

Wiltshire Family History Society, Swindon Branch, September 2023

MEETINGS REMINDER – see below for further details

Thursday 14 September 2023 via Zoom – ‘Family, House & Local History – sources before 1837’

Thursday 28 September 2023 at the Central Community Centre, Emlyn Square
‘Running out of Steam’



Bringing in the Sheaves

Harvest time at
Winterbourne Bassett.

Sarah Ann Harris (nee Peck) on
the left. She was born 1854 at
Ogbourne St George.

Mrs Wiltshire (?) in the middle
and the lady on the right is
unknown.

FROM CHAIRMAN JOHN

September, already, the start of a new season, which I am really looking forward to, I hope you are too.

As I have said in previous newsletters Yvonne always gives me food for thought. Quite unexpected this time. In the caption under a photograph of tea in “The Bakers Arms” is a reference to a big “yellow teapot”. My thoughts immediately went to “Bluebird Toys”, another long gone Swindon institution. Many local charities and organisations requested a “Big yellow teapot” for auction or to raffle. The company was always very generous, the town must have been flooded by these toys. Did you own one, buy one, win one or give one?

Thanks again to Yvonne and all who have contributed to this issue and at last the article I promised on Westcott Street is in this issue!!!

WHAT'S COMING UP

Thursday 14th September 2023 via Zoom

Family, house and local history - sources before 1837 - Jackie Depelle

We generally consider the main research resource before 1837 to be parish registers, certainly they are a key stone to going back in time. However, there are many other collections of material both held locally and nationally that may take us back towards 1538 - and beyond.

Thursday 28th September 2023 7.30 pm at the Central Community Centre, Emlyn Square
Running out of Steam - Phil Garrahan

Hubert Cook (1901-1966) and Leslie Cole (1910-1976) worked for the GWR Swindon but developed to become successful artists. Using slides of their art made in Swindon in the inter war years, this talk examines their contribution to Swindon's heritage sector.

MARGARET NEAVES

We have a little poster detailing the above. If you think you could help by distributing a copy or two please contact swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk Any help gratefully received – thank you.

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

15 September as part of Swindon's Heritage Open Days (HODS) – two talks at the Central Library:

5.45 pm 'Running out of Steam' by Philip Garrahan (see also above 28 September)
7.00 pm 'From Steam to Stegosaurus – Swindon's questions answered'

All of the event info is here:

<https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/visiting/event/running-out-of-steam>
<https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/visiting/event/from-steam-to-stegosaurus>

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

Swindon's heritage is fascinating and there will be lots happening on **Saturday 9 September** in and around the Railway Village. The theme this year is 'Creativity Unwrapped'.

You are invited to come along between 11.00 – 3.00 to the Central Community Centre in Emlyn Square for exhibitions and displays by, amongst others, the Mechanics' Institution Trust, Friends of the Health Hydro, Wilts & Berks Canal Trust and also Swindon Branch of the Wiltshire Family History Society **so please come and say 'hello' to us.** A celebration of **local celebrities over the years**, some more well-known than others.

Visit the Railway museum cottage at 34 Faringdon Road built c. 1846 (see our last Newsletter). Try rug-making and other Victorian inspired crafts.

Pick up an 'i-spy' Family Trail to explore the Railway Village or join one of the walking tours led by volunteers - 11.30 and 1.30.

Hear how new Swindon grew with the railways. How early Swindon residents built a new community.

Don't miss out on tea and cakes etc at The Baker's. You won't be disappointed AND while you are there don't miss the exhibition – 'Swindon Creativity Explored'. It's going to be something quite special.

Get a rare glimpse into The Cricketers – an historical pub in the heart of Swindon's Railway Village. It is currently undergoing the first phase of being restored.

Get involved in arts & crafts workshops run by Swindon Museum & Art Gallery.

There is even an archaeological dig in the GWR park and live music performances.

SEE YOU THERE



Free Family History Drop-In Session

Monday 18th September - 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.

Find
my past

The British
NEWSPAPER
Archive

ancestry



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.

