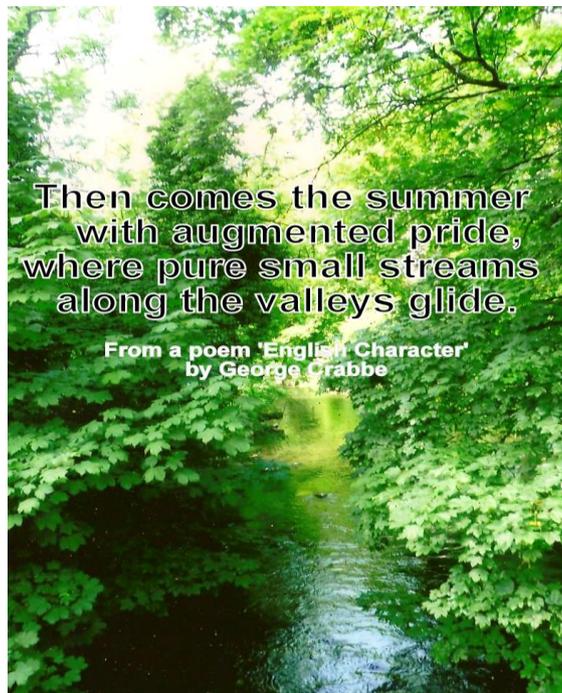


Wiltshire Family History Society, Swindon Branch, July 2022

REMINDER: Face-to-face meeting 28 July. Zoom meeting 14 July.



HOLIDAY THOUGHTS – Remember TRIP?

Trip Something older Swindonians will well remember!

The excitement and the anticipation and counting down the days and hours until time to go. Even the workers would have tally boards around the Works to count off the days from Christmas to Trip.

With holidays back on the agenda for some following the pandemic, does anyone have fond memories of Trip .. and the snapshots? Please share your memories with us.

nealy1@virginmedia.com or
swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

See more below.

JOHN'S JULY JOTTINGS

Yvonne asks if we remember trip week... (see below) well, yes, I do. Sometimes we travelled overnight or very early Saturday mornings. Depending on the time of the train, my dad always insisted we were there about 2 hours before the scheduled departures. We either travelled to the station by bus or walked from Cypress Grove. On one occasion we walked to the station arriving about 7am. Luckily we were this early because my dad discovered he had left his wallet at home. Getting a taxi to do a round trip back home to retrieve the wallet cost a good portion of our "holiday" money.

My late brother Colin (Sid to those who knew him) told me about one trip journey which I have no recollection of, as I was only a toddler. Our family shared a compartment with another family who were neighbours in Westcott Place. They had a bit of a reputation locally. When they heard the guard shouting "tickets please," panic set in. Explaining that he only had four tickets for his six children. (There may have been a limit on the number of children you could have on "the free pass") The neighbour persuaded my dad that his oldest son and my brother could hide under the seat until their tickets were checked. His four girls were in their best "Sunday" frock, impractical for hiding under seats. Their youngest son was a toddler, like me. My brother was not happy. When he emerged from under the seat he had blackened face, grubby knees and soiled clothes due to cigarette ash and other debris under that seat. He also sustained a few bruises from being kicked by swinging legs from the children on the seats above. This family looked for my dad on the return trip, but dad managed to avoid them, much to my brother's relief.

Talking about trips, two great ones this past week. The first to the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham, the second to The Black Country Living Museum in Dudley. Both visits were interesting and informative. Thanks to Margaret and Jenny who arranged these visits. Yvonne continues to keep my "grey matter" going, thanks again Yvonne.

Those of you going on trips this month have an enjoyable time. **JOHN MILLS**

WHAT'S COMING UP Thursday 14th July 2022 - Zoom Meeting

Family History in newspapers and periodicals - Expected and Unexpected Sources - Colin Chapman

Colin is an international speaker and author of 15 books relating to British local, social and family history. For over 400 years newsprint has provided information on people's lives that is often missing in official records. He will tell us about means of access and give illustrated examples during his talk. **MARGARET NEAVES**

Thursday 28 July 2022 at Central Community Centre: Doreen Jones talks about her great great Grandmother Thirza.

