

Wiltshire Family History Society, Swindon Branch, November 2023

MEETINGS REMINDER – see below for further details

Thursday 9th November 2023 via Zoom - East End through the lens of a camera

Thursday 23 November at The Central Community Centre, Emlyn Square –
Making Plans for Swindon



**“They shall grow not old, as we that
are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the
years condemn.”**

Evidently these two lines and those on the photo are the first words that came to the poet Laurence Binyon as he composed this while sitting on the cliff-top looking out to sea in north Cornwall.

It was mid-September 1914, a few weeks after the outbreak of WW1 and news came that casualties were mounting. He lost several close friends and his brother-in-law in the conflict.

FROM CHAIRMAN JOHN

I was quite enjoying reading the draft copy of this newsletter, then there was the article about Ken Kitchen, and I was traumatised. Not that I have anything against Ken Kitchen It was the statement that he was a “woodwork teacher at Moredon School”. Having failed the eleven plus, Moredon School, with the emphasis on practical rather than academic skills, was my destination. Oh dear.

“Mills, you have the mechanical competence of a gorilla”, Mr Winkle, my Technical Drawing teacher, bellowed across the classroom. My thoughts at the time were he was a bit harsh on gorillas.

Mr Winkle was correct. A school timetable that had 2 double periods of either metalwork or woodwork, depending on the term and a triple technical drawing lesson. interspersed with PE or games, which I was also useless at, made secondary school a traumatic experience. The thought of metalwork or woodwork filled me with dread. I don't think Ken was my teacher, but I do recall Mr Finch-Crisp was the metalwork teacher.

Mr Packer was my English teacher. He, like me, was on the committee of the Swindon Male Voice Choir. He joined the choir in 1936. In the attendance book from 1939 to 46 against his name was the short phrase “in the forces”. He was in the RAF, obviously he survived as did Mr Finch-Crisp who was a prisoner of war of the Japanese and he suffered terrible injuries. I never

appreciated what my teachers, male and female, must have gone through during the war. So, my trauma was nothing to what they went through. **JOHN MILLS**

WHAT'S COMING UP

9th November 2023 via Zoom - East End through the lens of a camera with Danny Wells

Danny will talk to us about life in the East End of London from World War 1 to World War 2 with snapshots of life and culture during this time of change.

23rd November 2023 at The Central Community Centre, Emlyn Square - Making Plans for Swindon by Jon Ratcliffe

Local professional photographer, Jon Ratcliffe, delves into the plans for Swindon that didn't make it off the drawing board. From Victorian New Swindon modernisation to post Second World War grand boulevards and the bold visions of the present day. Be taken on a tour of some very different ideas for the town that's always got change on its mind. **MARGARET NEAVES**



Free Family History Drop-In Session

Monday 20th November - 2pm-3:30pm

Local Studies - Central Library

Want to look into family history but don't know where to start, or perhaps you need help with research you've already started?

Volunteers from the Wiltshire Family History Society will be on hand to help with researching your family history - locally and elsewhere

We have online facilities we can use at Local Studies including Find my Past, Ancestry and the British Newspaper Archive.



For those researching locally, you can also discover the physical... directories, poll books, electoral rolls & more.

Learn what online resources are available, how to interpret certificates and how to draw up your own family tree.



For further information:

swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk or ring 01793 822310.

Cakes and Tales : A Free Lydiard Tregoze Family History Event To be held at Hook, Greatfield and Greenhill Village Hall SN4 8EA 2.30pm on Friday 17 November 2023

Another chance to share your memories and explore the Lydiard Archives with Friends of Lydiard Park, chair Sarah Finch-Crisp and local historian and fellow trustee, Frances Bevan.

For over fifty years **The Friends of Lydiard Park** have been gathering and compiling the memories and stories of people who grew up in and around Lydiard Park, creating a fascinating

history of the life of the village. Please do bring along any photographs and historical material you would like to share and we will photograph them on the spot.

Cakes and Tales is a FREE social event though we would be very grateful for your donations on the day. The cakes are all home made by our lovely volunteers and to help with catering please book your place by emailing The Secretary, Julie Holland at secretary@friendsoflydiardpark.org.uk or write to her at 30 Croft Road, Swindon SN1 4DQ.

FROM THE FRIENDS OF SWINDON HEALTH HYDRO

We have started building a social media presence, in preparation for future campaigns regarding the future of the Health Hydro. We want to see a first class restoration and full use of the Health Hydro for the people of Swindon & beyond.