RODBOURNE HISTORY

On **9 and 10 September** the Rodbourne Community History Group will be conducting tours around Rodbourne. These are great and most interesting walks and well-worth joining in for anyone with Rodbourne connections or those who just want to discover more about the area.

Places are limited so please book ASAP by contacting secretary@rodbournehistory.org or ring 01793 616558

REPORTS

RESEARCHING YOUR RAILWAY ANCESTOR by Judy Rouse – report from 27 July 2023

Judy started by giving us the bad news. In the 19th and early 20th centuries the Railway companies as a group nationally were one of the largest employers incorporating occupations we may not normally associate as being a railway job.

There were about 1900 railway companies in England and Wales in existence pre-1923 but only about 140 of these had staff records of any description, and the predominant records available on Ancestry were for the GWR and the LNWR. Approximately 50% of the books cover the Great Western Railway, while the books covering the London and North Western Railway are more dense with records.

The larger companies had been selectively transcribed and other companies with records had not been digitized, including the Welsh companies which remained independent until taken over by the GWR in 1923 at the grouping. No updating seems to have been carried out on the on-line records since 2016. There is also only very limited coverage of the Railway Company magazines, which were a mine of information as to promotions, retirements etc. (GWR magazine only covers 1938-43) Local Studies Centres usually have a more complete set.

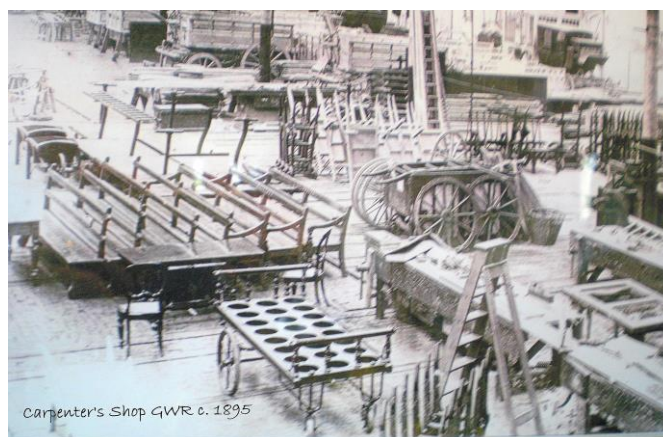
To quote Ancestry: All of the railways included in this database were once private companies that later came under authority of the British Transport Commission with the 1947 Transport Act.

The records for the 1923 post grouping period, with the exception of the GWR, have not survived to the same extent as the pre-grouping period. Part of the problem for the survival of later records was that from 1905 onwards the railway companies turned increasingly to mechanisation of their staff records onto card systems which did not survive the post grouping reorganisation.

A good source for identifying the records for other companies and their whereabouts up to 1947 nationalization, available in most reference libraries is: - **David T Hawkins Railway Ancestors: a guide to the staff records of the railway companies of England and Wales 1822-1947.**

The GWR records survived to a large extent due to it keeping its corporate identity throughout the period to de-nationalization.

Not all railway records, especially for the Railway Workshops, are at TNA and those for Swindon GWR works are at Wilts and Swindon Record Office and are due to the efforts of the late David Colcomb in searching these.



There are other railway employers such as London Transport, whose records are digitized by Ancestry, collieries where records might be in the relevant local record office and men who moved to work on overseas railways.

The records were kept for the railways' benefit, not family history researchers, so we should bear in mind that records come in a variety of formats.

- A complete Career history
- Occupation ledgers such as signalmen
- Location by the station or depot where the man was employed.

If you were lucky and a record for your ancestor existed, all these records could give much information as to type of employment, accidents reprimands etc. Sadly, there is for many companies a lack of Way and Works records for the thousands of labourers who maintained the track.

