

## Wiltshire Family History Society, Swindon Branch, March 2023

### MEETINGS REMINDER – see below for further details

Thursday 9 March 2023 via Zoom – ‘Ancestors who were Civil Servants’

Thursday 23 March 2023 at The Central Community Centre, Emlyn Square  
‘Where Residents of the Railway Village would have shopped in the 19<sup>th</sup> century’



### Daffodowndilly by AA Milne

She wore her yellow sun-bonnet  
She wore her greenest gown  
She turned to the south wind  
And curtsied up and down.

She turned to the sunlight  
And shook her yellow head  
And whispered to her neighbour  
‘Winter is dead’.

### FROM CHAIRMAN JOHN

My ramblings today should all have the prefix, **see below**.....

I managed to miss the last zoom meeting. Whilst some of you were enjoying the talk, I was waiting for my order, in a fish and chip shop in Swanage. With my name, Mills, I would have probably found the talk interesting. I haven't found any millers in my tree, however I have found bakers.

What an amazing photograph that Ken Mumford took. Things really have changed from the days that I used to stand at that end of the platform with my Ian Allen loco spotting book. Mind you things had already changed in Danny Scroggins photograph, no steam engines!

Missing from March memories, from the archives of Swindon (GWR) Male Voice Choir:

**26<sup>th</sup> March 1941** Savoy Cinema, Swindon, where the choir joined the RAF Dance Orchestra (better known as the Squadronaires) and Dixie Minstrels helping to raise “morale and entertain the troops” as well as cash for RAF Welfare and Comfort fund.

Enough of me, enjoy your read. **JOHN MILLS**

PS. The wait was well worth it, the fish was fresh off the trawler that day.

### WHAT'S COMING UP

**9 March Zoom meeting:** ‘Was you Ancestor a Civil Servant?’– Alan Ruston

Alan has been involved in lecturing, speaking and writing in family history for over 30 years. In his talk he will tell us of the expansion of the civil service in the last 150 years, the evolution of government departments and how to trace an ancestor in public records.

As usual for our Zoom meetings, Glenys (our Zoom Host) 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](mailto:glenys.bettley@ntlworld.com)

**23 March at the Central Community Centre** - 'Where residents of the Railway Village would have shopped in the 19<sup>th</sup> century'.

We set out to investigate what facilities were available to residents of the Swindon Railway Village from the early 1840s through to the end of the century.

Paul Cole has written in about a talk in the main hall of Lydiard House on 19th April on **How Genealogists use DNA**: <https://www.friendsoflydiardpark.org.uk/events/how-genealogists-use-dna/>

## REPORTS

### Zoom Meeting Thursday 9 February 2023 – MILLS AND MILLERS – Laurence Page

Although there are various types of mill, eg cotton, paper, saw mills and even gunpowder mills, Laurence concentrated his excellent talk on just two:

**WATERMILLS** – Introduced into Britain by the Romans. Whereas most Saxon villages did have a church, they would have had a watermill by necessity, sometimes even two which would be situated by rivers, streams and brooks at a fast-flowing point or drop in height level. A regular chore would have been to clean off the mud and gunk – although not on Sundays.

At the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 there were more than 5600 mills in England, including one in Swindon and a large one at Wootton Bassett owned by Miles Crispin. There were also watermills at Chiseldon, Purton, Wanborough and seven at Wroughton.

There were two types of watermill – undershot powered from force of water below and overshot powered by water falling onto the wheel. They were attached to the side of buildings.

**WINDMILLS** – introduced into Britain in about the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the earliest surviving being from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and built in places most exposed to the wind.

Post windmills had one large central 'post' and the whole structure turned to take advantage of the best wind direction. In fact the whole structure could be moved from place to place if necessary.

Tower windmills were brick-built and the top/cap, with sails, moved with wind direction. Chiseldon windmill was such an example, although eventually moved from Chiseldon to Windmill Hill.

Smock windmills were not so common and usually wooden structures. The top/cap moved with the wind direction.