Doreen has given us a little preview of her talk: "My talk is entitled "My Great Great Grandmother Thirza". Thirza SIMONS née WEBB was born in Bromham in 1824 – her father was an agricultural labourer. She eventually moved to London where she married in 1853 and accompanied her husband, who was in the Bengal Artillery, to India on several occasions around the time of the Indian Mutiny in 1857 - I will read extracts of several letters that she wrote at the time. Thirza continued to live in London after the death of her husband until her own death in 1899. They are both buried in Brompton Cemetery, one of London's 'Magnificent Seven'.

SWINDON BRANCH MEETING and AGM, 26 MAY AT CENTRAL COMMUNITY CENTRE

Following our AGM* on 26 May 2022, the meeting was thrown open for anyone who had brought along a family keepsake or memory.

Sue brought a beautiful little carved wooden trinket box made by her grandfather for her grandmother when they were courting. Her grandmother's initials 'I C' intertwined were carved on the top

Martha brought along a bowl and saucer which had belonged to her great grandmother from Maine, USA. Classical scenes were printed on the set. Not made from china or porcelain but actual material unknown.

John Mills brought a 'Sweetheart Matchbox' with a lovely photo of his great Aunt Mary Rose Mills on the cover. John explained that she had lived in the same house for 80 years until slum clearance in Westcott Street. John brought photos of the inside of the house. **More on this story next time.**

Helen showed us a Dance Card of 1923 at the Grosvenor Hotel, Chester, which belonged to her grandmother who was born 1903. It was inside a beautiful case with exquisitely embroidered flowers on the inside pocket.

Another box, this time from Theresa, made of bone and mother-of-pearl which belonged to her mother. Inside was her Mum's wedding hair band when she married in 1937. Theresa also brought wedding photos showing the hair band being worn.

Paul Cole when renovating his 1883 home, came across a photo which he supposed may be of Miss Edith May Dyer on her 16th birthday in 1918. It is thought that she lived in the house. **More on this story next time – and a surprising 'twist' to the tale.**

Yvonne brought her grandmother's fur gloves, rather like gauntlets. They were a pair but each glove slightly different so not both made of same fur.

It was a lovely informal and enjoyable evening.

*The AGM minutes are available if anyone would like a copy – nealy1@virginmedia.com or swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk A quick collation of the results of our recent questionnaire shows that most are happy with our current venue and with our Zoom meetings. We had various suggestions, although unfortunately we are never going to be able to please, or cater for, everyone's meeting day suggestions. However the various suggestions have been noted and we may just have an event to tell you about next time – a direct result of the questionnaire. A further plus is that we may have managed to sort at least two offers of lifts to those without transport and who would like to join with us from time to time.

One question that came up quite often was 'parking'. We've had no problems so far and we find that people are trying to share transport. As we are the last group at the Central Community Centre on the fourth Thursday evening, we are allowed to double-park, ie down the centre of the car park. The only thing we'd ask if this does ever happen is that our welcome desk ladies are told. We all leave at about the same time, so there should be no problem. In addition, there is parking at the nearby Bristol Street car park and the offer available to be accompanied back, for security reasons, after meetings if required.

ZOOM MEETING 9 JUNE: Bridging the Gap – Tracing Forwards from 1921 by Jackie Depelle

This can be a difficult period for family history researches and Jackie provided us with lots of sources that could help fill in the gap. This is a time when personal recollections can be useful and also the 1939 Register, especially when used in conjunction with information from the two previous censuses.

Jackie has compiled a comprehensive handout listing lots of possible sources, eg parish registers, wills, graves and burial books, newspapers, Armed Forces records, trade directories, street directories, Ancestry trees, Lost Cousins, Genes Reunited – and Family History Societies. Not forgetting DNA of course.

If you would like a copy of her handout, please just ask - nealy1@virginmedia.com or swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

70 GLORIOUS YEARS

Swindon Branch were invited to join with the Central Community Centre on Friday 3 June to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.



We were in a room next to The Baker's café – very handy for teas, coffees and a great selection of cakes. (Perhaps not so good the waistline!)

There was also lots going on over at the Central Community Centre just across the road.





Meet the gang - Natasha, John, Barbara, Lis & Teddy

COULD YOU BE THE ONE WE'RE LOOKING FOR ...?



Everybody needs a little help sometime

... and we are asking for your help again please.

Is there anyone who would like to join our Swindon Branch Committee as a helper? Perhaps you have ideas or some expertise that may help us?

