonds of Edgware Road London. coach proprietor, for £650, still subject to the mortgage to the Kemps. The sale was clearly an arrangement on Brown's behalf, and Tucker's diary and a surviving account book suggest that his trade continued uninterrupted.

In February 1848 the main part of the factory of Mr. Samuel Brown, 'one of the oldest in the town...soaked with oil', caught on fire, and in less than two hours was totally destroyed by fire. There is little doubt that nothing remains of the main block of James Edgell's factory of 1812-1818. The building was insured; the Kemps received £1,406 and released the premises back to Edmonds in June 1848. In December Edmonds sold the factory and new buildings he had erected back to Samuel Brown, who had been discharged from bankruptcy, for £1,900. Whatever the significance of these financial goings-on, there seems to be no doubt that the row of three buildings which formed the main part of Courts Mill until demolition dated from the years following 1848. Those actually on the site of Edgell's factory are probably those that Brown was able to use immediately.

Gane Brothers were engaged in building in 1857, possibly the block further to the east, Or the range which now survives against the Park. Both are shown on a plan on the deed of 1860. The



buildings which survived the fire must have been the dyehouse, and a three-storeyed building adjoining it, which was probably the counting house and workshops of the sale description.

The 1851 census shows that Courtfield was occupied by the Revd. Thomas Griffin, aged 73, a Baptist minister having no pastorate, and a fundholder. He, and Thomas Grimm Esq., perhaps a son, were still there in 1855.

Samuel Brown died on 23 March 1853, aged 47. Having no son, he had brought his nephew William Roger Brown (always known as Roger) into the business. Samuel Brown left Roger £500, provided in his will that he was to be allowed to rent the factory and machinery at a fair rent, and ordered his trustees to allow £5,000 capital to remain in the firm at four per cent. The memoir of Roger published at his death presented the situation like this: 'Left with a small factory and little knowledge of the merchant side of the business, a partner was necessary. On the scene comes the busy, bustling, dapper little Welshman, with all the tricks of the trade, fresh from the largest house in London.' The Welshman was Michael Palmer, born in Pembrokeshire in 1814.

The factory remained the property of Samuel's trustees until 1860, when it was sold to Palmer for £8,000, and he immediately sold half to Brown for £4,000. It was described as comprising East Mill, Centre Mill, and West Mill, with workshops, warerooms, and dyehouse, the dwelling house, and a piece of ground in Steeple Ashton parish. Edward Bacon Evans, a foreman at the factories, was living at Courtfield by 1861.

In 1870-71 a power loom and spinning shed with a steam engine was added to Courts Mill at a cost of £5,000, and in 1872 a wool shed (no doubt the one still standing near Courtfield House) was built at a cost of £400. In 1873 another wool shed was built adjoining the Courts Mill weaving shed.

Roger Brown sold his share of the business in 1877 to Alexander Mackay who was born in Lathern, Caithness, in 1838. He bought Brown's half share of the factories for £13,300, and paid him for his share in the capital and £10,000 for the goodwill. In 1892 Michael Palmer died, and his executors sold his half share of the property to Alexander Mackay for £13,000. From 1892 onwards the firm was entirely a Mackay family concern.

No principal of the firm lived in the house for many years after Samuel Brown left it in 1850. We have seen that E. B. Evans, superintendent of the factories, was there in 1861. In 1871-2 it was occupied by a tenant, Richard Burrow Tarr, a wool merchant. Between 1881 and 1911 it was the home of Joseph Long, variously described as a clerk, an accountant, and a book keeper.

The next recorded tenant was F. W. Lewis, a foreman at the factory, 1915-16. Reay Mackay had moved in by 1920, and lived there until his death in 1952; his widow remained there until it was sold in 1964 to the recently deceased owner, Mrs. Mary Pearce.

In 1917 King George V and Queen Mary visited Trowbridge, and were shown over the factory. Queen Mary made a second visit in 1943.

In 1963 Palmer and Mackay was purchased by Sarum Fine Woollen Mills Ltd. which ran the factories of Lavertons at Westbury and Tuckers at Frome, and the Trowbridge site was closed down.

### **Update**

In June this year the Editor had this email from Tom Griffiths, Development Director (Designate) of Ashford Homes, Melksham.

