

Wiltshire Family History Society, Swindon Branch, July 2023

MEETINGS REMINDER – see below for further details

Thursday 13 July 2023 via Zoom: Drainpipe trousers to rock and roll

Thursday 27 July 2023 at The Central Community Centre, Emlyn Square – Researching your Railway Ancestry.

**Oh the summer time has come
And the trees are sweetly blooming
And the wild mountain thyme
Grows around the blooming heather**

Will you go lassie go?

**I will build my love a bower
Near yon pure crystal fountain
And on it I will pile
All the flowers of the mountain.**



JOHN for JULY

Firstly, an apology. Last month I said I would write about Westcott Street. Well due to being on holiday and other events, this month has just flown by, and I haven't had the time to collate the material I needed. So this article is deferred.

The trip to Sevington Victorian School was excellent. Again I had to apologise, this time to "mam" for being late. Got totally lost, only realising a lot later, that if I hadn't panicked and gone a further half a mile down the road I would "have reached my destination", rather than do a U-turn. Still never been to Castle Combe racetrack before!

Rodbourne Cheney School, where I attended, was a Victorian school, but bit more "modern" than Sevington. I remember being an "ink monitor" at school where you had to fill the inkwells with bottled ink prepared by our teacher, I always managed to get ink all over my fingers.

I was reminded of this having sat in the cramped desk, including inkwell with ink, at Sevington looking at my hands, and just before leaving, discovering my fingertips covered in ink and we didn't even use the pens for our writing exercise.



Thanks to Margaret for organising the trip and the “mams” at Sevington for looking after us. Must do my homework now before “our Mam”, Yvonne, tells me off and makes me write a hundred lines. “I must do better.” **JOHN MILLS**

NOTE: Report and photos will be in next month’s Newsletter.

WHAT’S COMING UP

Thursday 13 July 2023 via Zoom: Drainpipe trousers to rock and roll - Graham Sutherland

Graham is a retired police inspector and recently retired town crier. He is currently a blue badge tourist guide, author of fiction and non-fiction and speaker. His talk this evening will tell us about life in Britain during the 1950s. Will it bring back some memories for a lot of us?

Thursday 27 July at the Central Community Centre 7.30 pm – Researching your Railway Ancestry – Judy Rouse

Judy has visited the Swindon branch on many occasions to talk about her in depth knowledge on railway related topics. In her talk in July, Judy will tell us of the many different railway companies which existed pre 1923 and the differing survival rate of their records. She will explain how researchers may need to go down different routes from Ancestry to add information and put the flesh on the bones of their research. There will also be some GWR interest in the talk with examples of Swindon Works records from many different departments which Judy has explored in her own research.

MARGARET NEAVES

Glenys Bettley is our host for Zoom meetings. She will be inviting you to join with us if she already has your details. For others who would like to join in, please email Glenys on glenys.bettley@ntlworld.com

17 JULY 2023 2.00 – 4.00 pm
Local Studies
2nd floor Swindon Central Library

DROP-IN FAMILY HISTORY SESSION

**For beginners, those who would like to know more,
and for those with a ‘brick wall’
Pop along to see if our team can help you.**
PLEASE PASS THIS ON TO ANYONE WHO MAY BE INTERESTED

... AND A REMINDER FROM JENNY POPE

On 9 September we have our proposed trip to London Metropolitan Archives, which is just off the Farringdon Road, so with close access to the City of London, the London Charterhouse and the Postal Museum, there are a number of alternative places to go if you choose.

The coach will pick up from Swindon at 8.00am and will cost £35 per person, based on 27 participants. If you are interested in coming please let me know ASAP at coaches@wiltshirefhs.co.uk, or ring me on 01793 852662.

REPORTS

'Sons of the Soil, researching agricultural labourers' – Janet Few Zoom meeting 8 June 2023

The term 'Agricultural Labourer' encompasses many headings, for example, Farm Labourer, Farm Servant (often live-in), Husbandman and also Yeoman and Farmer.