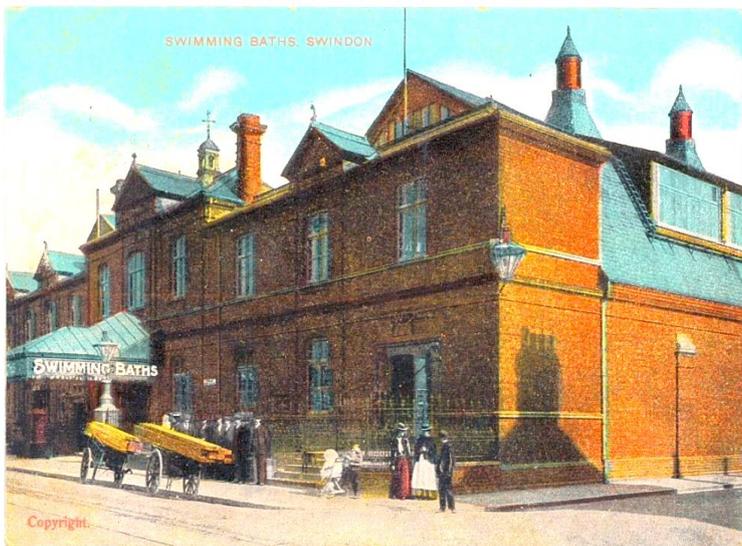
We hold periodic Committee Meetings (usually twice a year) which, at the moment, are on Zoom.

Help at 'outside' events is always welcome of course

If you feel you could help us then please email nealy1@virginmedia.com or swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk Thank you.

SWINDON'S HEALTH HYDRO

The Health Hydro, part of Swindon's GWR heritage, celebrates its 130th anniversary this year.



Thanks to Andrea for providing this lovely old photo

Your stories and memories of this lovely old building are being requested and collated by Andrea Christmas – for example, the swimming pools, the medical centre and Turkish baths etc etc.

She says that even memories that you think are everyday and insignificant are often the ones that help most when putting together a picture of the Hydro.

Please delve deep into your memories and send them to andreaichristmas@googlemail.com

RODBOURNE COMMUNITY HISTORY GROUP

Have you ever visited the Swindon Designer Outlet Village in Rodbourne and wondered what it used to be like in the days of the GWR?

You now have the chance to find out.

And it's FREE!!

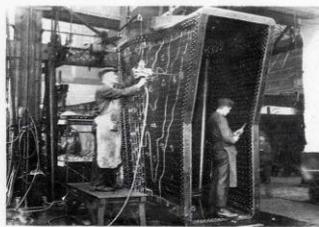
The Rodbourne Community History Group are again conducting their very popular tours there bringing the old GWR days back to life.

If you like Swindon history, then don't miss the chance to go and see for yourself – you won't be disappointed.

The Rodbourne Community History Group also hold meetings. See their website for further details ... AND

they have written three excellent books on Rodbourne history.

GWR FACTORY TRAIL



TAKE THIS FREE GUIDED TOUR CHARTING THE HISTORY OF THE DESIGNER OUTLET LISTED BUILDINGS AND ASSOCIATED GWR FACTORY BUILDINGS WITH A TOUR GUIDE FROM THE RODBOURNE COMMUNITY HISTORY GROUP

YOUR GUIDE IS A RODBOURNITE AND WITH PERSONAL MEMORIES OF WORKING IN THE GWR FACTORY HE WILL GIVE YOU A FLAVOUR OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE WORKS THROUGH TIME



2022 TOUR DATES

4th June, 2nd July, 6th August, 10th September & 10th December

There are limited spaces so please book your place
Contact the Secretary
01793 616558
secretary@rodbournehistory.org



Not quite the message we want to portray on this occasion!! Really just the opposite and your help is requested please.

Graham Carter, local author (you will know him from the Swindon Heritage Magazines and the Swindon Advertiser) is in the process of collecting material for his forthcoming book on Cycling. Here is Graham's message:

If anybody has got anything with any cycling connections in Swindon and district, I would be interested, even just old family pictures with any kind of two-wheeled bike in it - as long as they would be happy for me to publish it in a book.

They can email me at cartergandj@gmail.com.

The book is going to be a history, but also a 'celebration of cycling, cyclists and cycles in Swindon', from the invention of the bicycle until the present day.

So get your thinking caps on and perhaps become part of Swindon's cycling heritage.