There was large variety of “non railway” employments, including:-

- Steamers and docks
- Police
- Fire brigades
- Work with horses
- Delivery men
- Hotels
- Refreshment cars overnight sleeper stewards
- Pullman car workers,
- Carpenters, stonemasons, bricklayers



Women were an important part of the workforce, sick bay attendants on steamers, maids in hotels and refreshment rooms, and from WW1 large numbers were employed as clerks and in other capacities while the men were fighting. Most of the non clerical jobs ceased once the men who survived came home.

Other records available to use to amplify or replace non existent staff records include

- Trade union
- Railway Friendly societies
- Hospital and sick funds
- Convalescent home records
- Superannuation and pension funds

If you are lucky, Trade Union records which are on Find My Past can be combined with Railway Friendly Society records etc to make up for the lack of a detailed railway employment record. Judy showed an example of her and Chris's research for an engine driver employed at Childs Hill Loco Depot, who was the first occupant of a newly constructed Midland Railway Village so apart from his complete staff record, and sickness benefit, there was a local history book on the village which gave full details of him and his extended family plus a plan of the tied 2 up 2 down house into which they were all crammed.

Judy ended by paying tribute to the work of her late husband Chris in collecting and indexing so many railway records which she used to illustrate her talk and exhorted us never give up hope!

THURSDAY 10 AUGUST – Visit to Railway Village Museum Cottage and The Baker's

What a lovely afternoon! And, before going any further, a very big THANK YOU to all the volunteers who made our afternoon so memorable.

We met outside the Museum Cottage at 2.00 and were shown around in four groups. This cottage was built in the mid-1800s and is now maintained as a typical Railway family house c. 1900.

We were told stories, and snippets about some of the residents of this particular house, a little of how they lived and their surroundings – far different from today.

They would have looked out over boggy fields, the canal and possibly up to Old Swindon where the next nearest houses would have been.



These two photos show the extension, built in the 1890s which would have made a tremendous difference to the living conditions and comfort of the occupants. Before 1890 the cooking would have taken place on the fire in the living room (see above). The copper would have been outside under a cover in the back yard.

Here we see Pam amidst the home comforts of the time.

The copper is built-in over in the corner, there is an array of old irons on the table ready for heating up in the fireplace. The mangle (with a McIlroy's stamp on it) is evidently a favourite when schoolchildren come to visit.

The dresser is at the opposite end of the extension/kitchen. Either side are tin baths, one small and one a little larger. You can also see the meat safe and a washing dolly. The larder cupboard is in the corridor near to where the original back door was located.

Incidentally, the cottage would very much like to acquire an authentic dolly tub so if anyone can help, please let us know.



This house would have been one of the larger ones in the Railway Village. Although hard to believe today, the 1851 census reveals that a family of 2 parents and 8 children were in residence. Some families in the Village took in lodgers when children left home.

We then went across to The Baker's which was once a thriving public house for many years and, before that again, was a bakery for the Railway Village. Now a café, it was laid out beautifully with white cutwork table cloths, bone china cups and a rose with fresh rosemary on each table. We had tea/coffee in abundance and could try as many different home-made cakes as we could manage to eat! These photos show how much we enjoyed it!



Note Chairman John being 'Mum' with his 'big yellow teapot'.

FROM LAST TIME ...

This from Judy Rouse in reply to John Mills' thoughts in the previous Newsletter:

I was especially glad to share John's trip down memory lane with "priv tickets" and free passes etc because like him I can still smell the factory smell on my father's clothes when he came home, including his old Home Guard overcoat which he wore for many years, a combination of oil and grease from the machinery and coal smoke from the engines. The outer clothes and overalls of all the men were so impregnated with the smell that the "workmen's trains" in the morning and at night had special stock reserved for them, and it was horrible if for any reason you had to catch an early train and went in on "the workman's". The smell of one man's clothing intensified by several hundred, plus the fear of spoiling one's best clothes from the seats. We always wore our "best" to go to London, no leisure wear in the 1950s and early sixties.