Some had specific roles for example, wagoner, carter, shepherd, horseman, cowman, ploughman, drover, grazier, gamekeeper, market gardener, dairyman and bailiff.

Then there would have been the supportive trades for example thatcher, wheelwright, blacksmith and ploughwright.

Woman would be employed as milkmaids, who looked after the cows, and dairymaids, who made the butter and cheese.

Timeline of British Agriculture 1750 –1850, the time of the agricultural revolution

Enclosure Acts - from late 1700s

1815-36	Agricultural depression and then the Napoleonic wars
1830	Swing Riots
1836	Tithe Communication Act
1846	Repeal of the Corn Laws
1848	Failure of Irish potato crop – also in England and Wales
1851	The census included farm acreage and number of employees
1867	Agricultural Gangs Act covering such subjects as employment of very young children
1872	National Agricultural Labourer's Union
1873	Owners of land had to be listed
1889	Board of Agriculture created
1908	National Farmers' Union established
1930s	Marketing boards for milk, potatoes, pigs and hops
1936	Tithe Redemption Act - abolished tithes
1939 – 1945	Dig for Victory and Land Army

Farming, of course, was governed by seasons and tasks for those seasons, ie sowing, harvesting etc. plus additional tasks like weaving.

Additional sources from which to discover information. They can be found, so dig around for what could be very useful information. Janet gave some examples:

The General View of Agriculture books by county, from 1790s with some new editions in the 1810s. Great information may be available. Varies in different counties.

Tithe maps and schedules.

Land Tax Returns 1780 – 1832. Annual returns.

Valuation Office Records drawn up in 1910 – at the National Archives.

National Farm Survey taken in 1941

Directories eg street directories. Be sure to read the descriptions.

Newspapers – farm sales, adverts, shows & fairs, crimes, disasters, weather and accidents

School log books – non-attendance because eg. weather, harvest, markets

Diaries/letters – perhaps someone who lived in the parish

Estate Records - may be difficult to access but can contain names

Lists of gamekeepers' licences

It is also interesting to learn about tools, machines and techniques used by agricultural labourers. How did they impact on our ancestors?

Museums of Rural Life. See websites.

Occupational Hazards –agricultural labouring could be quite dangerous. Things that might have impacted on their lives:

Unpredictability - crop failure. Impact on mental health.

Weather – very significant

Health hazards – accidents with machinery, transport, animals (horses, bulls etc), chemicals eg sheep dip.

Does anyone have an interesting story/memory to share with us? Please contact Yvonne at swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

FROM LAST TIME – Ford Popular

This is what one of our members recalls: “Yes I did have one but not new. It was second-hand and purchased from Kings of Oxford in 1960. It had transverse road springs and, boy, did it rock-and-roll when cornering, especially if one was driving the car without passengers. How to overcome this problem? ... put a bag of sand in each passenger position. Much better then when cornering.” **MEMBER 07186**



A 1961 model of the Ford Popular.

The following notes were written way before the Ford Popular came onto the scene – and perhaps written by a non-driver?

On Monday 30 March 1914, the Evening Swindon Advertiser commented on ‘The Motor Car’

Most of us who dwell in towns will welcome with one accord the introduction of the Motor Traffic Bill into Parliament. Primarily it is designed to extend the powers of the Local Government Board to deal with some of the rougher corners of motoring. Already the country at large has had reason to be grateful to the Board for the departmental regulations which have prohibited the use of the shrieking ‘cut out’ in populous areas, and we are no longer liable to be roused from our well-earned repose by a series of explosions which the imagination pictures as the preliminary to a volcanic eruption.

But there still remains to be dealt with the illimitable variety of sounds and cacophonies which are used as indications to advise the wayfarer of the approach of the motor. There are still the grunts, coughs and groans, gurgles, wheezes and whistles, and the tinkling of bells, each marking the coming of a car, and each more penetrating than the other. There is no exaggeration in the suggestion that these warning discordances do more to unnerve and disconcert the pedestrians who venture to use the roads, thus to cause more catastrophes, than any mere excess of speed of careless driving. If legislation can be introduced to standardise the warning notes of all the mechanically-propelled vehicles, and fix the precise note to be used, the public generally would have time and opportunity to gather itself together and settle its nerves.