The milling stones consisted of a stationary lower/bedstone and an upper stone that moved to grind the corn into flour which was then bagged up. Local farmers would usually drop off their

grain, by horse and cart (or even donkeys in difficult terrain), and return a day or two later. A few with smaller loads may wait, perhaps partaking of refreshments whilst waiting.

Some millers may have owned their mills but most would have been tenants, with surrounding land on which they may have kept cows, pigs or sheep – even beehives. Most would have had an assistant as the work was heavy and long hours. It could also be dangerous as belt/workings exposed and the resulting white corn dust could cause lung disease. We were told of one horrific fatal accident when someone was struck by a sail. At the end of the day, the miller would have to complete his ledger/day book to record the day's work.

They would have been fairly well off as the work was consistent, and especially if they actually owned the mill. Milling would often run in families and skills passed down through several generations.

The coming of steam power and cheap imported grain saw the decline of water and wind mills and by the time of WW1 most had been closed down. Quite a few of the buildings survived, however, with many now having become private homes with excellent views. Some are run by voluntary groups and open to the public.

Laurence explained that there can be good resources available on miller ancestries, for example photos, some in historical books. From the County Records offices – tythe records and maps, manorial and church records, deeds and leases which may have survived even though the mill itself has gone, wills and inventories, even diaries and ledgers may be found occasionally. Newspaper articles, quarter session reports and prosecutions may all help to provide the family historian with information.

**Does anyone have miller/mill connections to share please?** It does seem that there were several around the Swindon area at some time. Please contact [nealy1@virginmedia.com](mailto:nealy1@virginmedia.com) or [swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk)

### **'CELLARS, TOWERS AND TUNNELS' – Jon Ratcliffe** **Thursday 23 February 2023 at the Central Community Centre**

Thanks to Kate Goodenough for writing the report and to Jon Ratcliffe for the photos.

Jon's talk was a presentation of photographs of Swindon buildings in various stages of demolition and some after renovation.

Jon had managed to photograph 360 degree views from the top of the Signal Point office block above the Rail Station. These included the Carriage Works and many of the office blocks, day and night-time views, that have sprung up since 1965.

Andy Binks of the Swindon Society, who does not worry about heights, appeared in some of the photos!



Photos of the carriage works showed the metal framework and excellent natural light, the Inspectors 'amenities', and some signage – 'Danger Live Wires' which is listed along with main fabric of the Works.



The Victoria Road College site is a listed building and it was particularly interesting to see the transformation from effects of water damage inside into the conversion of flats for rent.

Jon also gave a photo account of the (now old and demolished) Swindon College site that once adjoined the original building, some showing its derelict state inside and the Byron Street Houses.

Lovely view over Swindon taken from the now demolished Swindon College.



There were photos of the basement area under Theatre Square where the shops in that area have their stock rooms. Also of the Morrison's supermarket construction.

Jon was asked to take some photos of Aspen House, Temple Street, to make it "look ugly" presumably to add weight to its demolition. An interesting one showed the strong room for the registers of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Some photos of the old Corn Exchange, now in ruins, showed unusual angles. Inside the building was found old Bingo cards and a Band Log book showing dates, costs, what band members wanted to drink, and any other requirements.

Other photos showed the coal hole at Apsley House, the Bath Road Swindon Museum, and the wine cellar beneath, with writing on the wall 'W. Toomer's Claret'.

Jon told us about his trip with an Architect to Wroughton Airfield to look at the columns of the old Baptist Tabernacle. All the stones were placed on wooden pallets.

Another unusual photo was of the inside of the Brunel Statue and underground room containing the Fire Hydrants for the Brunel Centre.

The Health Hydro was the next photo, showing the attractive big baths, the large stained-glass window and the cellar containing the original water and steam pipes which ran directly from the GWR Works and provided power before the gas boiler was installed.

Another picture showed the old laundry in Aylesbury Street and, at the other end of the street, a wall, with outer layer removed, to reveal wording advertising Player's cigarettes.

