

DROWLEY'S - BUILDING WOKING'S LANDMARKS

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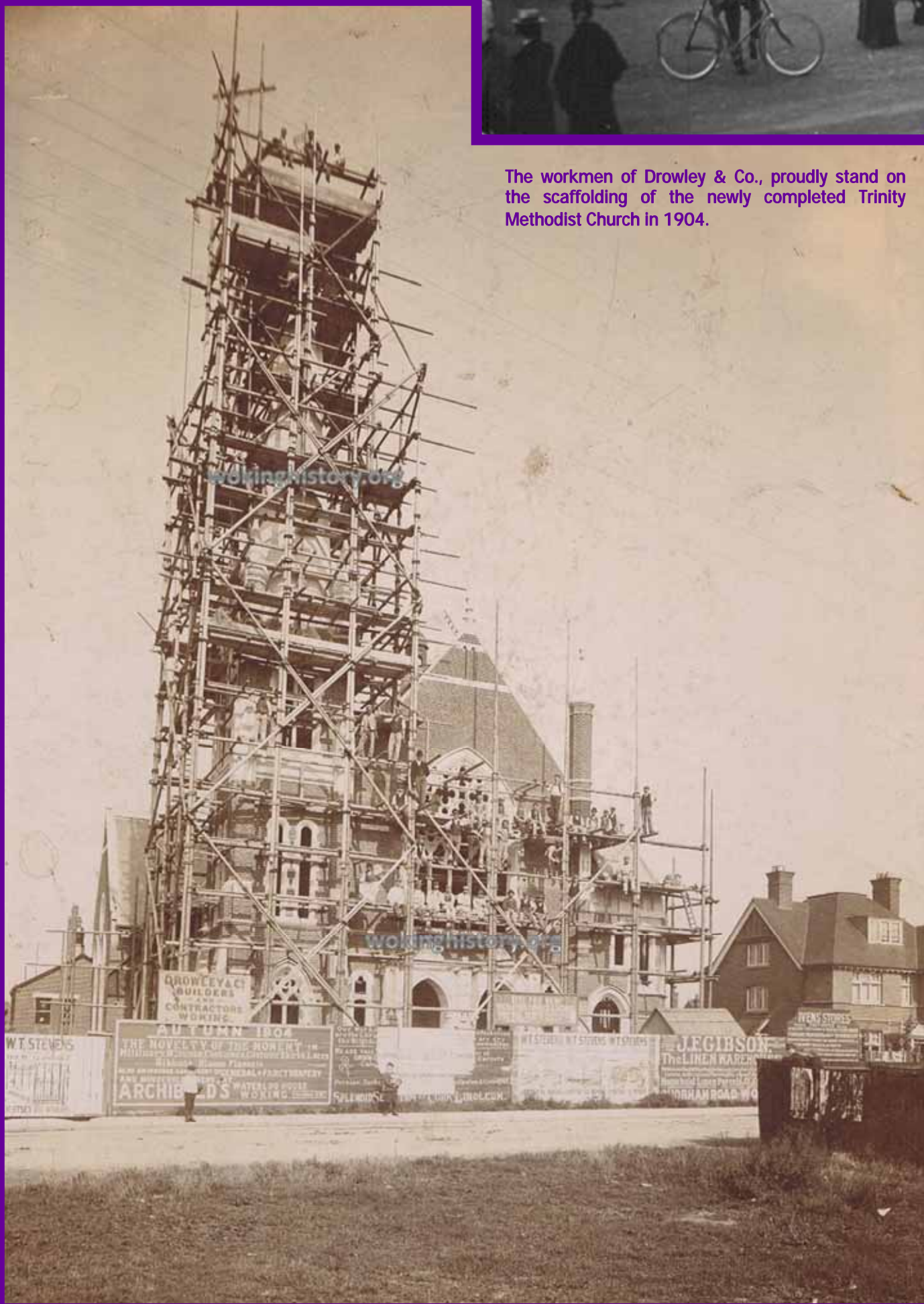
A couple of stories that have been covered in recent months in this column have been the development of the Wesleyan Methodist movement in the town and the early trials and tribulations of Woking Urban District Council. This week the two come together with the building by W Drowley and Co of both the new Trinity Methodist Church and the new Woking Council Offices in Commercial Road in 1904 and 1905.

For those of you new to the area I hope that in previous weeks when I have written about 'Commercial Road' you have not been too confused and realised that that was the pre-pedestrian name for what is now 'Commercial Way'.