I was also delighted that he too remembered the later incarnation of "Lardy Gardener's" confections, which were taken over by Godwins, when they took over the bakery. I know Purton men did a roaring trade in buying lardies fresh from the oven on their way to the train and selling them on at the factory gates, much to the dismay of us children, because being a yeast recipe they were only baked in the mornings with the bread, and by the time our mums got there they were nearly always sold out. Saturday was the best morning if you turned up early enough, and I can remember the sugar glaze at the bottom and the rich moist fruit sugar and lard fillings. It makes my mouth water even now. Sadly the recipe died with Mrs Godwin after she closed the bakery. Since my mother died (as my father and I adored lardy, being a Wiltshire girl she made her own after Godwin's closed) I have only recently come across one that anywhere matches it, which my son in law buys as a treat for me from a bakery in Andover on his way into school. As this is in Hampshire, I don't feel this can count as "proper lardy"!

MERVYN HEWLETT has sent us some memories relating to his father Frederic Joseph HEWLETT and the GWR

My father's story about the GWR fete was that yes, the cups of tea were free, however having to boil up such large quantities of water was a problem, so the organisers decided to use a railway engine tender - with the result most people who had a cup found themselves sitting on the privy for quite a few days following. As Dad related this as one of his memories, I think he must have taken advantage of the free tea!

I have Dad's GWR Rule Book from when he started there in 1917. He was described as a boy at age 17. Some conditions of employment were very restrictive, such as a fine of 2s 6d and instant dismissal for making work of the wrong dimensions, or of inferior quality. Very harsh on a new starter – or perhaps just encouraging him to be careful?

He worked a nut and bolt machine plunging holes in red hot ingots, with the result his arms were badly burnt and scratched from the handling of the blanks. The Rule Book lists the fine that an employee would have to pay if they lost or abused the GWR tools, files etc. He said it was down to the opinion of the bowler-hatted foreman of his workshop.

Mervyn says he would be happy to copy and pass on the contents of the Rule Book for anyone seeking further information.

No idea if Dad ever was fined but the same very strict foreman gave him the job of overhead crane driver in the iron foundry J1 shop in later years, which entailed carrying three tons of molten cast iron up the foundry for the moulders to use, way below him, attending the wooden and sand filled moulds for the engine pistons, connecting rods etc. Dad also said the rail track, which the crane ran along had joints that were not smooth so there was a danger of spilling the molten cast iron if not careful !!!

Father had a hobby of making cement garden ornaments at home in Moredon Road. After my mother died in 1972 Dad moved to the Groves residential home in Whitworth Road. He decided to carry on with his hobby but not in the same materials and he turned to papier mache.



Artistry in paper . . . from the hands of craftsman Fred Hewlett.

At an OAP Arts & Crafts exhibition the osprey he is holding was awarded a certificate for the best in his class.

I have in my front garden a full-size concrete model of an alligator with a partially open mouth, which passing children delight in running in my front gate and depositing pebbles from the gravel surrounding him into his open mouth.

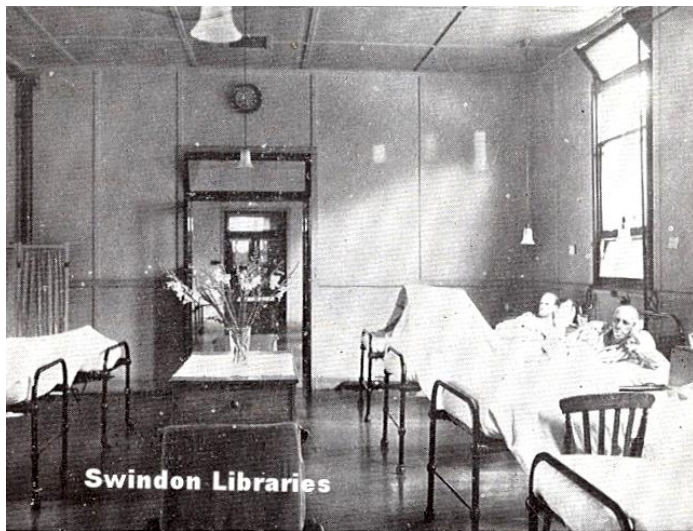
Whilst in Moredon Road, he made and displayed in the front garden a full-size penguin, the croc and several life-sized seagulls. Often passers-by would stop and take a second look.