The Norman Foster designed Renault building appeared next and finally there was a photo of a box. What was its significance - it was the first batch of vaccines delivered to STEAM for the people of Swindon. History in the making!



## HERE IS A LETTER FROM ALISON – about her Miller connections

Thank you for welcoming me to the Swindon Branch of the WFHS. I found the Zoom talk by Laurie Page “My Ancestor was a Miller” very informative, this was especially interesting to me as my 3 x Great Grandfather William Ball was a corn miller. On the 1851 Census he was 31 and living at Goosebridge Mill, Malmesbury with his wife and 5 children.

By 1881 he had moved to Lyneham Mill and was now 60 years old.

He was still at Lyneham Mill in 1891 and continued working as a corn miller until his death on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1891.

He is buried in Lyneham churchyard.



Photos of Lyneham Mill (Blind Mill)

Since the talk, I have found out from another member that Lyneham Mill was also known as Blind Mill.

It was a water powered mill and originally fed by Lilly Brook.

Other surnames that I'm researching are:  
Humphris/Humphries – Clyffe Pypard, Wootton Bassett.  
Dixon – Brinkworth.  
Bowns/Bounds – Warminster, Netton Durnford.  
Newman – Bodenham, Bemerton.

I would love to hear from any other members who can share any information.

**ALISON CLIFF** ([alisoncliff@hotmail.com](mailto:alisoncliff@hotmail.com))

## ANOTHER COAL RELATED MEMORY – this time from Jan Dennis

Yes I have very clear memories of the coal man delivering and being instructed by my mother to count the bags as they crashed into the bunker. She was always suspicious that she wouldn't receive as many as she'd paid for. She always did of course. I also remember going into the coal merchant's very cosy office with the blazing fire to select the best quality that could be afforded.

My grandmother was of Scottish heritage and full of superstitions so First Footing was very important to her. The shovel of coal was left outside the door for the local policeman, on his rounds, to bring in as he was dark haired. She was anxious that their red haired publican neighbour should not be first.

My husband came from a coal mining family, working at various mines in the West and East Midlands, and I've been looking back at some of the censuses.

They started work at a young age and of course there was no pension.

According to the 1881 census there is a daughter age 16 listed as a coal miner, as was her 14 year old brother.



Further research, however, shows that women were banned from working underground in 1842 so the 16 year old girl could not have been a miner. The enumerator must have made a mistake. She may have been a 'pit brow woman' employed to pick out the stones from the coal.

In 1901 my husband's great grandfather was still hewing coal at the age of 66. His father wasn't a miner but I remember meeting one of his uncles who had lost part of his hand and had coal dust embedded in his forehead from his mining days. **JAN DENNIS**

**NOTE:** Jan draws attention to the Coal Mines Regulation Act of 4 August 1842 when, from 1 March 1843, it became illegal for women and children under ten to work underground in Britain. Sounds good but some families relied on those wages and there was no unemployment compensation. Moreover it appears that there was just one inspector to cover the whole of Britain AND he had to give notice before visiting collieries. Thus many women would have continued working in the mines – possibly until they were killed or injured.

Bad enough for men working in the pits but imagine how frightening for very young children often working completely alone in the dark and confines of low tunnels.

An article written some years ago about mining in Victorian times relates that a miner's day began with a 'knocker-up' banging on the door in the very early morning then a long trudge through dark cobbled streets to the mineshaft. Besides working at the pit face underground, there would be blasting and erecting pit props. Drammers pulled heavy carts by a chain attached at the waist in low tunnels.

Many dangers including cave-ins, floods, fires and explosions – and cold. Caged canaries were used to detect if poisonous gas was present.

## **FROM LAST TIME ..**

**Glyn Harris wrote to say:** In the newsletter John makes mention of his memories living in the GWR houses, and Mervyn later expands on this in his article. However, I was a visitor to these houses as my uncle, a signaller in the east box at the station, lived in Oxford Street.