The Wesleyan's first chapel gave its name to Chapel Street, with a later extension onto



The workmen of Drowley & Co., proudly stand on the scaffolding of the newly completed Trinity Methodist Church in 1904.



Commercial Road taking up the area now occupied by Provincial House. They later built a Manse and Sunday School across the road (more or less where Smith's & Robert Dyers are today), but in 1904 work started on their third site in the town – the Trinity Methodist Church (where Boots is today on the corner with Cawsey Way).

Next door, where Cawsey Way now cuts across the old line of Commercial Road, was the Constitutional Club, with the currently empty site to the left (some might remember the Post Office being there until relatively recently), being where the new Council Offices were erected in 1905.





The buildings pictured here (together with the office building on the corner with Victoria Way and the Fire Station behind) are all part of the proposed new 'Victoria Square' development. I don't know how long those plans have been in the pipeline, but when (or should I say if) work finally starts, I doubt that the builders will be able to match the time it took Drowley's to build the Trinity Methodist Church.

The foundation stones for the church were apparently laid on the 4th May 1904, with the top stone of the spire being put in place on the 16th September that year!

Sadly the Rev George King Pryor, who was the main force behind building the new church, became ill just a few days before it was due to be officially opened on the 18th January 1905, and he never got to preach in the church before he died on the 31st December 1906.

The opening ceremony didn't go without a hitch either, as when the Rev Sylvester Whitehead (President of the Conference) read his address the electricity failed and he had to carry on in the dark until it could be restored. The failure of the electricity supply, as again we have seen in recent weeks, was probably not that much of a surprise at the time!

Having constructed the Methodist church in record time, the workers of Drowley's simply moved their tools and boards a few yards up the road and started work on the new Council Offices. It appears that they took their time on the new offices as it was not until the 14th March 1906 that the first council meeting could be held in the new council chamber, but at a cost of only £4,500 (as opposed to an earlier estimate of £6,000 for similar offices on the site), the council probably thought that it was well worth the wait.

With the construction of the Council Offices the full row of 'public buildings' along this part of Commercial Road was complete, and remained a landmark until the end of the 1950's when the council offices were demolished to make way for the Post Office. The Grand Theatre and Water Company offices followed soon after to be replaced by Globe House (originally called Premier House), and then finally the 'Con Club' and Methodist Church succumbed in the early 1970's to the developers of what eventually would become Wolsey Place.

The former Methodist Church sites up the street were also redeveloped at this time with the

After finishing the church the scaffolding and hoardings were moved down the road to the site of the new Council Offices.

original chapels on the corner with Chapel Street being demolished to make way for Provincial House. Up to then they had been used by Surrey County Council for evening classes, a labour exchange and finally as the public library, whilst the Sunday School building had been taken over by the YMCA and later used as the Atalanta Ballroom. That closed in 1974 and was demolished soon after for Woking's new town centre – now known as Wolsey Place.



THE GRAVE OF JOHN ROWLANDS (I PRESUME)!



In 1904, at his home in Pirbright, the great Victorian journalist and explorer, Henry Morton Stanley, died. He was buried beneath a massive granite stone in the nearby Churchyard.

He was perhaps most famous for 'finding' Dr Livingstone (I presume) in 1871 – although whether Livingstone needed to be 'found' is a matter of debate.

Born as John Rowlands in Wales in 1841, 'Stanley' emigrated to America at the age of eighteen where he was taken under the wing of a wealthy trader called Henry Hope Stanley. He changed his name to that of his new friend (substituting 'Hope' for 'Morton' apparently because he simply liked the name) and after fighting in the American Civil War he started writing for newspapers such as the New York Times and later the Daily Telegraph (who part funded his mission to find the source of the Congo River).

In 1898 after years of exploring Africa he retired to deepest, darkest Pirbright, buying Furze Hill Park where the little stream is still known as the 'Congo Stream'.



SUTTON GREEN'S NEW PUB IN 1904



Another new building constructed in 1904 was the Fox & Hounds at Sutton Green (now known as The Olive Tree). There had been an older pub of that name on the site before, but presumably trade in the village was such that by 1904 the landlord was able to invest in its reconstruction.

The pub was apparently the location of the

villages annual May Day Fair where in the early 20th century the Lord of the Manor (or at least the tenants of Sutton Place), had provided straw hats and cheeses for the winners of the races and other events.

The blacksmith shop was nearby – the blacksmiths no doubt quenching their thirst at the hostelry on a regular basis.

In those days Sutton Green was very much 'tied' to the manor house, with many servants and farm labourers living in estate cottages in the village. The clientele of the public house (and the demographic of the villagers) is quite different today!