At the same time, the equipment of the motorist 'trapper' will have to be enlarged, and, in addition to note-book, tape and stop-watch, there will have to be a free issue of a regulation turning fork.



Does anyone know what the 'cut out' was? Was the 'trapper' some kind of speed control? Any thoughts on this one – please email swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

SOME HIGHWORTH FOLK

There is a small booklet entitled 'Some Highworth Folk' 1869 – 1879. At our May Zoom meeting, Ian Waller suggested we research outside normal channels and this booklet no doubt comes into that category. It gives a wealth of information on SOME of those living in Highworth during those ten years (pity it's so short a period) and gives a snippet of how life was then, including what almost amounts to tittle-tattle.

Sometimes as well as the name, addresses are given, number of children (and info about them eg if illegitimate, school and whether confirmed, dishonest), who they worked for, disabilities – even quarrels! Here are a few of the most interesting/strange entries:

A 78 year old man described as 'poor now', had property formerly, character, very ill, has wife years younger etc ...

A couple: were church people, came to Highworth not long ago and were persuaded to go to Wesleyans June 1879. Children go to British School.

A lady: housekeeper for three brothers living together, labourers, church.

A man: died suddenly in the field at work 1873.

A widow: applies for linen to go and 'keep house' for a at Longcott who is a widower and says she hopes to marry him.

A man: Pest house, moves about and to Union. Four children, dirty, story telling etc etc etc.

A man: several illegitimate children, bricklayer & mason, brazen, bad reputation.

A lady: widow of soldier. Washerwoman for Son Stephen apprenticed to, SS teacher, has a 9s a week pension.

A lady: lives with dying, has led a bad life, seemed repentant went to Union and died there 1877.

A man: wife died in childbirth. Now lives with father. Very rheumatic. Has been to Bath for waters, churchman. Married again. Works at Wife's father lives with them.

A lady: one son at work, drinks, swears and fights occasionally.

A man: lost an arm in quarry explosion, one daughter at home, abandoned. Father supposed to connive.

A man: labourer, wife Welsh, children odd lot, church. Had heart disease, died. Widow in Lost a son in 1879 and 1880.

A lady: in service Rodbourne had a child, now in service Swindon, seems sorry, returned not good character, stole coats from Convicted.

A man: drill sergeant. For all the good work still incorrigible, disgusting.

A man: labourer, 8 children at home, go to National School occasionally and dirty, dirtiest lot in parish, children all beg, lie and steal. Daughter unchaste, wife coming occasionally to ch. since joining Bible Class.

A lady: on parish, sells sweets etc and keeps open on Sundays.

A man: labourer, church, ringer, drinks. Died from an accident after amputation of right arm 1873 run over by butcher's wagon which he was driving.

A man: widower with one child, pensioners, served 2 /12 years, has a stiff right arm but can work when not rheumatic. Steadier than he was.

A lady: widow, one daughter at home, laundress. Daughter a bad character, regular at church, daughter died penitent 1878, mother moved to Swindon.

A man: very ill, died after a week's illness – inf. bowels after cold.

A lady: husband left her 23 years ago and went to California and from there to Melbourne, Victoria, she has not heard from him for more than 10 years.

A man: no children, 7 premature, both members of Wesleyans, formerly Church people. She dying, not quite collected, no religious belief except there is salvation, a specimen of the effects of schismatic separation such as leaves a very sad impression too late physically for change.

The book is a great record for family historians even if only through those ten years.

DISAPPEARED?

Has anyone heard of Red Cross Street in Swindon? Another street that has disappeared over the years?

Well not exactly, the name seems to have been changed in 1883 to what we now call Radnor Street – named after the 5th Earl of Radnor, William Pleydell-Bouverie, a magistrate with local masonic connections.

Built in 1879 it is quite clearly marked as Red Cross Street on the 1883 Orlando Baker map and is listed on the 1881 census as such.