We would be grateful for any photos, anecdotes or other material that we might use in our campaigning.

REPORTS

Thursday 12 October 2023: THE GOLDEN AGE OF TRAVEL 1836 to 1936 – Zoom with Ian Porter

A lovely talk from Ian guiding us through various modes of transport over a 100 year period.

The coming of the railways led to trips to seaside resorts and emergence of various attractions such as piers, proms, fairs, donkey rides, amusements and ballrooms. There were originally four bank holidays annually, although unpaid until the 20th century. So day trips became popular or weekend stays for those better off.

Seaside visitors were fully clothed on the beaches. For bathing, males and females on separate parts of the beach and, for the ladies, there were bathing machines. Women's swimwear was heavy and often weighted to avoid riding up.

Suntans – definitely out as this was indicative of those working 'outside'. However, that all changed when Coco Chanel started a new trend and sun bathing became the in thing to do.

Thomas Cook changed the concept of holidays and travel. His first organised trip was from Leicester to Loughborough, and as a keen supporter of the temperance movement, no alcohol was allowed. The trips were expanded and in 1855 came the first foreign trip to the Great Exhibition in Paris, with everything from leaving home, the journey, accommodation, food being organised. So was born the package holiday.

Thomas Cook was very religious and delighted in organising tours to the Bible Lands by means of paddle steamers and sleeper trains, sometimes combining the two methods. These tours could be very luxurious. Thomas Cook was there for the Suez Canal opening. Single ladies felt safe to travel alone.

The Orient Express started in 1883. London – Constantinople. There were several versions and several routes. This method of transport combined luxury, beauty and mystery. The central car was the restaurant complete with gaslight chandeliers and 10 course dinners. This mode of travel was sometimes not without problems, for example bandits and snow drifts. The latter inspired the famous 'Murder on the Orient Express'.

Ocean liner companies were in fierce competition and the Blue Riband was a much sought-after prize. The more funnels, the more impressive. Service was most important for first-class passengers. Also fashion. Ladies took their maids and copious luggage. There was a maids and valets saloon – not allowed to mix with first class who sailed in luxury including non-stop eating and drinking, cocktails, smoking rooms, dancing until midnight and so on. Single ladies had their own table.

First class passengers paid huge sums which helped to lower steerage fares. There was strict separation in the classes with steerage passengers even subjected to health checks for TB and other diseases.

Then there were the shipboard romances and emigration of those crossing the oceans to start a new life elsewhere. Huge numbers left for USA and the colonies.

Tunnels – few to begin with and then more, particularly in Switzerland and Germany for sports resorts

Visit to spas and **taking the waters**. Entertainment with fine dining. Summer was one long round of balls, dinner parties, ballet and events. 9/10 course dinners. Then there was the Grouse season.

1919 saw the first chartered **air flight**. Flying still dangerous at this time. The first long distance flight was in 1928 and by 1933 there were commercial flights across the Atlantic. This also brought about the duty-free system. HUGE and luxurious Zeppelins took to the air – 25 state rooms and very comfortable over a 2-day flight. The end of airships came in 1937 with the New Jersey explosion. The event was caught on film.

Then came the war and end of an era. See below for notes on The Flying Scotman.

Additional note – a ‘silly’ to end this report! The first recorded transatlantic stowaways were William Ballantyne and his tabby cat Wopsie aboard the R34 airship for a flight from the UK to Mineola, New York from July 2 – 6 in 1919. Wopsy and two homing pigeons were the first animals to fly the Atlantic, with Wopsie being the first quadruped known to have flown across a major body of water.

SATURDAY 21 OCTOBER at Even Swindon Community Centre



We had been invited to the Rodbourne Community History Group event and had two tables, mostly featuring files about people, places and events of the past.

Although not busy in terms of the number of people through the doors (steady trickle over the 6 hours), our display seemed to generate interest – and the stories! Well, Swindon is full of stories, memories and histories. So a very busy and enjoyable day for us.

FROM LAST TIME

Judy Rouse wrote that she too remembers Hinders and Brett's.

Phil Garrahan's request for information on former Swindon artists, as per his list in our last Newsletter, brought one very interesting response regarding G A Reason who, it was thought, painted the mural in the (now long-gone) hot houses in Queens Park.

James Geoffrey Peart

Within about an hour of circulating our last Newsletter, Nigel Chalk, Online Parish Clerk for Stratton St Margaret, was able to give great grandson Jack details of James' compensation from the 1948 GWR Hospital Register. Many thanks to Nigel and we hope it goes some way to knocking down Jack's 'brick wall'.

