



The history and significance of Trowbridge Park Bandstand

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1 INTRODUCTION

The story of Trowbridge's bandstand in the Town Park is inextricably tied up with the history of the park itself and that of the Haden family's involvement in Trowbridge.

This short document is therefore divided into three main parts, each attempting to provide an insight into one of the above stories.



2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE HADEN FAMILY'S INVOLVEMENT IN TROWBRIDGE

2.1 The Haden Company

Many people will know of Trowbridge as a centre of the woollen industry both before and after the Industrial Revolution of the late 1700s. The town was the centre of woollen cloth production in south-west England in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Known by the epithet "The Manchester of the South", Trowbridge once hosted forty wool mills and was at the time widely regarded as one of the wealthiest towns in England.

What many may not know about Trowbridge is that there was another innovative and successful industry that grew up in the town in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution.

Haden, a prominent engineering firm with a rich history, began in 1816 when brothers George and James Haden established their engineering company in Trowbridge, Wiltshire.

George Haden (1788–1856) was a British engineer, inventor and holder of several patents relating to woollen milling and warm-air heating. He is most known for the design of heating systems for Wilton House, the Houses of Parliament, the British Museum Reading Room and in 1826, at the request of King George IV, Windsor Castle.

The Windsor Castle heating installation was particularly revolutionary being a pioneering warm-air system. This installation at a royal residence helped cement Haden as an industry leader and the Haden company rapidly grew into an international company specialising in heating, ventilation and plumbing.

The partnership evolved over the years, with James Haden eventually retiring in 1855, leading to the formation of George Haden and Son, under George and his son George Nelson Haden.

By 1914 the company was under the direction of William Nelson Haden, J.P., and Charles Ingham Haden. Over the years it had diversified its expertise to include not just heating, ventilation, hot and cold-water supply, but also electric lighting and power plants, and even cooking and laundry plants.

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The company's specialisation in heat economy continued to showcase their innovative approach to engineering.



Haden family circa 1900 including Charles Ingham, William Nelson & their families

The Haden company played a crucial role during the conflicts of the twentieth century, indeed, in 1915 the company converting its operations to serve as a munitions works.

Following the First World War in 1919 the firm was transitioned into a private company, eventually becoming a public entity in 1921.

A significant milestone arrived in 1926 when Haden secured a contract to equip Carlol House in Newcastle with its innovative lower-pressure hot water panel system. This system utilized large thermal storage cylinders with electrical

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elements, strategically designed to draw power during off-peak hours, thus demonstrating an early commitment to energy efficiency.



Munitions workers 1918

The mid-20th century saw the firm continue to expand its services and by 1937 they were recognised as leading heating and ventilating engineers. By 1961, their offerings had grown to include heating, air-conditioning, piping, and sanitary engineering. This portfolio included warm and cool air systems and industrial process services. At this point they were employing approximately 3,000 individuals.

Despite a dip in profits in the mid-1960s, the company quickly regained its footing. The late 1960s and early 1970s marked a period of strategic acquisitions and consolidation. In 1969, they acquired Troughton and Young to bolster their electrical contracting capabilities. This was followed by the consolidation of their electrical and mechanical engineering activities, including Troughton and Young,