Mike and Pam Stubbs have the following thoughts: "Which Board (New or Old Swindon) made the decision to rename the Street probably we will never know. Because it might be something as simple as, being next to Radnor Street Cemetery Gates and Chapel, it would be a bit disconcerting perhaps if the Cemetery was called Red Cross Street Cemetery! It's a pity that another Street local to New Swindon could not be named Red Cross Street because of the work done by the Nurses during the Crimean War and Boer War and then the First World War."

At the time of the 1881 census Nos. 1 – 30 Red Cross Street was listed between 44 Clifton Street and Fair View House. Then came 1-4 Cambria Bridge Road and then William Street.

Occupations of the heads of household included: Machinist, Carpenter, Blacksmith, Forgerman, Mason, House Painter, Iron Worker and Shoe Maker. Interestingly there were very few heads of household who had been born in Swindon. Just the following:

At No. 27 was John C Slocombe aged 23 Factory Labourer. Could he have been related to the John Slocombe aged 52, Machinist, born Bristol living at No. 30?

At No. 23 (?) was Aaron Eatwell aged 24 General Labourer

At No. 2 (?) was William Walker 20 General Labourer

Others who were fairly local were:

Martha Telling 85 born Purton

Elizabeth Tuck 31 Annuitant born Lydiard Tregoze

James Rivers 30 Factory Labourer born Ogbourne

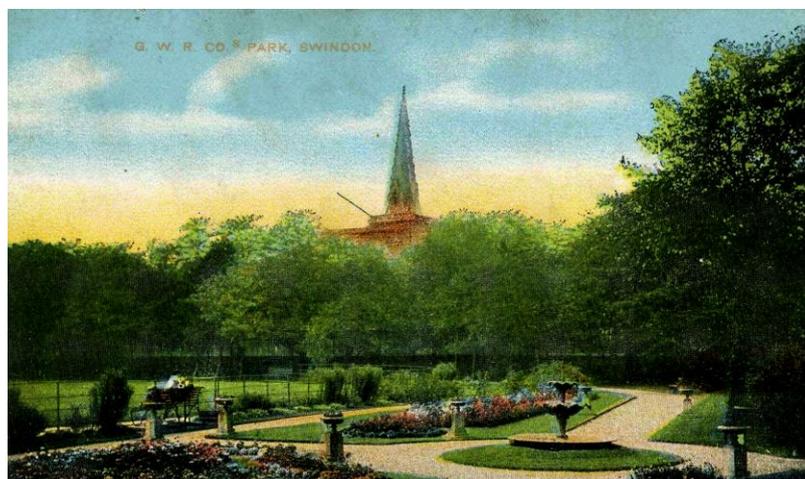
James Usher 47 Factory Labourer born Corsham

Charles Kilminster 37 Mason born Highworth

Does anyone have a connection to Red Cross Street/Radnor Street or perhaps other long-gone Swindon streets? Please email swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk we'd love to hear from you.

GWR PARK – with a great deal of input from Roy Cartwright. Thanks also to Roy for the photos.

It was known as the Cricket Field in the early days and during the 1890s Dr W G Grace played there several times and on one occasion was bowled out for a 'double duck' by a local man. (Does anyone have more information?)



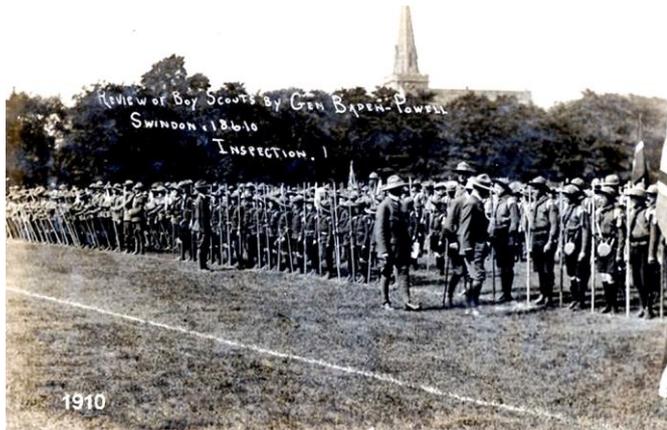
According to the local Advertiser, GWR's Chief Engineer, Joseph Armstrong, oversaw the development of 'The People's Park' from 'little more than a wilderness alongside a most sadly abused and neglected cricket pitch into a pleasure garden – a thing of beauty for the relaxation of railway workers and their families.'