In early years the railway village received its electricity supply from the company power station. This was DC and thus not in compliance with the national standard 240/250v that we are now all used to. As more domestic appliances became available the DC system was becoming defunct. Visiting my uncle one day I stubbed my foot on something under the table. Uncle explained it



was a power converter which provided the house with a 240v AC supply. I don't know how powerful it was, but I doubt it would have been sufficient for a modern house, nor do I know when the houses were connected to the grid. **GLYN HARRIS**

**Glyn's uncle was Edward Charles BULL.** Born in Bristol on 9 November 1909, he married Ethel Gwendoline Taylor at The Methodist Chapel, Brinkworth, on 29 May 1937 at which time he was a Railway Porter. Railway Employment Records show that he started work with them on 29 January 1926.



Photo: Bathampton Street

By 1939 he was living at 32 Bathampton Street with Ethel and one child. Edward was shown as being 'Signalman/Goods Guard, Passenger Guard, GWR'.

The family were still recorded there in the 1947 Swindon Street Directory, but the 1965 Street Directory lists them at 16 Oxford Street.

Edward died 10 December 1985 at which time he was living at Coleview.

### **SWINDON STATION (Platform 3) – THEN AND NOW** (with thanks to Ken Mumford and Danny Scroggins)



Photo by Ian & Stella Fagg



Photo by Danny Scroggins



This is the photo taken by Ken Mumford. Almost the same view but spot the difference!

Some have referred to the 'wires' as knitting. Whatever it's called, it quite a jumble!

**Judy Rouse wrote to say:** I've already shared with you my reminiscences of the old GWR hospital so won't go through that again, but both my mother and I had operations at the "Vic", which was very low key compared with today. Very strict visiting hours, the ward nurses did the cleaning of all floors which were highly polished and not a scrap of dust anywhere. I remember being scolded by the sister for having an ashtray on my bedside table, until I pointed it out that it had been used by a visitor to the patient in the adjoining bed! I was and am a lifelong non-smoker, so at the age of 21 I was mightily offended. Can you imagine smoking in a hospital ward today!!

Re. Brack or Brock Hill, **Brock** is the old name for a badger. At Purton we have a wood called **Brockhurst** (from the Old English - **Badger Wood**) and after probably a thousand years or longer there is still a massive sett of badgers there in the old earthworks round The Camp (Romano British settlement), and there are a mass of setts still in Old Town along the old railway line embankment, we get them in the Close frequently. **Hurst** has an alternative derivation of **sandy hillock**, and of course Okus where PMH was situated used to be called **the Sands**. Probably liked by badgers because of how easy it is to tunnel into.

Incidentally isn't it amazing what we can learn from place names about the history of the area where our ancestors lived. The top end of Purton is called **Pavenhill**. When a new house was being constructed in the old quarry there, the remains of a Roman villa with mosaics was discovered, and when the old workhouse a few hundred yards down the road was being partly demolished, a Roman cemetery was excavated, so is the name a folk memory of what was there lingering on perhaps? Or perhaps it was because that road formed part of a coach route down a very steep hill, so perhaps it was cobbled at some time.

The row of houses that made the small council estate at Pavenhill was called **Blacklands** and the name Blacklands was commonly given to areas that had been in human occupation for a long period of time. Behind Blacklands were a large number of allotments, one worked by my father and he certainly would have testified to its fertility (Blacklands is anthropic meaning **modified or 'built' by human intervention over time**).

Also lower down the hill towards Braydon there is Park Gate Farm and from an article I've been reading this week in a recent WANHS Journal about another area of Wilts, the name Parkgate is indicative of there having been a deer park in the area, and Braydon Forest was in Royal ownership up to Stuart times. In one of his books, the Seventeenth Century writer on Wiltshire John Aubrey was told by a Grittenham resident that before deforestation and enclosure in the reign of Charles I "**that a squirrel might have jumped from tree to tree all the way from Wootton Bassett to Grittenham**". It's still sparsely populated hence the "Braydon Tin Chapel", it was too far for people to come up to the two Purton Methodist village chapels. It's still in use and until she became too ill recently my cousin drove down there to attend.