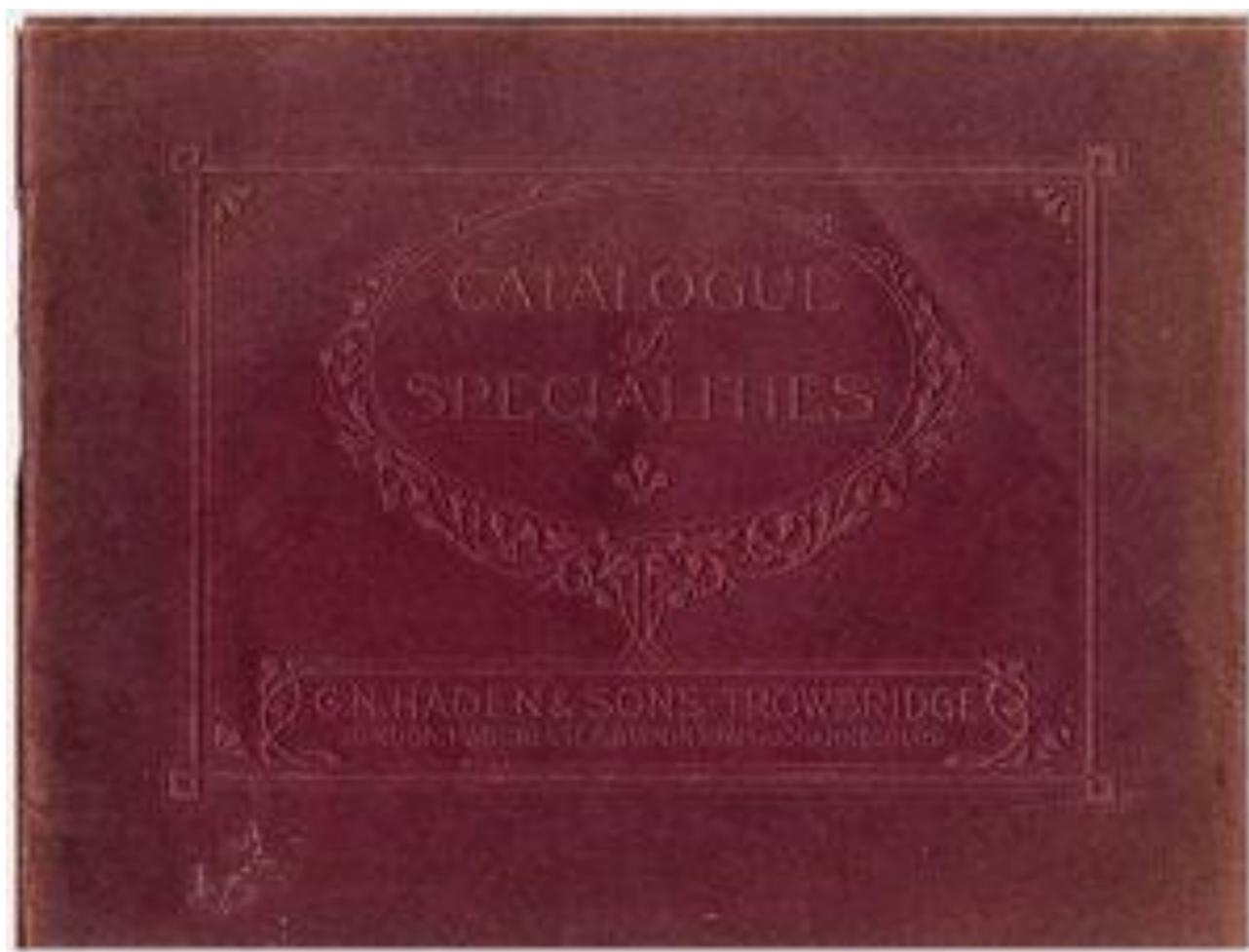
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into a new subsidiary, Haden Young, in 1970. The same year saw the acquisition of Carrier Engineering Co., further broadening their expertise.

During 1971, Haden Young secured major contract to install heating, air conditioning, and fire protection in an 18-story building as well as several other large contracts. This was a period of rapid expansion that led the parent group, G.N. Haden & Sons, to officially change its name to Haden Carrier later that same year.



Catalogue of Specialties

The company's journey under this new name continued until 1986, when it became Haden Building Services Ltd.

The company was subsequently sold to Balfour Beatty but remains listed under the original name with Companies House as "Active".

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In the 1990s, the company played a pivotal role in the construction of the Channel Tunnel, cementing its legacy in major infrastructure projects.

2.2 Visible signs of the Haden family around Trowbridge

A stained glass window dedicated to the memory of George Haden can be found in the Tabernacle Church (now converted into residential flats, but with the Church and its stained glass window remaining preserved).

Until 1974, Trowbridge's Clarendon school was known as the Nelson Haden School.

..... and of course, in 1939 William Nelson Haden presented the bandstand in the Town Park to the town.



3 THE CREATION OF TROWBRIDGE TOWN PARK

The early history of the land that would one day become Trowbridge's Town Park is interwoven (an apt term, considering the town's strong association with the wool weaving industry) with the history of the site now occupied by the Old Town Hall..

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the site that is now occupied by the Old Town Hall was known as Hall's Place and was owned by the Hall family. The grand house that then stood on this site was one of only three prominent stone buildings in the town centre, the others being St James's Church and the Market Cross.

Hall's Place passed from the Hall family to the Langford family before being purchased in 1812 by William Stancomb, a prosperous local wool merchant and mill owner. It was during William Stancomb's ownership that the house became officially known as The Limes.

The arrival of the railway in Trowbridge in 1848, along with the town's expansion driven by the cloth, brewing and food industries, now fueled rapid urban population growth.

In 1860, Stancomb used land adjacent to his home to construct the town's first Market Hall. A large cattle market was subsequently established behind it on land that now forms the boundary of Trowbridge Park.

In 1884, William Stancomb made the generous decision to open his grounds to the people of Trowbridge. At that time, the town was a thriving manufacturer of world renown woollen cloth and clothing. The skyline then would have looked very different from today. In every direction stood the chimney stacks of the mills that drove the local economy. Visible from these open grounds would have been Ashton Mill to the south, Court Mill to the east, Home Mill to the west with Studley and Innox Mills beyond, and Silver Street and Yerbury Mills to the north.

Amid this heavily industrialised landscape lay this welcome expanse of green space. The grounds made available by William Stancomb quickly became a popular retreat, offering local workers and their families a place to relax and escape, if only for a time, from the demands and pressures of Victorian industrial life.