BONFIRE NIGHT – a follow up from the Bunce of Ashbury article in our last Newsletter – from Ken Mumford

I knew DAVID BUNCE very well in connection with the GIDEONS INTERNATIONAL. I joined the Swindon & District branch in the early 1970s not long after moving to Swindon. After a short time in this branch and with a migraine headache I heard David Bunce nominate me as the new Secretary at that branch's AGM. I suddenly realised that my name had been mentioned!!

I was Head of Science at Ferndale Junior High School in Ferndale Road, Swindon, at that time.

After one branch meeting at his home, David Bunce took me out into one of his fields and suggested that I had a school bonfire there that November.

Ken sent these photos of the event.

(Note: could that be Venus in the sky?)



Much of the material was supplied by discarded furniture from Norman's Furnishers.

That, first of several bonfires, was very interesting because as the bonfire died down David said for me to come back up to his house, to which I replied - 'What about the parents and pupils?' 'Bring them too!' was his reply. Why

He and his wife, Rita, had cleared their double garage and had laid out some refreshments - what an unexpected surprise!

On another occasion, David and Rita allowed me, and some of the pupils where I taught, to use their indoor swimming pool and afterwards to have a BBQ.

As an added extra, Ken has sent the following two photos relating to Ferndale School.



Some members of staff



Inspecting the new school minibus

Ring any bells with anyone? Please contact swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

NOW SANFORD STREET SCHOOL



Following on again from our Sanford Street School article in the last newsletter, here are a couple of photos of Cyril Murtough whose name and work as a teacher was highlighted in our September newsletter.

Bring back any memories?



AND ANOTHER SCHOOL- RELATED STORY TO STIR YOUR MEMORY

This came from Mervyn Hewlett after reading the Wiltshire Family History Society quarterly journal, which many of you will receive. His wife Mary recalls the Harry Smith Band (see article in the journal page 16) playing regularly at dances in the Shrevenham Memorial Hall on Friday nights.

This led Mervyn to thinking about Ken Kitchen who played in the Johnnie Stiles Band, which we featured in a recent newsletter. Mervyn sent in the picture below.

Ken Kitchen is second right on the front row but he was also a woodwork teacher at Moredon School. Mervyn wrote:

“Ken was very conscious of how much he spent of school money on supplies for his lessons wood nails screws etc. If a pupil dropped a nail on the floor the lesson would stop whilst the whole class searched until it was found. Bent nails

and damaged screws were straightened and refurbished for future use. Quite often some pupils used this to disrupt the lesson and use up the time. Not me - woodwork was one of my favourite lessons.

I thought the mention would stir the memories of Swindon dancers and pupils of his classes at Moredon school. According to my sister-in-law, who was a teacher at Drove school, he worked there too at the time she did.”

Note: stir up any memories for you. Please let us know on swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

AND YET ANOTHER PHOTO OF THE JOHNNIE STILES BAND



ictured after winning their first ever Dance Band contest are the Johnnie Stiles Band. This win at ading was the first of many and would eventually lead them to become the All-British Dance Band ampions in both 1948 and 1949. Back row, left to right: Les Taylor, Eric Goodman, Gordon Talbot, thur Marsh, Sam Morgan (the band's manager); front row: Pete Coleman, Phil Hillier, Charlie Comley, hn (Jock) Walker, Johnnie Stiles, Ken Kitchen, Roger Summerfield.



Not sure when this was taken but it features Sid Titcombe with the Johnnie Stiles Band at The Empire Theatre.

Sid was a well-known comedian in Swindon, in his day appearing at The Empire Theatre. He was also an accordion player, a pantomime dame, and best friends with Bert Fluck.

DECIPHER IDENTIFICATION REQUIRED

(A recent family history query.) Any ideas please what this mysterious object could be and what the lettering signifies?

- What is it? A small, possibly coated silver container, less than 2" in diameter
- It has a detailed hunting scene on the lid



THE FLYING SCOTSMAN IS CELEBRATING ITS CENTENARY

We love our steam engines in Swindon and, although not a GWR locomotive, possibly the most famous engine is the 60103 Flying Scotsman. It hit the headlines recently when it was involved in a low-speed collision in Aviemore.

It's been celebrating its centenary this year and probably is most noted for being the first steam locomotive to reach 100 mph in 1934. It also set the longest non-stop run of 422 miles in August 1989 while in Australia.