I mustn't rabbit on, but one of my favourite place names down in Braydon, is another wood called **Ravens Roost**, must have had them nesting there surely!

Another and last you'll be pleased to know is the hill down through Cherhill to Calne -**Labour in Vain Hill**, absolutely love that one.

Thanks to Judy for her comments. Would anyone else like to add to this – [nealy1@virginmedia.com](mailto:nealy1@virginmedia.com) or [swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk)



## **SWINDON RAILWAY STRIKE ACTION BACK IN 1972**

In excess of 400 Swindon's British Rail workers held a sit-in on Monday 26 June to protest against the suspension and sacking of workmates. They had begun to sit-in in Nos. 5 and 6 shops the previous Friday. British Rail had alleged that several chargemen had refused to handle spares and equipment being sent to other depots. The work had been 'blacked' for fear of it speeding up redundancies.

**06.06.1979** Swindon to Paddington for 50p. That's the ambitious package from British Rail, who want to get families out of their cars and on to the trains. This bumper offer under the banner of Family Railcard will start on June 17 and continue for an 8 months trial period. If it's successful, Family Railcards are likely to be valid after that for 6 or 12 month periods. And it will work like this: Dad – or Mum – buys a Family Railcard for £10. He then pays the full 2nd-class fare for the journey – single, ordinary or Awayday return. And Mum, or another nominated adult and up to four children travel for just 50p each – a total of £2.50. For single-parent families there is a £5 Family Railcard.

**01.10.1981** 'British Rail has slashed the day return fare between London and Paddington to £5. The cut of £3 is part of the campaign launched by Western Region to win back passengers lost to the cheap express coach services. The tickets will be valid on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and at the weekends for passengers traveling after 9.30 am and coming back to Swindon on trains leaving London after 6 pm. The new day return ticket from Swindon will be tested from October 6.'

## **SOME MARCH MEMORIES**

**02.03.1882** An attempt was made to assassinate Queen Victoria at Windsor.

**18.03.1947** Swindon was recovering from a hurricane on Tuesday March 18 1947.

**05.03.1949** Snow fell in Swindon. People shivered in the cold, which seemed more severe after the spring-like weather of the previous month. The official forecast predicted keen night frosts and snow at times.

**02.03.1953 Swindon:** The 6.05pm train from Swindon to Highworth was the last ordinary passenger train to be run over that line. Inspector Tom Salisbury was on the platform to give driver Bert Scaplehorn a farewell handshake before the train left Swindon. There were a number of schoolboys returning home after the Swindon Town football match on the train. They watched out of the windows as Mrs Phyllis Hacked handed the staff to Fireman Les Leason before the return journey. The staff must be in the hands of the fireman before a single-line train was allowed to leave.

**18.03.1953 Swindon.** A flautist, formerly of Swindon, was invited to play in the orchestra providing music for the Coronation in Westminster Abbey. William Bartlett was principal flautist with the Yorkshire Symphony Orchestra and had been a student at the Royal College of Music, to which he had won a scholarship after working in the offices of the Railway Works. He had just begun his studies when war broke out, and Mr Bartlett served in the Army for six years. He has been educated at Commonweal School and his family home was in Avenue Road.

**09.03.1963** Swindon: More than 350 people, a record number, attended Hills' 20<sup>th</sup> annual dance at McIlroys Ballroom in Swindon. Dancing was to the Gordon Talbot Orchestra and the Barbados All Star Steel Band.

**23.03.1963 Swindon:** The Mayor of Swindon Coun A E Cockram officially opened the modernised public baths in Milton Road, Swindon. The estimated cost for the modernisation of the baths was £90,000. The mayor was introduced by Ald Charles Streetly, chairman of the Marketing and Baths Committee. BBC TV cameras were at the baths televising a swimming competition between Western Countries and Midland Counties for the sports programme Grandstand.