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Then, in 1887, the Local Board of Health started to look for a site for a grand municipal building for Trowbridge. The site of William Stamcom's house became the front runner and Sir William Roger Brown, a wealthy cloth merchant and arguably one of Trowbridge's greatest philanthropists, funded a project to build such a building. This project was deliberately planned to coincide with Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. The Limes was therefore purchased for the then princely price of £20,000 and demolished to make way for the new Town Hall (now the Old Town Hall) which was completed and opened in 1889.

William Brown, along with two other local benefactors (a Mr Walker and a Mr Hayward) now led the efforts to secure the Town Park's future. Together they combined their own financial contribution with £1,337 raised through a public subscription and purchased the land outright and free of debt for the people of Trowbridge.

The completion of the Town Hall therefore coincided closely with the formal establishment of the adjoining public park.

In the years that followed, the park was gradually extended towards the River Biss through further donations from prominent local benefactors until eventually, by the beginning of the 20th century, it reached the 12 acres that we enjoy today.

Following the First World War, the park was chosen as the permanent site for the Trowbridge's War Memorial, and thus it became a focal point for community remembrance.

With funds raised by wealthy businessmen and donations from local businesses, like Ushers brewery, the memorial, featuring a lone soldier standing with fixed bayonet atop a stone plinth, was unveiled in 1923. It was erected to commemorate the 289 men and women of Trowbridge who lost their lives during the First World War.

Sadly, the conflict that many believed would be "the war to end all wars" did not prove to be so. Following the Second World War, a further 102 local names were added to the memorial, ensuring their sacrifice would also be remembered.

As part of the original memorial dedication, families of those who had lost loved ones during the Great War (it was not yet known as the "First World War") were invited to plant an avenue of Cornish elm trees. Arranged in three rows, the

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avenue extended southwards from the cenotaph towards the lower field, creating a living memorial to the fallen.

Then , in 1939, local industrialist William Nelson Haden paid for the construction of the new art deco bandstand in at the northern edge of the upper part of the park (sometimes known as Walker's Field). This bandstand was, and still is, used for public performances and events.

Sadly, the devastating outbreak of Dutch Elm Disease during the late 1960s and early 1970s that destroyed tens of thousands of ancient elm trees across England did not spare the elms of Trowbridge Park and eventually these too had to be felled. The lost elms were replaced in the 1980s by Lime trees that follow the same alignment as the original avenue.



The Avenue of Lime Trees – Winter 2010

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It would be fitting to think that these Lime trees were chosen because of The Limes, thus preserving both the landscape and the memory of those whom the original trees were intended to honour.

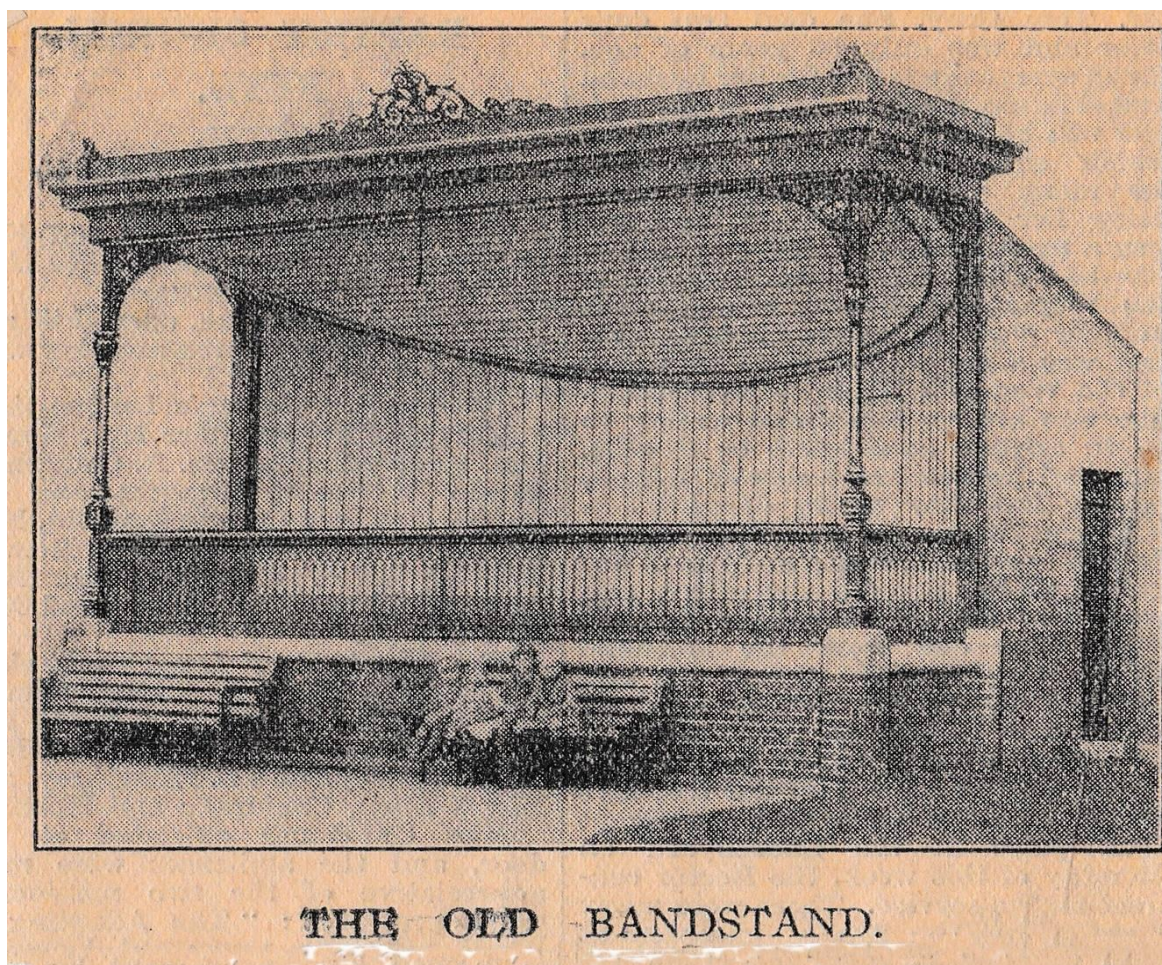
Into the 21st Century, the park and its clamshell art deco bandstand continues to serve as a hub for community activity, regularly hosting community events, concerts and fairs.