THE SALISBURY MUSEUM AND WILTSHIRE MUSEUM are asking for your stories

Amy Hammett, Community Curator for Wessex Museums – covering Salisbury Museum and Wiltshire Museum - is carrying out the groundwork for a 2023 exhibition to celebrate some of the untold stories from both World Wars. Crucially she seeks leads for stories that shed light on the wartime experience of those from the less well-documented groups and communities – the LGBT, the African American servicemen and women, and other minority groups. Topics covered will include – for example – how some form of segregation still existed within the American military UK bases during WW2. Anyone with useful relevant information can email Amy: AmyHammett@salisburymuseum.org.uk

TRIP - continued

Wednesday 14 June 1848 seems to have set the scene when a special train took 500 GWR men to Oxford – free. Eventually the Trip holiday evolved although not all workers were entitled to participate in the early days. Trip did later include all GWR workers who were allocated a certain number of days off, increasing until known as Trip Fortnight ie the first two weeks in July each year. Before holiday pay came into force, families would save from Christmas onwards to take advantage of the numerous free trains to various destinations: Tenby, Penzance, St Ives, Weymouth, Barry Island, Torquay, Margate, Blackpool, Birkenhead, Weston-super-Mare and perhaps other destinations. Children would save up their pocket money and families would possibly come home broke.

Bath or wash night for all the family on the Friday, bags packed (trunks sent off in advance via the Parcel Department) sandwiches cut, and perhaps even some boiled sweets for some, and they would be off.

Families would rise early, some as early as 3.00 am, and local streets would be bustling with eager holiday makers, advancing on the steaming trains, lined up in the GWR sidings.

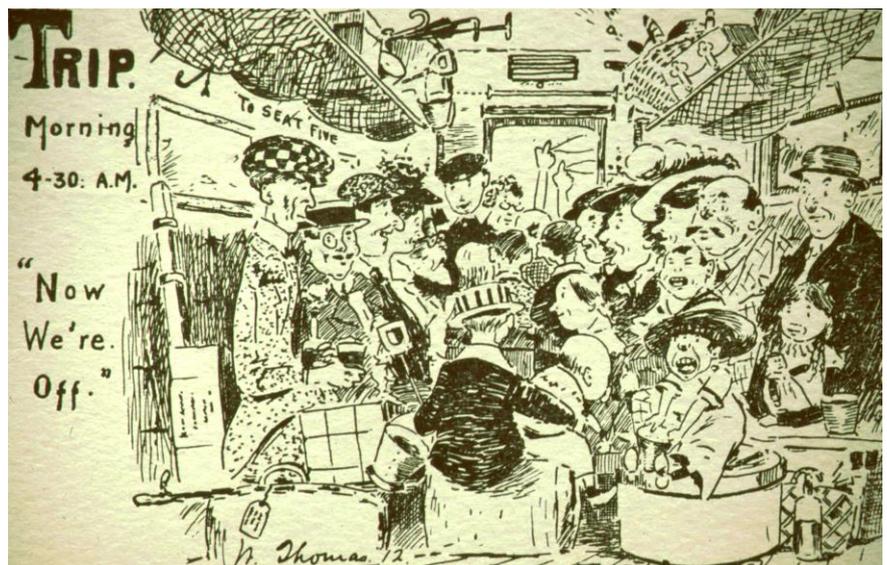


Photo courtesy of Andy Binks and the Swindon Society



Photo courtesy of Andy Binks and the Swindon Society

Getting into the coaches could be tricky, via steep ladders with no hand rails.

Best clothes for all, smart and fashionable (and often home-made) were what was expected, even though the coaches used could be rather old and dusty, and conditions were often crowded and cramped.

Early on, trippers wore all their clothes even on the beach.

Local schools finished earlier for summer holidays than in other parts of the country. Swindon centre was like a ghost town – no cuppa, or even provisions, could be found by anyone visiting the town at that time.

No smart hotels for Swindon workers, who stayed in ordinary houses. Not exactly bed and breakfast either – more like ‘room and attendance’ and, although landladies did the cleaning of rented rooms, families bought their own food for landladies to cook for them. It rather depended on cash available as to what those meals consisted of. Some families even grew veggies etc to take with them.

Friends and families often hired beach huts next to each other and there was fun and frolics on the beach with organised sports and activities.

WW2 intervened, effectively putting holidays and trip on hold for six years. Post 1946, however, things changed and trip extended from one to two weeks holiday – with pay!