60103 Flying Scotsman September 2023
Photo courtesy of Peter Todd via Ken Mumford

It was built in Doncaster in 1922 and named after the Flying Scotsman east coast mainline service between King's Cross and Edinburgh Waverley in 1923.

Its first non-stop service on that line was on 1 May 1928, taking 8 hours.

It was restored at the York National Railway Museum, who own it.

Ken Mumford has pointed out that Sir Herbert Nigel Gresley CBE (1876 -1941) was the Engineer responsible for the Flying Scotsman. He seems to have been to the LNER what Isambard Kingdom Brunel is to the GWR.

Interestingly it had been assigned various numbers throughout its history, entering service in February 1923 with the GNR No.1472 and assigned 4472 when named in February 1924, becoming a flagship loco for the LNER.

Later renumbered again twice for LNER, firstly as 502 and then 103. With nationalisation in January 1948, the Flying Scotsman was renumbered E103 but months later became 60103.

Photo: Ken Mumford June 1919 at Purton Common



THE SYCAMORE GAP

There were two comments about the Sycamore Gap and it does seem that even people in our own area are heartbroken at the wanton destruction.

Judy Rouse has special memories (see photo) as it was hers and Chris's (her late husband) last great outdoor adventure together. She says that the Sycamore Gap was such an iconic moment that has stayed in her memory.

They had walked Hadrian's Wall from Newcastle to Bowness on Solway in May 2019, and came down from Housesteads Fort to the Sycamore Gap in the late afternoon.



10 November 1951 Recorded in the Swindon Advertiser: McIlroys of Regent Street, Swindon, has not acquired Gainsborough's famous 'Blue Boy' but a remarkable copy of the painting was hanging in the store's restaurant. It was painted by local artist 64 year old Herbert Hardy Middleton of Devizes Road. He lost an eye at Gallipoli during his Army service but refused to give up his painting.

Herbert H Middleton, born 16 January 1887, was listed at 20 Devizes Road (office) Swindon at the time of the 1939 Register. He was an Accountant Rent Collector and his wife was Caroline M Middleton born 12 January 1886.

11 November 1939 As men aged 20-22 who registered for military service on October 21 were informed they would receive their call up papers during November, more than 30,000 railway men were released for military service.

15 November 1939 After a 5-2 thrashing by home team Stratton Villa, a team of soldiers were treated to an evening's entertainment at The White Hart Inn. The football match was described a 'interesting' during which the soldiers made a rousing start scoring twice in the first 20 minutes. Villa players C Woolford and D Woolford delivered four of the goals while Martin scored with a header from a corner kick. Mrs Butler and her helpers provided a good spread and the game was followed by a darts match and a sing song.

21 November 1963 A grand ballroom had been added to the Swindon McIlroys store in the 1930s with chandeliers and panelling allegedly sourced from doomed cruise liner the Mauritania. The Rolling Stones played there on 21 November 1963.

After being interviewed by Swindon Evening Advertiser, it was written of lead guitarist Brian Jones 'His command of the style is authoritative and he managed to achieve a mellow, amplified sound where most West Country 'rock' groups only muster a harsh twang.'

Friday 22 November 1963 John F Kennedy, 35th President of the USA, was assassinated while riding in a presidential motorcade through Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas. In the vehicle with him were his wife Jacqueline, John Connally (the Texas Governor) and his wife. JFK was shot by Lee Harvey Oswald, a former US Marine from the nearby Texas School Book Depository. Vice President Lyndon B Johnson assumed the presidency.

AVERN – CAN ANYONE HELP PLEASE?

Does the surname AVERN ring bells with anyone?

Looking for a James William AVERN born 2 August 1899 and died in 1979. He had siblings born in Swindon and married Frances M Bridgeman in 1924. They were living at 2 Bruce Street in 1928, later moved to 135 Moredon Road, but there may have been a connection to 117 Linslade Street. (The Bridgeman family had lived in Princes Street.)

James William served with the British Army Pioneer Royal Engineers, and his parents were Harry Ivan and Lucy Avern.

Any information on James William and his family gratefully received. Please contact swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk Thank you.

AND ... CAN ANYONE HELP WITH THIS ONE?

The 1891 census: The enumerator had written at the start: "... comprising the following streets: Kingshill Terrace, Albion Terrace, South View, William Street and Clarendon Cottages and Baker's House."

The first houses in Albion Street were built in 1877. Nothing found for Kingshill or for South View, although William Street does seem to have been covered in full.

Any ideas?