4 THE BANDSTAND ITSELF

4.1 Bandstands in the Park prior to 1939

The original bandstand in the Town Park was a traditional Victorian structure erected following the park's formal opening in 1884.



By the late 1930s, the structure of the Victorian bandstand had suffered from significant decay and it was removed as part of a broader effort to modernise the park.

4.2 Location of the Bandstand

The second Trowbridge Park Bandstand, the current art deco structure donated to the town by William Nelson Haden, was erected in 1939 in the same location as the original, now demolished, structure.

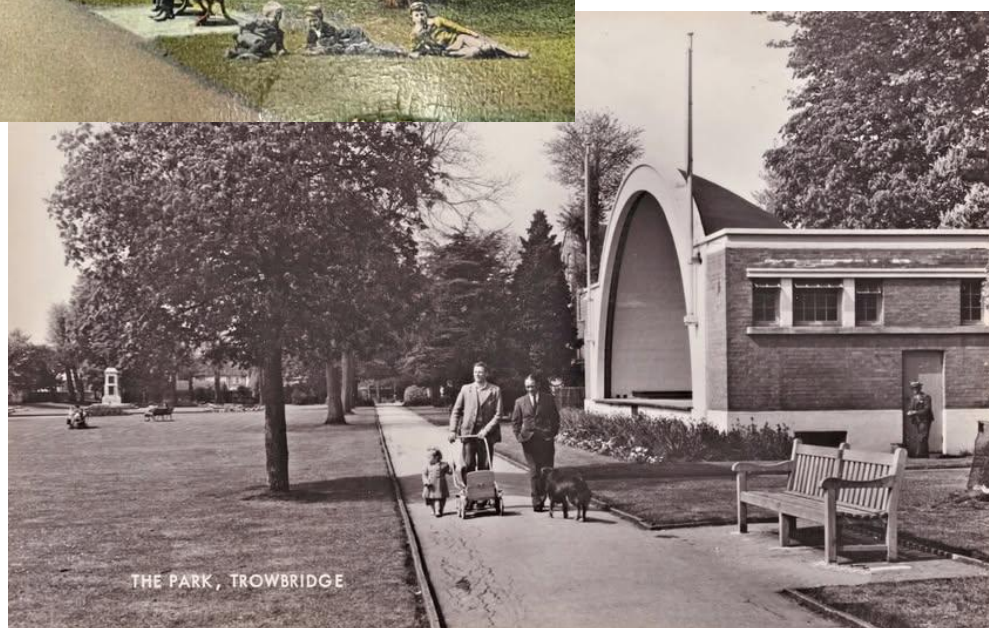
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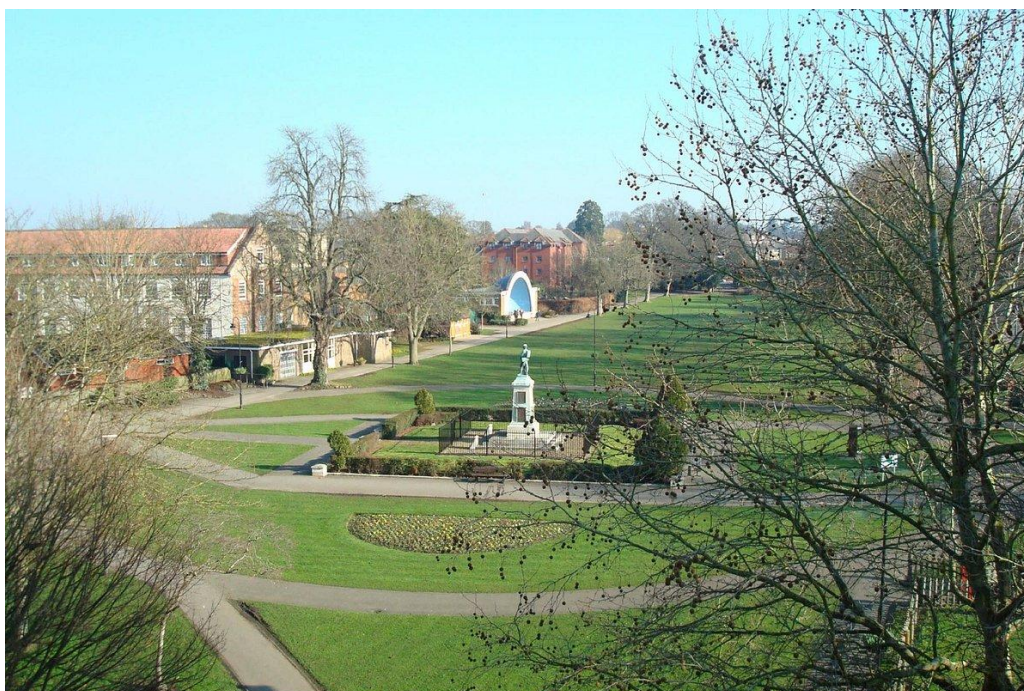
This location of both bandstands location is on the northern edge of the Town Park in front of St. George's Works and between the more recent Park Club building and Walker's Yard (the Trowbridge Town Council Neighbourhood Services team's compound).