Sometimes they were entered into the GWR annual Arts & Crafts exhibition much to Dad's delight. One year he entered two small gnomes – the judges' comments were "not in proportion". My father's comment in return was "how do they know, have they ever seen one?" Not deterred, he entered a different model the following year. **MERVYN HEWLETT**

NOTE: CRICKET & JOHN LAVERICK

I had intended to include more about W G Grace and Swindon's John Laverick in this Newsletter, but have decided to postpone until October. Yvonne

GWR MEDICAL FUND HOSPITAL



Hospital Extension—Male Ward

Following on from our last Newsletter, Mike and Pam Stubbs also sent in this information, again taken on various census dates, but this time focusing on patients actually in the hospital on those days:

Thanks to Local Studies, Swindon Library for providing this photo – taken slightly later in 1947.

Do you recognise any of these names? Please let us know – swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

On census day 1921 (19 June)

William Jason BARRETT 30 Leather Trimmer born Reading, Berkshire
 Charles John OAKFORD 25 Fitter Turner born Swindon
 George Fowler BENNETT 49 Wheelwright born Swindon
 Henry HUNT 61 Plater born Wootton Bassett
 William REEVES 38 Carman born Stratton

On census day 1911 (2 April)

Arthur SAWYER 41 Railway Locomotive Blacksmith born Gloucester
 William GARDINER 41 Railway Carriage Gas Fitter born Abingdon
 George KERSLAKE 38 Railway Carriage Machine Man born Yeovil
 Charles Alfred CHAMBERS 20 Railway Locomotive Cleaner born Swindon
 William Herbert DAVIES 19 Railway Locomotive Boiler Maker born Swindon
 Frederick Mark FELL 14 Part time Student born Swindon
 Fred WELCH 5 born Swindon

On census day 1901 (31 March)

Charles H ALLEN 25 born Westbury
 Leonard DADGE 21 Fireman (stationary engine) born Bristol
 John LANGEAR 28 Boiler Maker Labourer born Castle Eaton
 John W HINDER 29 Labourer Porter born Stratton St Margaret
 Herbert B JENNER 29 Shunter Points born Brookthorpe, Glos.
 Charles BULLEY 22 Engine Fitter born Swindon
 Thomas CURTIS 52 Railway Engine Fitter Labourer born Uffington
 Lewis LAMKIN 29 Railway Blacksmith's Striker born Boughten Monchelsea, Kent
 Arthur PEAPLE 7 born Rodbourne
 George DOBSON 6 born Swindon

On census day 1891 (5 April)

John HOPKINS 47 Railway Station Master born Weare, Somerset
 David COOK 57 Railway Factory Labourer born Wroughton
 Edmund RYAN 15 Labourer Sawyer, Saw Mill born Bombay, India

On census day 1881 (3 April)

No patients in the hospital at this time.

REMEMBER THIS? 18.09.1962

More than 2,100 Railways Works personnel were to be made redundant in 1963 and 1964, British Rail announced. Many of those affected were employed in the carriage works, which was to be all but completely closed by 1965. Union leaders said they were not accepting the proposals and planned instead to come back to management with their own suggestions.

WET JULY

Good for gardeners but not for holiday-makers. In July 1950 it was reported that considerable damage had been done to crops in Wiltshire due to heavy rain and strong winds in the last few days, and farmers feared it was going to be a difficult harvest,

SWINDON TOWN CENTRE

Upheaval? A mess? Yes but back in June 1959 there were also decisions being made. The Swindon Advertiser reported:

'Swindon Corporation's plans for a dual carriageway shopping parade along the site of the old canal were abandoned in favour of a 40 ft pedestrian precinct. The shopping parade would extend from the roundabout at College Street School to Catherine Street.'

WESTCOTT STREET – John Mills

Back in the May edition of the newsletter, Yvonne wrote about the struggles of the Uzzell family and their fight with Thamesdown Borough Council. The council had a compulsory purchase order on their property, 6 Westcott Street, as part of their slum clearance scheme.