It was controlled by the Mechanics' Institute Park Improvement Committee.

By the 1870s a surrounding brick wall, topped with ornamental railings, various entrance gates and a keeper's lodge had been built and formal gardens laid out. The popular Victorian town park also boasted glasshouses, fountains and a bandstand.

Around the same time a Drill Hall was constructed in the north-west corner for the 190 men of the 11th (Wiltshire) New Swindon Rifle Corps. During WW2 the park was used for drill practice.

Records show that the park was being frequently used for cricket, athletics, cycling and rugby, regularly providing a venue for the New Swindon and GWR cricket teams and the New Swindon Wanderers rugby team. It was also used for other activities such as Scout meetings and events and, in 1910, their activities included bridge building, mattress making and a simulated attack on a scouts' camp.



Ladies playing football in the Park in 1938

Our early Swindon railway ancestors would have known all about the Children's Fete, which Joseph Armstrong helped to instigate and which has been held since 1868. In August 1904, 38,000 people attended and 3.5 tons of cake was required that year, sliced by a specially designed slicing machine. It was free for children under 14 and they had one free ride on the roundabouts and received a cup of tea and slab of fruit cake.

In 1925 the Park passed into the control of Swindon Corporation.

After WW2 some features were lost or removed including the bandstand, the pavilion and ornamental drinking fountain. The lodge and glasshouses were removed later as they are shown to survive on an Ordnance Survey map of 1967-71.

Early History

The area now occupied by the Park and Railway Village was once open farmland. Two pasture fields provided the land for the Park and were known as 'Rodbourne Lane Ground' and 'Part of Great Ground', both owned by Colonel Villet.

The Great Western Railway (GWR) opened a factory at Swindon to build and maintain trains in 1843. At the same time a 'Railway Village' of 300 cottages was built to accommodate the influx of new workers. In 1844 GWR purchased just over seven acres more land to provide space for houses, a church, a vicarage, a church hall and a cricket ground. It had been owned by Colonel T Vilett and was known by many as The Plantation, later becoming known as the GWR Park or Faringdon Road Park.

The new Millenium and beginnings of a revival (2000 – present day)

In 2003, after a gap of more than 60 years, the Mechanics' Institution Trust revived the tradition of the Children's Fête in the park.

There have since been a number of features added to the park including tree and bulb planting, a Memorial to the end of the First World War and a monument to International Mother Language Day.

In 2018 the Railway Village in Swindon was named as Britain's favourite Conservation Area and is now within a Heritage Action Zone.

The Park is presently undergoing vast redevelopment.

NOTE: My parents first met at the GWR Fete. Yvonne

OLD OCCUPATIONS – LACE MAKERS

Wikipedia describes lace as ‘a delicate fabric made of yarn or thread in an open web-like pattern, made by machine or by hand’.

There are two general types – needle lace and bobbin lace, but also knitted, crocheted, tatting and cutwork.

It seems that there is some question as to its origins, but both bobbin and needle lace were being made in Italy early in the 1400s. Manufactured lace may be made of synthetic fibre, sometimes cotton, linen or silk thread. Originally linen, silk, gold or silver threads were used.

Bobbin lace is, as the name suggests, made with bobbins and a pillow. Bobbins turned from wood, bone or plastic, hold threads which are woven together and held in place on the pillow with pins. The pillow would contain straw or perhaps sawdust.

Needle lace, again as the name suggests, is made using needle and thread.

The first lace makers possibly came here from the continent around 1565 to the Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire areas. In good times the lace making trade received higher wages than an agricultural labourer, and women often worked ‘at the pillows’ for 10-12 hours daily. Young children were sometimes taught in order to earn a little money for their parents. However by the early 1900s many local women had given up the trade because there was no regular market.