**02.03.1969** The French-built supersonic aeroplane Concorde completed its first test flight.

**05.03.1969** Swindon headed the list of 30 expanding towns in the country, which housed people from the London area, a spokesman from the Greater London Council said. Since 1953 Swindon took more London families than any other expanding town. About 6,000 London families had moved to Swindon.

**20.03.1980** The pirate radio station Radio Caroline, on the ship Mi Amigo, sank after 16 years of broadcasting.

**14.03.2018** An ancient, sub-tropical coastline dating back 56 million years was found in west London by engineers working on the new high speed rail line, it was revealed.

## WERE YOU THERE?

Crowds gathered in Swindon 50 years ago in March 1973 for the opening, and during the next 41 years some high-calibre performers appeared there. The inaugural ball featuring the Peter James Band, was attended by Swindon councillors and civic officials, including Mayor Peter Furkins, former Mayor Alf Bown and also Bill Read, John Norman, Eddie Norman. Courtesy of Mike Yarwood, Ted Heath, Harold Wilson Richard Nixon, Frank Spencer and others also made an appearance.

I'll give you a clue – it had a revolving bar.

Remember the Brunel Rooms?

## SPRING AND BLUEBELLS



Does anyone remember the song 'The Bluebells of Scotland'?

The Corries were one group that sang it. They were quite prolific in their recordings which included the poignant 'Massacre of Glencoe'. But if you want a giggle, then google them singing 'The Bricklayer's Song'!!!

## ELIAS NETHERCOTT 1821 – 1900

Ray Nethercott got in touch about this branch of the Nethercott/Nethercot family as it relates to our Swindon Railway Village project. Perhaps you are connected with the Nethercott families or know the surname? We'd love to hear from you please – [nealy1@virginmedia.com](mailto:nealy1@virginmedia.com) or [swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk) This is what Ray has sent:

Elias Nethercott was born to George Nethercott and Ann Chidgey. George was born in Treborough, Somersetshire, the smallest parish in England and was the younger brother of my direct ancestor, Henry Nethercott. George was an agricultural labourer and went to Roadwater in the adjacent parish of Old Cleeve for work.

Elias went to Swindon and I guess he had an apprenticeship in carpentry with Isambard Kingdom Brunel as this was his life's work. I guess that he would have been building railway carriages as at that time they were of timber construction.

In 1847 he married Sarah Voss who he must have known when younger as they lived close to each other in Roadwater.

At the time of the marriage, Elias aged 26 lived at **37 Bathampton Street**, Swindon, but in 1847 it was called Bath Street. Apparently there was a postal problem as there was also a Bath Road in Swindon and I found out that the name was changed in 1902.



Sarah Voss aged 30 and daughter of James Voss, a mason, was in service at 28 Circus, Bath and Bath Register Office is where the marriage took place on 25 May 1847. From a newly found relative of Elias, I found a good deal of controversy and scandal.

Sarah Voss became seriously ill and the couple by 1851 had moved to stay with Elias's parents in Roadwater. So ill was Sarah that her niece, Sarah Jane Voss, came to live with them and care for her aunt. Elias and Sarah had no children but Elias and Sarah Jane did, apparently nine children. When Sarah Voss died, Elias and Sarah Jane never did marry.

One of their children was Harry, who set up a foundry in Roadwater and made a fortune from castings for the miniature gauge West Somerset Mineral Railway, which transported mineral ore from the Brendon Hills down to Roadwater, where it was transferred to a standard gauge railway and taken to Watchet harbour where it was put on ships and sent to South Wales for smelting.

The Nethercott foundry is still standing although not now used. I have many photographs of the Roadwater Nethercotts and all their properties and their commercial history. I have an image of Elias, taken from a book of Roadwater and district, with a second page of history\*. I have made enquires but apparently there are no GWR staff records from Elias's time with the company.