Yvonne then posed the question does anyone know any more about this story?

Well, I don't know what happened to the Uzzell's, but number 7 Westcott Street, directly opposite number 6, was the house that Henry Mills, my great grandfather, lived in when he moved to Swindon from Brokenborough in the early 1890's. The Mills family lived here until its demolition in the mid 1970's.

"I don't care if they send the bulldozers in I'm not b**** moving from the house I have lived in for more than 20 years" said Richard Uzzell to the Evening Advertiser. As far as my Great Aunt Rose was concerned, the Uzzells were newcomers because she had lived over 80 years in Westcott Street. The four Stoke sisters (at number 10) (aged 54 to 60) had lived there over 50 years, many other residents had equal tenure.

1901

7 Westcott Street

Henry Mills	43	Stationary Fireman	Brokenborough
Louisa Mills	49		Devizes
Frederick Mills	21	Railway Clerk	Brokenborough
Albert Mills	18	Machine man Drill	Brokenborough
George Mills	16	Railway Clerk	Brokenborough
Rose Mills	9		Swindon

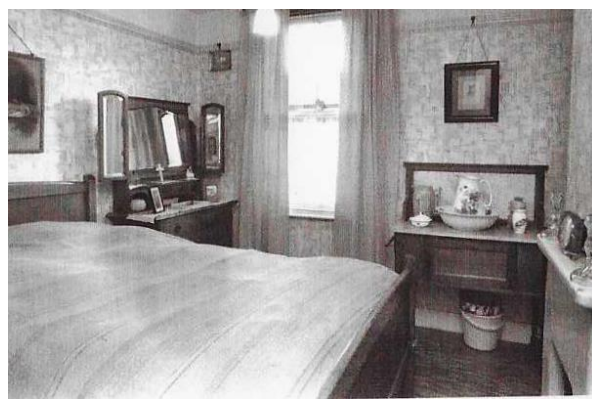
By 1911 Frederick, George and Albert had married and moved out. Rose was now a sewing machinist (tailoring) possibly in Comptons. Albert, my grandfather, was now living at 169 Westcott Place just around the corner from his parents and sister.

In 1917 Rose married Walter John Wheeler and after the war Walter moved into No 7. Walter had lived at 143 Westcott Place. Both he and Rose attended Westcott School but not in the same class as Rose was 3 years his senior.

Louisa died in 1934. Henry was still living with Rose and Walter at No.7 in 1939, he died the following year.

Rose and Walter were quite content with their house, but the council decided it was a slum area and they wanted to demolish 58 houses (including 169 Westcott Place) a pub and a shop to build sheltered accommodation. Declaring it a slum area made it easier to obtain compulsory purchase orders and obtain government funding.

Their house had two reception rooms a kitchen, bathroom and three bedrooms. "We have all the comforts and conveniences we want here. It isn't a slum" (Rose Wheeler. Evening Advertiser 11/11/1972). See photos below. You decide if it's a slum or did it just need "some modernisation". Grants were available for improvements but those who applied from this area were refused.



They moved to Acacia Grove a year or so later. Walter died in 1975 and Rose two years later. I don't think they really recovered from the move from the community they loved. I hope the Uzzell's who fought on for a number of years fared better. **JOHN MILLS**

SWINDON ARTS CENTRE, Devizes Road

Officially opened 1 September 1956 by Swindon Mayor N V Toze and Arts Council vice-chairman Wyn Griffith.

The Methodist Central Hall in the town centre had previously doubled as an Arts Centre. More than two decades later the striking old building would be wrecked by fire, forcing punk band The Clash to switch a gig to another location.

The Devizes Road centre had formerly been a dance venue called the Bradford Hall. During WW2 it had been popular with service personnel, probably including some of the American units.

It was converted into a 240 seat theatre and has been through a number of refurbishments in the decades since.

WITHIN LIVING MEMORY – do these names ring any bells?