The two images below show the original Victorian bandstand on the upper left and the 1939 art deco bandstand on the lower right. It is interesting to see how the trees, that were mere saplings when the photograph of the Victorian structure was taken, have matured into full trees by the time of the second photograph. Also visible in the background of the second photograph, but not in the first, is the town's War Memorial that was erected after the First World War.



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The bandstand in the Town Park (2013). Photograph courtesy of Tripadvisor

The view above is of the Town Park taken from the roof of Castle Place in 2013 before the St George's Works development was completed and still shows the now demolished toilet block immediately to the left of the bandstand. However, this image clearly illustrates the fantastic location of the bandstand for open air concerts in the Town Park as well as its showing its relationship to the town's War Memorial.

This image, taken in 2025, is of the bandstand during a summer concert and illustrates its position in front of the by now completed St George's Works.



The bandstand, with St George's Works behind during a summer concert in 2025.

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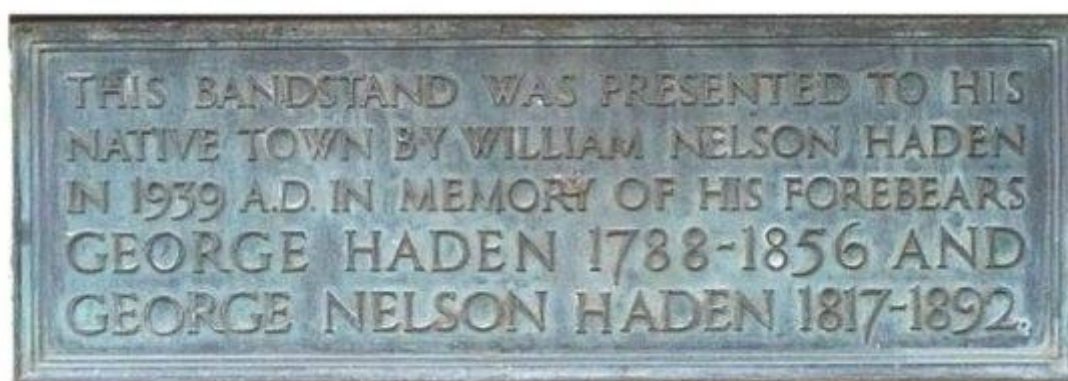


4.3 The current Bandstand's history

The current bandstand was commissioned and gifted to the town in 1939 by local industrialist William Nelson Haden (B 1859 - D 1946).



MAKING HIS GIFT: Mr. W. N. Haden, J.P., formally presented to Trowbridge on Saturday, a beautiful bandstand at the People's Park, built in memory of his forebears, George Haden, 1788-1856, and George Nelson Haden, 1817-1892. Also in the picture are Sir George Oatley, architect, Councillor A. Batley, J.P., chairman of the Council, the Rev. Nisbet Wallace, Rector of Trowbridge, and Mr. M. Roberts, conductor of the Royal Artillery (Portsmouth) Band. Above, Mr. W. N. Haden, together with other prominent Wiltshire folk, enjoying the band contest.