THE POST OFFICE AND THE WAR YEARS

With its origins in the reign of Charles I, the postal service grew so extensively that, by the outbreak of WW1, it was the country's largest single employer – according to the Royal Mail Archive.

The Royal Mail has been in the news somewhat of late and we've mentioned the postal system in our newsletters before. So just a few more thoughts:

- Have you heard of the hen-and-chickens bicycles? Evidently an experimental design trialled, but not adopted by the Post Office, in the 1880s. It looked like an overgrown penny-farthing with two small wheels and a large basket at each end.

- Do you have any early ancestors working for the Post Office? Post boys operated a relay system of delivering post, riding around 20 miles before being replaced on the sound of a horn by another rider. Coaches then came into operation, halving delivery times.
- Until 1711 all letters had to pass through London which was costly and inefficient. Then cross-posts between other towns were introduced.
- In 1883 the title of 'letter carrier' was officially replaced with 'postman'.

November is when we remember Armistice Day:

During WW1 the Post Office released some 75,000 men from its 250,000 staff to fight in all aspects of the Armed Forces. In excess of 8,500 were killed. Many served in the Post Office Rifles.

The civilian Post Office was vital in sending out recruitment and conscription papers. Also for the sad task of delivering the dreaded telegrams for those who had died or were missing in action. Twenty million parcels were sent to British POWs and five million packages to Britain for German POWs.

The War Office and Post Office censored all post and telegrams. Eighteen millions letters went missing on sunken ships.

During WW2 the Post Office ensured its services continued to run uninterrupted by air raids and set up offices in tents when buildings were damaged. Conscribed men were replaced by women and juniors.

Do you have any postal workers in your family history? Contact swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

GREAT UNCLE WILL – LIS MILLS

I used to think that no one in my family had any military background, therefore when Remembrance Sunday came around it didn't have any direct relevance for me. However, once I discovered details of my Great Uncle Williams' war, everything became more poignant.

As a child there was a couple of photos in my Grans old bluebird toffee box of William Webb. The only information I was given (after a lot of questioning on my part) is that he died young in the first world war.

Time elapsed, then I started taking searching for him seriously.



He was born in Corsham near Chippenham, in December 1894.

Looking in local (Wiltshire) regiments drew a blank...O.K. perhaps he moved and joined the forces further away from home or he was sent to another regiment as a replacement.

Many hours/days/years I spent hunting him down. No luck. John began to suggest he did not exist. (Despite the photographic evidence).

So, I reached a dead end....

However, one Christmas I phoned a distant relation in Canada, and I mentioned that I had searched high and low for William. She said she had met William when she was a toddler. Then amazingly everything started to slot into place.

William had travelled to Canada with the purpose of performing the role of best man at his older brother's wedding. His brother John had emigrated a couple of years earlier to Ontario.

After the wedding William decided to stay, as his employment prospects at home, didn't seem bright. Not long afterwards war broke out and he signed up in Canada into the 18th Battalion (Western Ontario)..No wonder I couldn't find details of his regiment I didn't know he had enlisted thousands of miles away!

Ironically training for the Canadians brought him back to Wiltshire, as he was based on Salisbury Plain.

Now my research really "kicked off." I could follow his regiment and the details of his war. He would have fought in some of the Canadians greatest battles. Vimy Ridge, Hill 70 and Ypres. Ironically, he was killed on 9th July 1917 whilst he was resting away from the front line. A stray German shell hit the camp he was resting in killing him and a number of other Canadian soldiers.

I began to feel emotional ties with great Uncle Will, so much so that we decided to visit his grave in Normandy.

I contacted the British Legion and made a donation for a wreath of poppies.

On the roadside next to the cemetery a single wild poppy was in bloom, I picked it as we made our way to Will's grave.





The Commonwealth Graves Commission gave detailed instructions of how to find the grave.

It was in the Aix-Noulette Communal Cemetery near Arras.

We placed both wreath and the poppy on his grave.

I felt sad that no one from his family had or would ever visit his grave.

After leaving we decided to have lunch and drove a short distance to the Theipval memorial.

Here we parked next to another British car. I went to the boot to get out our cheese and baguettes we had purchased earlier. The occupant of the neighbouring car was doing the same. We caught each other's eyes and I discovered that he too was visiting his great uncles grave. Our eyes filled with tears, and we commented on the futile waste of life war brings.

With that John and his wife had both decided to get out of the car and find out what had happened to lunch. They found us both in tears and unable to tell them of the coincidence. A poignant visit, one we will never forget. **LIS MILLS**



WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

(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)