I know there were/are Nethercotts in Swindon but have never been able to link them to my family line. My father and grandfather were born in Bristol and before them it was all Exmoor, back to the Nethercott estate near Dulverton. This estate is now owned by Boris Johnson's father so who knows if it was my family's home back in the 16th century. **RAY NETHERCOTT**



**NOTE:** \*Ray sent this quite detailed article about Elias Nethercott which, besides containing photos of him and his family, describes how he was connected to Roadwater's first road traction engine in the early 1860s. The article continues with Elias's son Harry (as above) mentioning his early cars – a 1902 Darracq and a Model T Ford. Please email the above address if you would like a copy of that article. Yvonne

## **MYSTERY, ROMANCE AND INTRIGUE**

Just like Ray, a further email has been received about the intriguing Axford family. The original question was 'could the writer's Great Grandfather's brother, Charles James Fox Axford, have been one of the first GWR surgeons'? That was the 'mystery' part. **SEE THE ATTACHED** for more on the family. It's quite long, so attached separately.

Delving further into the family revealed 'romance' – a probable connection to Hannah Lightfoot and King George III and 'intrigue' as to what happened to Hannah.

Charles James Fox Axford was the first lease holder of Apsley House, home of Swindon's Museum for many years. Apsley House will again be mentioned in our next newsletter which will feature Swindon auctioneer William Dore.

## **.... on the subject of Swindon's Museums ....**

Frances Bevan has written about **Charles Herbert Henry Gore**, Swindon's first museum curator. This is her story - featured here with her kind permission:



In 2016 we all got very excited when Make Architects produced an ambitious £22m design concept for our town's much needed new Museum and Art Gallery.

But sadly, the bid for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant that would make this possible was unsuccessful and it was back to the drawing board.

And then four years later Covid struck. In March 2020 the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery closed its doors, like everywhere else, as the country shut down in an attempt to halt the spread of Covid 19. But when other museums and galleries nationwide reopened in May 2021, Swindon's didn't.

Swindon Borough Council's solution: The top floor of the Civic Offices in Euclid Street was to be converted into a museum and art gallery while selected artefacts and paintings were to go on tour around Swindon. The long-term plan is to build a new museum and art exhibition facility in the centre of town but when they say long term, they really do mean long term. The estimated timeline is in the region of 10 years.

Frances Bevan continued with the story by introducing Charles Herbert Henry Gore who was to become Swindon Museum's first curator.

The 10 year old Charles had found the fossilised bones of a prehistoric animal on the site of the Queen Street gasometer and thus began a lifetime's interest in geology and natural history.

By 1919 Charles had accumulated an extensive collection, which he offered to the Swindon Corporation on condition that it provided a building in which to accommodate it all (sounds familiar).

It was decided to use the Victoria Hall, a property in Regent Circus, which had just been vacated by the Roman Catholic congregation awaiting completion of their new church at Holy Rood.

Victoria Hall is the building on the extreme right of the photo – published courtesy of the Swindon Society.



Ten years later Charles packed up his collection again and moved it all up to Apsley House where it remained until 2020, when the museum closed its doors for the last time. Where is Charles's collection now? Well to be honest we don't actually know. 'In storage' is the official comment – it certainly isn't on display that we do know. **FRANCES BEVAN**

## THANK YOU FRAN

I'd like to take this opportunity of thanking Frances Bevan publicly for the tremendous help and support she is showing to our GWR Village cottages project. She has allowed us to use some of her 'blogs' for the Railway Village street files. These are in connection to the Radnor Street Cemetery stories she has produced in conjunction with the Swindon Society and Noel Beauchamp. Take a look for yourself at her blogs. Yvonne

## PINCHED FROM A CHURCH MAGAZINE

"Just want to let everyone know that I am in hospital and they are keeping me in. I have only poisoned myself - what I thought was an onion turned out to be a daffodil bulb. The doctor said I should be out sometime in the Spring."

**"I don't believe the half I hear,  
Nor the quarter of what I see!  
But I have one faith, sublime and true,  
That nothing can shake or slay;**

**Each spring I firmly believe anew  
All that the seed catalogues say!"**

**Carolyn Wells**



(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](mailto:nealy1@virginmedia.com))