Susan Hatton’s story shows a rather different angle to the above. Susan grew up in Maids Moreton, Buckinghamshire. She says that generations of her family lived there and she was related to most. The men were agricultural labourers and the women lace makers. No door was ever closed. It was such a secure upbringing.

Susan is a published poet and we featured her poem ‘Hobson’s Choice’ in our last Newsletter. Included in her book of poems ‘I Remember’ is one about ‘My Lace making Grandmothers’ which begins:

In the early part of last century
Life was extremely hard.
My Grandmother made Bucks Point Lace
Which was sold for a farthing a yard!

Susan has kindly sent her story for us to use in our Newsletter:

Bucks Point Pillow Lace

I grew up in a small, rural village near Buckingham where, for years, most men had worked on the land as agricultural labourers and their wives, of necessity, made lace as the wages were poor. Lacemaking was a skill handed down from one generation to the next although some bigger villages had a lace school where the art was taught from an early age.



Lacemaking at Maids Moreton. The photo was taken at Terrace Yard. The lady at the back in the hat is Miss Burrows who was known as 'Old Dotty Burrows'!

We know there was a thriving one at Olney and a lace centre where lace was bought and sold but it was also sent to London for sale. William Cowper, the lacemakers' poet, petitioned parliament on the lacemakers behalf and immortalised them in his poetry.

The equipment needed was a pillow, a stand called The Maid, a good supply of bobbins, both bone and made of wood, a long pattern, the pricking as it was called, a good supply of pins and thread and a bobbin winder. The bone bobbins were often carved with names or a tribute such as 'from Father'. The thread was sold to the lacemakers by the lace agent and then bought back as the finished product. The story handed down to me was that the lacemakers were paid a pittance and it was the lace agent who made the money.

In the summer months women would gather together for company but when the nights drew in candles were expensive and rushes would be gathered and fitted into rush nips. It's not surprising that many lacemakers suffered with eye problems.

The lace they made was exquisite and was worn by the nobility as well as by family members. Today Bucks Point is still prized for its beauty and intricacy as well as the story hidden in its stitches.

I am lucky enough to have my Grandmother's pillow, bobbins, box and some lace on the pillow. A very positive link with generations of female ancestors. **SUSAN HATTON**

A FEW JULY DATES

17 July 1951 Cricklade building firm H & HE Giles revealed that for several weeks it had been visited by a hen. The creature had taken a liking to fluttering in from a yard next door in High Street and laying eggs in a box of nails. Although the hen seemed comfortable with the arrangement the nails were reportedly playing havoc with its tail feathers.

28 July 1851 Three intrepid young oarsmen were spotted rowing a rubber dinghy along the disused canal at the side of Kingshill Road. In spite of the canal not having been used in earnest for decades, we noted that the boys managed to achieve a fairly respectable speed as they propelled their craft through a thick coating of slime. One of them told a passer-by 'There's nowhere else in Swindon we can go, so we decided to come here, stink and all'.