*Thank you for your email, and for your interest in Courtfield House. As you are undoubtedly aware, the house and its grounds have recently been purchased by our parent company, Doric Developments (Bath) Ltd.*

*In conjunction with our appointed architect, we are currently undertaking a feasibility study to understand how best to divide the listed building into residential accommodation. The interior of the building is fascinating, but not without its challenges, and with a number of structural repairs being required. The refurbishment will therefore be expensive relative to the size of the building, so there will be an element of newbuild housing in the grounds to fund the comprehensive refurbishment, and to complement the setting of the listed building. This work is very much still at concept stage, but we would be happy to share with your further once our proposals are a little more developed.*

# RECENT MEETINGS

## Radstock

On the 9<sup>th</sup> May the Civic Society were led on a walk around Radstock by Peter Collier, to view some of the sites associated with the coal mining industry. It was a beautiful spring evening as you can see from some of the photos taken by Mike Johnson. We first visited the church where a grandson of Horatio Nelson was vicar and who is buried with his brother in the churchyard. The church was

mainly rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and has a remarkable sun dial on its south side. From there we viewed the new developments taking place on the site of the old GWR station and some of the sidings. Ludlows Colliery was just up the road where we could see some of the original mine buildings and even old railway lines still in situ. After crossing the Wellow Brook we looked at some of the typical coal miners' cottages built by the Waldegrave family which owned many of the mines and much of the land. Next to the Coombe's Brewery is the market hall which has now been converted into a fine local museum and outside is a memorial to the miners in the form of an old winding wheel on top of a column on which are illustrations of many of the fossils which were found in the mines. Behind the Radstock Arms hotel was the basin for the Somerset Coal Canal which ran towards Limpley Stoke before the Somerset and Dorset Railway followed much of the route to Bath. In fact, the centre of Radstock once had two sets of level crossing gates which were a cause of congestion on summer Saturdays back in the 1950s. We couldn't leave Radstock without viewing Radco, the large co-op store which dominates the centre of Radstock. Interestingly, Radco now runs a store in Trowbridge. As we strolled back to the car park we all chewed on a chip which a member had very thoughtfully bought in the chip shop next to Middle Pit colliery!



## Answers to the Quiz - Bridges

1. Railway bridge at the side of Rose and Crown, Stallard Street
2. Canal bridge, Hilperton Marina
3. Road bridge, Hilperton Marina
4. County Way, Tesco
5. Footbridge at the railway station
6. Mortimer Street railway bridge, looking towards County Way bridge
7. Railway bridge, Dursley Road
8. Bridge at the end of Innox Road
9. Bottom of Polebarn Road
10. London Bridge, Wingfield Road
11. Brook Road
12. Canal bridge on Marsh Road, near the King's Arms.

## Trowbridge Connections 10 Margaret Davidge

Does anybody have any information about the film actress Margaret Grist Davidge? On the website International Movie Database she is listed as one of the **Most Popular People Born In "Trowbridge/ Wiltshire/ England/ UK"**. She was born on 4 October 1884 in Trowbridge and died in 1947, Marylebone, London.

Her film roles are listed as follows, in reverse chronological order: 1938 *The Villiers Diamond* (Mrs. Benson), 1938 *The Man with 100 Faces* (uncredited), 1936 *King of Hearts* (Mrs. Saunders), 1936 *Doomed Cargo* (Housekeeper, uncredited), 1935 *The Clairvoyant* (Lodging Housekeeper, uncredited), 1935 *Fighting Stock* (Mrs. Fenton), and 1935 *Regal Cavalcade*, Undetermined Minor Role, uncredited). *Fighting Stock* was a comedy written by Ben Travers and starred Robertson Hare among others.





# Recent developments in Trowbridge. Photographs by Kevin Hartley



New Surgery behind Adcroft Surgery

© K. J. Hartley



New housing on the old Adcroft Villa site  
(next to Adcroft Surgery)

© K. J. Hartley



House development off Hilperton Road,  
down Pepperacre Lane

© K. J. Hartley



Trowbridge Sea Cadets Headquarters  
New homes off Frome Road,

© K. J. Hartley



Development at the Trowbridge Mosque

© K. J. Hartley



Tennis Courts refurbishment in the town Park

© K. J. Hartley



Housing development in Union Street  
opposite old Clinic

© K. J. Hartley



Development of houses opposite the  
John of Gaunt School in Wingfield Road

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