It is a fine example of Art Deco architecture, and is a relatively rare survivor for public bandstands in the UK. It was built as part of a broader effort to enhance Trowbridge's Town Park and provide a dedicated space for musical performances and community events. The clamshell design was chosen specifically for its

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parabolic properties, significantly increasing the volume and clarity for audiences gathered on the grass at the top of Trowbridge Town Park.

Completed just before the outbreak of the Second World War, the bandstand became a vital site for "Holidays at Home" events, military training and band performances and was intended to maintain public morale during that six year conflict.

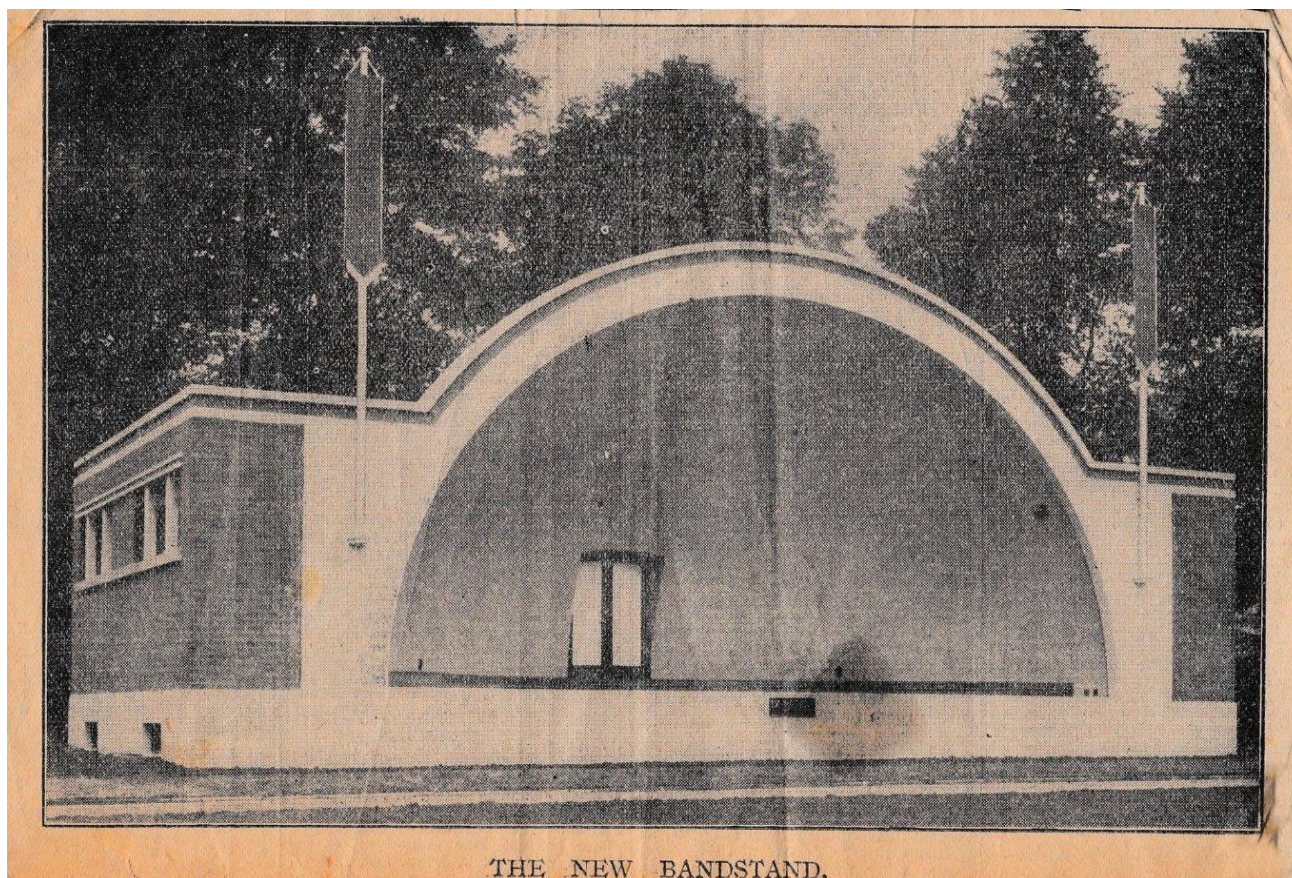


Municipal bandstands were popular during this period as they served as focal points for public gatherings, concerts, and other cultural activities. As such, they were key to providing entertainment for the residents, especially following the First World War. Trowbridge bandstand's distinctive Art Deco design was intended to be both functional and aesthetically pleasing, reflecting the architectural trends of the time.

Over the years since its construction, the Bandstand has been extensively used for events in the Town Park and has been a much loved centrepiece and focal point for events from concerts to town festivals.

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The bandstand as it appeared shortly after completion

Prior to 2014, the Bandstand was maintained by the district authority, initially West Wiltshire District Council, then (following Wiltshire's move to become a unitary authority in 2009) Wiltshire Council.