PS We have photos of my paternal Gran and Gramp and family on holiday at Penzance. Their landlady was a Mrs Trenoweth. Personally, I shall never forget the thrill and wonderment at rounding the corner from Carbis Bay, under the bridge, and my first glimpse of St Ives Bay from the train – I was 11 at the time. Yvonne

SOME MORE GWR MEMORIES FROM LORNA DAWES

(Who, sadly, passed away before these last notes from her could be shared)

CAMP COACHES – A LOVELY EXPERIENCE: Quite late on I had the joy of receiving a two-week holiday in a camping coach at Tenby, Pembrokeshire. The other Western Region, one being at Dawlish. Friends at the Railway Lounge used to service that one in the winter; it was ‘younger’ than the Tenby coach.

For well under £100 I had a whole coach for a fortnight, including all linen changed each of the two weeks, and milk delivered to a footstep. There were six coaches on site, accommodating up to eight people in each. Sixty pretty orange curtains to open and close!!

One morning the view appeared of large numbers of troops on the way to Castle Martin ranges.

CELEBRATIONS: Special wooden arches kept and duly ‘booked’ to decorate girls’ desks for birthdays/weddings/babies. Hand bells also kept and used to ring girls out, all the way down the tunnel.

STAFF SUGGESTIONS: Open to all staff, with small cash rewards.

A certain Percy Bowen (Staff and Booking Offices) gave a simple but effective idea: tins containing ink pads to have ‘this way up’ printed on the bottom – thus every drop of ink came to the top of the pad.

RAILWAY HOME GUARD: With the large numbers of men in the Works on War Work, there followed groups of Home Guards amongst them.

My own father was a Cylinder Moulder but was enlisted and spent weekend time on the edge of the Plain learning how to fire a rifle, and his paper records are still with me.

At one stage, two sets in the Works had a mock battle and one side cleverly went into the underground tunnels, only to come up out of a manhole near to the New Shop and surprise the 'enemy'. Quite imaginative!

CHOIRS: I've been in two myself and believe my 'old' boss, Phyll Hodges, was in one mentioned by John Mills, Chairman of Swindon Branch WFHS.

Most colleagues were involved in all sorts of outside interests. It was quite wonderful and I did a lot of their typing needs.

SMALL NOTES: The Works had its own internal telephone system and postal service. Certain envelopes were marked out for multiple addressees, when the contents were not confidential.

'Ormigs' – the bane of typists, especially in hot weather when the purple ink on them appeared everywhere, including undies! **LORNA DAWES**

THE OTHER SWINDON OASIS **Aka 'The Thing' or 'The Monstrosity'**

Does anyone remember Swindon's other oasis? Think Parade, think cube, think monstrosity! Got it yet? You'd have to think back to the 1960s/70s – Swindon town centre water feature. Installed in early **July 1966** but gone by the later 1970s.



Photo courtesy of Andy Binks and the Swindon Society

It seems that it was officially named 'The Oasis'.

The size of the 'pool' was reduced at one time with small flowers beds around it, but seemingly that did not help the popularity of Swindon's 'entirely new art form' which stood outside British Home Stores.

It was supposedly the only concrete cube waterfall in the world with inner illumination and flowing water – day and night. The structure became a 'giant foam dispenser' on a few occasions by practical jokers, or a paddling pool for adventurous toddlers.

It was said that 'the pool has become one of The Parade's most frequently used waste paper containers' and it was suggested that 'shoppers stand and gaze at the surface of the pool in the hope of spotting some sign of water between the discarded lollipop wrappers and empty bags'.

On the subject of pools, or at least of water, a pair of very old wells were found while renovating in Old Town. They were just six feet apart – but why? One was full of water. The other, although about 25 feet deep, completely dry and no sign of ever having been wet, or even damp. Speculation had it that it may have been a dummy used for storing contraband at a time when smugglers were abroad in Old Swindon. What do you think? Let us know by emailing nealy1@virginmedia.com or swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

COOPERS CONTINUED

Please see the attachment about Coopers Scrap Metals and two obituaries – Alfred Cooper and his son John.

The Cooper family have produced a book on The Korean War, June 1950 – July 1953 which contains very many letters that John Cooper sent home during this conflict. 'A most interesting read and history, and of interest to local people.' A copy may be obtained (without pictures) for £50 by emailing martinrobins@btinternet.com

FALSE INFORMATION – beware!