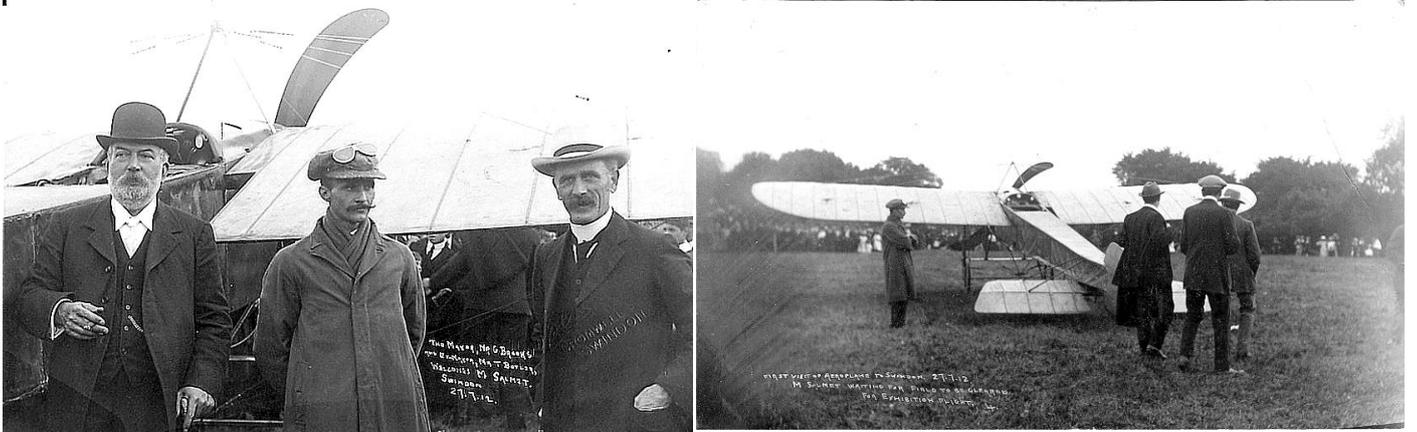
27 July 1912 – the day that M Henri Salmét (aka The Flying Man), a French pilot, in ideal weather conditions, landed in a field at 6.30 pm in Swindon – around the area where Pipers Way is now. His aircraft was a 2-seater Bleriot XI-2.

With thanks to Paul Williams for the photos.



There was riotous applause and great excitement from the 3,000 (a further article shows 30,000!) people, from far and near, gathered in nearby fields and even perched in trees – WHY? – because this was the very first airplane to touch down in Swindon. This was a time when few had even touched a motor car. The monoplane appeared on the horizon as a speck and gradually took shape ‘like an enormous dragonfly’. It was reported that ‘The machine came to the grass with a graceful bird-like motion’.

“I am just in time.” M Salmét said to Mayor George Brooke “I have run short of petrol and I had only two minutes more supply.” It seems that he ‘wowed the swelling crowds’ when he informed them that he had flown from Cirencester to Swindon in barely 20 minutes.



M Salmét filled up with petrol, took to the skies again and daringly circled overhead, ‘drew figures in the sky, darted between trees and buzzed closely overhead’. Blunsdon and Cricklade were also favoured with his twirls and whirls before he returned to Swindon.

A packed Empire Theatre heard him tell, in broken English “When I am in my machine I am much more safe than you in your motor cars. There is no dust, no dangerous corners and the policeman can’t say ‘you go too fast’ It seems that his talk was highly entertaining with regular stops allowing laughter and applause to die down. He presented a cheque to Mayor Brooke for the Swindon Victoria Hospital.

He had learned to fly in England and beat the altitude record by flying to 9,000 feet. He said “It took me one hour and 15 minutes to go up and then my carburettor froze. I came down in ten minutes.”

16 July 1952 A link with a Swindon pre-dating the arrival of Brunel was demolished. The old farmhouse at Gillings Wharf in Drove Road had once been a landmark for bargees unloading their cargoes. When the bulldozers moved in, the relics uncovered details of the various cargoes and their weights. In later years the farmhouse was used for Civil Defence exercises in which civilian volunteers practiced for crises including invasion.

AND SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE:

1856 Living conditions were still bad in the Railway Village where workers were petitioning the GWR to repairs the roads.

... AND A REQUEST FOR HELP PLEASE

Looking for information on 'The Coombes' at nearby Bishopstone. The house was owned by Betty Britton and Barbara Ward, Headmistress of Bishopstone School, lived there with her. Please contact swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk if you can help. Thank you.



The weeping willow is easily recognised with its graceful cascading branches, narrow tapering leaves and flower clusters. The most common are *Salix Babylonica*. What a lovely name!

With thanks to Clive Alexander for this picture.

Do our family trees resemble a weeping willow?
Not the 'weeping' part hopefully.

**The willow weeps for those long gone
but we can keep their names alive
as the wind blows through the feathery
fronds,
through us, our loved ones will survive.**

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