In 2013 Service Delegation and Asset Transfer discussions commenced between Wiltshire Council and Trowbridge Town Council and in 2014 the transfer of the Bandstand along with the Town Park from Wiltshire to Trowbridge Town Council was completed.

At the time of the transfer to the town council in 2014, the bandstand was already in need of repairs. Trowbridge Town Council did undertake some minor/cosmetic repairs to tidy it up and security fencing was also installed at this time to protect the building from the problems of unauthorised access, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

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Between 2014 and 2016, the bandstand was used occasionally but concerns over the structure's condition had led to this use being minimal.

A significant private development then took place during the years 2017-2019 at St Georges Works (the building immediately behind the bandstand). The town council agreed with the developer of St Georges Works that the area around the bandstand could be used for the storage of construction equipment and building materials deliveries. This period also saw the bandstand being used for the storage of the town council's equipment.

As the town council required a facility to use as a base for future operations and storage, a project to construct a new storage facility was drawn up while the St Georges Works development was still taking place and construction of the town council's new storage unit commenced once the land around the bandstand being used by the developer of St George's Works was returned to the council.

The new storage facility was completed (after a delay due to the Covid-19 pandemic) in September 2020. The project to construct the storage facility and working yard had involved upgrading the electricity supply to the bandstand and replacing the kitchen facility. This helped offset any preliminary costs quoted by the contractor of the storage facility but they also used the bandstand as their storage for the duration of that build.

The bandstand was therefore not used for its original purpose at all during either the construction of St Georges Works or the town council storage facility next door.

In 2021, following the local elections, a new council term brought in new councillors along with a new council strategy which included future projects to enhance the town, the bandstand being one of them. The council quickly engaged an architect to come up with some proposals for refurbishment of the bandstand and make it more accessible. Four designs were produced and sent out for public consultation. This resulted in one design being favoured and agreed by the council to take forward for further technical drawings, scopes of work and eventually the commissioning of a pre-tender estimate (PTE).

During this process the council commissioned the services of a structural engineer whose report highlighted significant defects in the concrete structure, in particular to the concrete beams viewed from within the basement.

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While the bandstand had been under the management of the previous local authority (Wiltshire Council), the sump pump had not been properly maintained, and the basement had been left flooded.

Further minimal maintenance by the previous local authority had led to leaks in the roof lining and windows compounded a damp problem to the internal areas with ceiling paint flaking daily leaving the interior floors covered in paint dust.

Even when Trowbridge Town Council took over the bandstand only the basic maintenance could be afforded. A structural report commissioned by the town council highlighted the need to engage with a concrete repair specialist to undertake a significant intrusive survey of the concrete structure, so the town council at that time restricted use of the bandstand for safety reasons until the report of that survey was published in 2022.

The report, when it was completed, provided the council options for repair, with certain levels of re-conditioning being offered, each with their own repair longevity. Following receipt of the report, and a public consultation being held to showcase the options put forward, the council met and decided on its preferred option. At the same time the council decided to allow some use of the bandstand, but with caution over any use of amplified music being played within the structure.

The estimated costs for the preferred option were put to the town council along with a PTE (pre-tender estimate) to consider funding; but the whole bandstand project was then paused as other projects by then had taken priority.

As of June 2026, the bandstand is still mainly in the same condition as it was when commissioning the reports referenced above and is still used for public community events and (non-amplified) musical performances.

4.4 The Bandstand's construction

The bandstand building is of brick construction with a flat membrane covered roof surrounding a reinforced concrete half-dome above a reinforced concrete stage supported by reinforced concrete pillars.

Following discussions with the Wiltshire Historic Buildings Trust, it has become clear that this concrete itself is of historic significance and would require specialist repair.

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The window frames and guttering are also original and would benefit from conservation rather than replacement.

4.5 The future vision

Both the Wiltshire Historic Buildings Trust and the Twentieth Century Society have been consulted and have expressed interest in the preservation of the bandstand.

The building is now slowly deteriorating to the state that urgent remedial work will soon be needed to the structure itself.

This required work is predominantly to the reinforced concrete loadbearing elements of the under-stage area which show clear signs of cracking, collapse and exposed steel reinforcement; the roof, parapet, guttering and downpipes all of which require repair/replacement in order to prevent further water ingress into the building; and the windows which are metal framed single glazed units offering almost no insulation of protection (even ignoring all the broken panes of glass).