Glyn Harris recently highlighted a situation all, or at least many, of us will have come across in our own researches – one way or another. BEWARE FALSE INFORMATION. This is what Glyn said:

“Many people copy other trees without properly checking sources.

An example of what can happen is when my great-grandmother, Elizabeth Maggs got married on 6 June 1870. She gave her age as 19 and her father's name as Simon Maggs. Her husband gave his age as 22yrs.

In fact her birth certificate records her birth date as 27 July 1853 making her 16 years and eleven months old. Her father is not recorded but later censuses reveal Simon as her grandfather. And research of her husband revealed his correct age to be 24yrs.



John & Elizabeth (nee Maggs) Jones

I have witnessed many trees that show Simon to be the father, which is incorrect.”

Glyn obviously encountered a few red herrings when researching his family ... Elizabeth's birth certificate gave her mother's name as Ann Maggs but, in fact, she was Mary Ann Maggs. The certificate also shows that Elizabeth was born at High Littleton whereas censuses show Midsomer Norton which was actually very close. One constant is that Simon Maggs was a coal miner.

At the time of the 1871 census John, 23, and Elizabeth 19 (nee Maggs) Jones were living at Reeves Cottages, Midsomer Norton, and living with them (listed as lodgers) were John Hyman 36, and Mary Hyman 44 (ie born c. 1827). Mary was, in fact, Elizabeth's mother. Note again the discrepancy in ages – deliberate deception or true facts unknown?

NOTE: I once found an Ancestry tree with a photo of my grandmother with her half-brother. They were shown as being father and daughter! Yvonne

THAT AGE OLD QUESTION

Continuing on the same theme, we've all discovered age discrepancies, whether from simply not knowing the correct information or twisting the truth to save face; being able to marry without consent; or various other reasons known only to those concerned at the time.

Glyn wrote: "My wife's grandmother gave her age at marriage 5yrs younger than she actually was – to bring her more in line with her husband. She carried this deceit throughout her life and I believe her headstone also includes it."

Note: at a funeral recently I was asked to try to discover information about a grandmother. The 1939 Register provided a birthdate on which I tried to base my researches. Having gone all over the country trying to eliminate births, I could find nothing. Eventually I discovered a baptism in a local village, which made sense but which did not correspond with the 1939 birthdate. No proof as yet, but I think the child was illegitimate which does make sense, although still no relevant birth found for her.



We are obsessed by numbers today and our busy lives revolve around our calendar or diary. Back 'in the day' it would have been the seasons. Actual birthdates would probably not have been accurately remembered/known so we need to take ages listed with the proverbial 'pinch of salt'.

There is also the problem of spellings and the headaches that can cause family historians. However

No matter how long you have travelled in the wrong direction, you can always turn around.

MARKET STREET, SWINDON

In our last Newsletter, Marcia Dancer shared her memories about various stores in Swindon. She rang me with further memories of the Old Market Hall stalls, namely:

Tommy King*	Home-make sweets
Harry Conn (?)	Nylons
Mr Townsend	Haberdashery
Angelinetta*	Butcher
Castles	Bakery
Mr & Mrs Penbury (?)	Books – also believed to have had a green grocers shop opposite the market in Commerical Road.

- More about these two stalls in our August Newsletter.

That led me to the 1939 Register in Market Street which you may be interested in:

1	Jesse Morton	23 May 1903	Excavator, GWR
2	Leslie C Romans	3 June 1904	Railway Stores Issuer. GWR
4	Uninhabited		
6	Uninhabited		
7	Henry J Townsend*	19 August 1893	Shopkeeper, Wool, Hosiery etc. Egg Merchant & Tea Vendor
8	Charles E Scaife	18 September 1905	Devon Savouries Gen. Man, Cooked Foods
9	Bertie Angelinetta	31 May 1894	Master Butcher/Shopkeeper
10	Edward T Humphries	24 February 1880	Basket Maker
11	Charles Ford	9 September 1862	Shop Keeper, General Stores
12	Mark F Fry	4 September 1866	Master Tailor

*We've mentioned Henry J Townsend in a previous Newsletter.

Mr Iles, the Jeweller, was also in Market Street of course – and still is there.

Castles cake shops were at one time well-known in Swindon – does anyone know anything about the history of these shops?