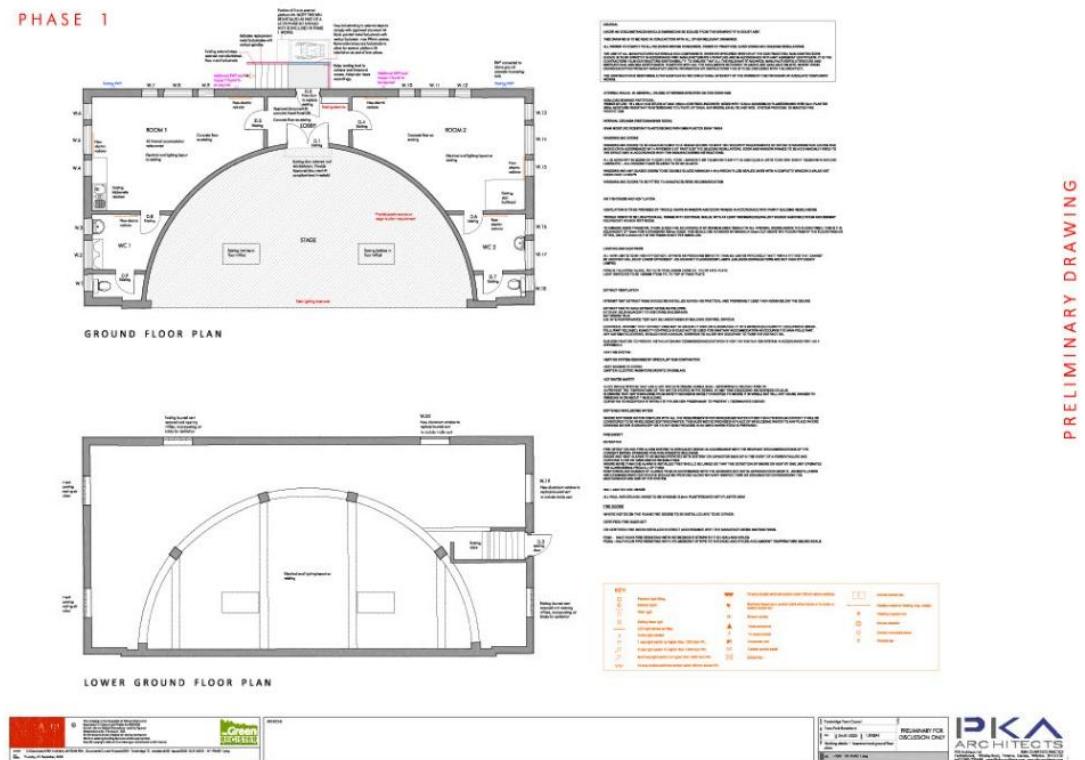
Work is also needed to make the building fully accessible to disabled/mobility limited users. Access to the backstage area is by steps only and there is a further step down onto the stage itself from these backstage rooms. The backstage rooms themselves are poorly equipped to host artists and there is currently no provision for modern sound or lighting systems on the Bandstand. Finally, cosmetic work is needed in order to restore the Bandstand to its original art-deco appearance.

It is therefore proposed that the Trowbridge Park Bandstand is repaired, restored and, where necessary and with due sympathy to its architectural and historical heritage, updated to enable its continued use by the town for events in the Town Park.

The plans below were prepared for Trowbridge Town Council by PKA Architects Ltd. in 2022.

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Whilst the bandstand has been deemed safe for limited use at the moment, specialist surveys were undertaken early in 2022 which identified the need for structural work on the reinforced concrete fabric of the building, particularly in the supporting structure under that stage area (accessed through the basement storage space), as well as repair/replacement of the roof covering, windows, parapet, guttering and downpipes.

These works are needed in order to stabilise the structure, prevent further deterioration and make it watertight.

The external steps leading up to the backstage rooms are obviously unsuitable for either mobility limited uses of the bandstand or the ease of transfer of performance equipment or props from ground level into the building and on to the stage. It is therefore proposed that these steps are replaced by a scissors lift capable of carrying flight cases.

Access from the backstage areas to the stage itself should be suitable for wheelchair users and thus the existing step down onto the stage should be removed by installing a ramp from the central stage-door down onto the stage. This can be achieved relatively simply without structural work to the stage being required.

After repairs to the reinforced concrete structure are complete and the under-stage (basement) area made watertight, this area would be used as a storage area.

It is also proposed that once structural work is completed, the current backstage rooms will have heating and ventilation installed so as to protect the fabric from damp and deterioration. One of these backstage rooms would be simply decorated and furnished and used as a dressing room for performers on the Bandstand.

Finally, in order to make the bandstand a suitable, welcoming and attractive venue for audiences and performers alike, a curved lighting gantry has been proposed for installation above the stage. It is suggested that this will be an unobtrusive addition that will not detract for the art-deco heritage of the building..... but whilst considering any future work on the bandstand, its historical significance cannot be under-estimated and the first aim should always be to preserve as much of the original structure (including the windows and guttering/downpipes) as possible.

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Improvements and enhancements that make the bandstand more useable in the 21st century should of course be considered, but these should always be undertaken in as gentle and respectful way as possible always mindful of the need to preserve the art deco heritage of the building.

The building is not currently Listed, however this may be considered as it would certainly help protect the original structure and may open doors to funding sources currently not available.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Material from various sources has been used in preparing this document.

These include, but may not be limited to:
Trowbridge Museum,
Trowbridge Town Council,
Grace's Guide to British Industrial History

Stephen J Cooper
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