The dwelling before No. 1 Market Street was Wharf House, Cromwell Street.

As always, we'd love to hear your comments on the above. Please email nealy1@virginmedia.com or swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk Many thanks. Yvonne

Faringdon Road: Maylotts photographers, Hope & Co. Outfitters, specialising in swimwear, Great Western Clothiers, Greenaways (?) books and stationery, Leonard & Longmans for baby and children's clothes, Nelson's pram shop and Opposite was the Wesleyan Chapel.

Any memories or photos please?

THE NEW NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE – LEAFLET

Distributed 1948

Your new National Health Service begins on 5th July. What is it? How do you get it?

It will provide you with all medical, dental, and nursing care. Everyone – rich or poor, man, woman or child – can use it or any part of it. There are no charges, except for a few special items. There are no insurance qualifications. But it is not a 'charity'. You are all paying for it, mainly as taxpayers, and it will relieve your money worries in time of illness.

BUT ... BACK IN 1923

SIGHT TESTING: consult HYSLOP'S qualified ophthalmic opticians 83 Regent Street, Swindon. Registered by the Joint Council of qualified opticians for SIGHT TESTING, the dispensing HOSPITAL and OCCULIST'S PRESCRIPTIONS and the supply of gasses to insured persons under the National Health Insurance Acts.

Spectacles and eye glasses in all styles at moderate charges.

Repairs and Lens replacement carried out in our own workshops at shortest notice.

Note. – opticians to GWR Medical Fund Society and REPTA (by appointment)

Advice on all defects given without charge.

Hours: 9 - 7. Wed 9 – 1. Fri and Sat 9 – 8

Director: CS MACPHERSON

WHERE ARE THEY NOW....?

....referring to the old Baptist Tabernacle pillars.

Such an imposing building and iconic landmark situated at the top of Regent Street. Built in 1886, the final service was held 45 years ago on **Sunday 3 July 1977** at 6.30 pm, and demolished 1978 despite many objectors including some VIPs. It was reported that the striking façade was carefully dismantled for future reconstruction elsewhere – it seems that a local man had planned to use it as the frontage of a house he was building in Malmesbury. Planning permission was rejected. It was later reported that the frontage lay in pieces under tarpaulins at the Wroughton airfield site. In 2006 Swindon Borough Council purchased them and had hoped to incorporate the Bath stone portico into a new museum or art gallery.

For now, this little piece of Swindon's history is stored at the Waterside Park recycling centre in Swindon and hundreds shedding their unwanted loads there, will unwittingly have driven over the top of them.

This impressive Swindon building would have been a well-known, and much-loved, landmark for many of our ancestors, so does anyone have any memories or stories to share - nealy1@virginmedia.com or swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

A PURTON HANGING AND A FAMILY DAY-OUT

The date was Friday 30 July 1819 – the event advertised to take place at 3 pm at Moor stones near Purton Stoke and close to the spot of the atrocity.

This was the last execution ever staged in the vicinity of Swindon and it was estimated that between 10 -15,000 attended from all over Wiltshire. It is interesting to note that the entire population of Swindon at the time was less than 2,000.



Watkins Corner is the bend in the road in the middle of this map
Courtesy of Judy Rouse

The crowds were held back by 200 deputies (special constables) who had been sworn in, in case of trouble.

Traders and musicians made the most of the event by hawking their wares. It was only the third hanging in Wiltshire that year and became almost a family-day-out. The anniversary of the execution was, for many years, marked by the Hang Day Fayre.

On 7 May 1819 at about 9.15 pm, with bulging pockets from the day's takings at Wootton Bassett, Stephen Rodway, a respectable coal and salt merchant, and owner of a Cricklade Wharf, was on his journey home to Cricklade by horse and cart, when he was shot in the chest and robbed of £40 and a silver watch. The event took place on the turnpike road just outside Purton Stoke – now known as Watkins Corner. Phoebe Grimes eventually discovered his body, raised the alarm and, on a bar table in The Bell at Purton, an autopsy was performed. William Simpkins found a loose horse the following morning which was identified as belonging to Stephen Rodway.

John Vickery, a Bow Street runner (one of London's professional investigators) suspected 'local ruffian and part-time bare-knuckle boxer Robert Watkins (aka Robert Turner Watkins) who had been drinking and spending money, he said, from his earnings on the canals of Chichester, possibly at Portsmouth. The investigation seems to have been quite thorough and there were other suspects and witnesses eg Robert's brother Edward, Thomas Ockwell, Mr Blanchett and James Smith. There was also conflicting information. The jury took just one minute to convict 25 year old Robert Watkins at the Wiltshire Assizes in Jul 1819. He told the judge 'I am no more guilty of the murder than you are, my lord'.

It was reported that, on the execution day, Robert Watkins ate a hearty breakfast at The Goddard Arms Hotel in Swindon, having been taken from Fisherton prison, Salisbury, an overnight stay in Marlborough and on to Swindon. Ironically, his executioner Jack Ketch (an alias) was also breakfasting there. A procession of horse-drawn vehicles wended its noisy way to the place of execution at Purton Stoke. Robert Watkins was taken initially in a standard mourning coach and later placed onto a 'hurdle in a cart, together with his coffin'. It was further reported that one of Robert Watkins' children shouted out to him 'Mammy is dead', having died of grief, and he replied 'Ah, and so will your daddy be shortly'.

He continued to protest his innocence as he climbed onto the gallows, calmly and quietly joined onlookers in earnest prayer and 'read aloud to the multitude the 108th Psalm' and, as Ketch adjusted the rope he said 'God bless you all'.

A 'fearful' thunder storm then erupted and folks say that it upset the hangman's horse to the extent that 'Mr Ketch', on his way home, also met his death – by means of a broken neck. Was it a sign of Robert Watkins' innocence after all? The Swindon Advertiser reported that 'sometime later his father allegedly confessed to the crime.'

There is a further report about this incidence – see our newsletter next time.

A FOOTIE NOTE: Saturday 9th July: 11am to 12 noon at Central Library: Steve Beale launches his book - the definitive history of primary schools football in Swindon. Steve's exhibition will remain in place until 23 August.

At the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre, Chippenham on 15 July 11am – 12 noon, will be a talk 'Wiltshire's Woodland Biography: a new Ancient Woodland Inventory'. Book a place with the History Centre.

DO YOU RECOGNISE THESE TWO LADIES?

Two very smart ladies – but WHO ARE THEY?

Mother and daughter perhaps?

Thought to have been taken at Wroughton and made into a post card. The message simply reads 'For Frank'.

If you have any ideas, please contact nealy1@virginmedia.com or swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk



LATE NEWS



From the left: Paul, Margaret, Stan, Chrissie, John, Lis, Yvonne, Kath, John, Dave and Stella

On Thursday 23 June, a few of us from Swindon Branch had the privilege of visiting 'behind the scenes' at the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre at Chippenham. What an experience – thanks to our guide Naomi.

Just for starters I can tell you that we saw handwritten letters from Florence Nightingale and IKB, a book manuscript of Alfred Williams (the Hammerman), restoration projects including the original charter of Charles I to the Goddards to hold markets in Swindon.

With very little persuasion (!) John Willetts has agreed to do a little write-up on our visit which will be in our August issue Newsletter.

I think we would all have liked to add a week on to our one-hour visit and to be let loose on all the information available there!

AND FINALLY – ANOTHER TRAIN-RELATED THOUGHT



At birth we boarded the train and met our parents, and we believe they will always travel by our side.

As time goes by, other people will board the train; and they will be significant ie our siblings, friends, children, and even the love of your life.

However, at some station our parents will step down from the train, leaving us on this journey alone. Others will step down over time and leave a permanent vacuum.

Some, however, will go so unnoticed that we don't realize they vacated their seats. This train ride will be full of joy, sorrow, fantasy, expectations, hellos, goodbyes, and farewells. Success consists of having a good relationship with all passengers requiring that we give the best of ourselves.

The mystery to everyone is: We do not know at which station we ourselves will step down. So, we must live in the best way, love, forgive, and offer the best of who we are. It is important to do this because when the time comes for us to step down and leave our seat empty we should leave behind beautiful memories for those who will continue to travel on the train of life. I wish you all a joyful journey. Author unknown.



**Every day
may not be good**

**But there's something good
in every day**

(You are receiving this email from Yvonne Neal, Secretary of the Swindon Branch of Wiltshire Family History Society, as a member, or interested party, living in or near Swindon. Your email details are held securely and not divulged to any other persons or organisations. Please let me know if you want to be removed from the list by emailing nealy1@virginmedia.com)