BACK TO SCHOOL this month but exam results for some will have recently been in their minds. Here are some successes for one Swindon school in 1962.

Martin Robins has sent in this list of boys attending the Sanford Street school in Swindon. He thought it may be of interest to our readers.

Their maths teacher was Cyril Murtough, described as being 'upright in bearing, impeccably dressed and highly disciplined'. He had a very relaxed style of teaching.

Cyril was Anglo-Indian and educated in a top boarding school in India, in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains. He and his wife Bessie lived in Jeffries Avenue and worshiped at St Barnabas Church.

They retired to live with their son in South Africa, passing away in advanced years.

Please get in touch if you know of any of these names – swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

Many thanks.

G. C. E. MATHS RESULTS.		1962.
Detek Arnesen.	1.	
John Billingham.	1.	
Bryan Boulton.	1.	
Colin Bowles.	2.	
Barry Bright.	1.	
Richard Bristol.	3.	
Richard Buxton.	2.	
David Carey.	6.	
Brian Carter.	1.	
John Frankum.	6.	
Jerence Greenwood.	4.	
Amelstan Hutchins.	4.	
Kenneth Inglis.	5.	
Peter Little.	1.	
Roger Lovegrove.	1.	
Peter Minter.	2.	
Bernard Pagett.	3.	
Peter Pickles.	1.	
Michael Sammons.	1.	
Peter Waters.	1.	

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SAVING ON FUEL BILLS

Something we all try to do! The 1950s report in our last Newsletter mentioned 'Rinso' and Fran Bevan, Swindon Advertiser 9 November 2009, was looking back at a suggestion in 1939:

'British housewives were asked to give up the practice of boiling their whites on washday, thus saving the country a predicted £2,500,000 in fuel. Perhaps not surprisingly, this announcement came from the producers of Rinso who showcased their product at a luncheon held at London's prestigious Savoy Hotel: 'Tests have been proved' said a scientist from the company's laboratory 'that clothes keep a better colour and last longer if they are washed in Rinso without boiling and without hard rubbing'.

The company arrived at their cost-cutting revelation by estimating that Rinso would save an hour's fuel on the average weekly wash. Across 11,000,000 British homes this equalled a saving of 572,000 hours of applied heat.



'Cost this in the terms of the cheapest available fuel, namely coal, and you will find that at the most conservative estimate the country would save £2,500,000 if women would give up the boiling habit'

WITHIN LIVING MEMORY – Swindon's Railway Village Memories of living at 32 Reading Street from Richard Kimber

I was born five doors away from the old Wesleyan Chapel, later the Railway Museum, in 32 Reading Street on August 11th 1950. At the time, the Korean War was on, Princess Anne was born four days after me, and the NHS was in its infancy. Believed to be modelled on Swindon's GWR Medical Fund Hospital.

Our home at 32 Reading Street had three bedrooms, toilet outside in the cold. Dad James, known as Jim, cut up the newspaper into squares for you know what. We had a big tin bath to start with as far as I can remember, and then, later, a fitted one. My first memory was at a very young age, perhaps a toddler, sitting in the old tin tub on bath night.



Photo: Mum, Marie, Richard on the tricycle and brother Peter.

In the early 50s, before being the age to go to school, I can remember listening to 'Listen with Mother' on our old wireless in the scullery. Bill and Ben were my favourites, with Little Weed. Can you remember their catchphrase, 'Flobbadob'? A year or two later it was transferred to the TV. Then it was a sad goodbye as I started school. My first school was Queenstown Infants where the new Zurich building is. It overlooked the dried up Wilts and Berks canal and was then turned into a car park. Memories of the very small milk bottle ...later stopped due to governmental saving. That's all I can remember from that school.

At the age of five, I was in Victoria Hospital having my tonsils out. My only other time of being in hospital was in the old GWR Medical Fund Hospital in Faringdon Road, now a community centre. I ended up in there after playing bullfrog in our street. The aim was to run across the street (almost always empty in the 50s and early 60s) from one pavement to the other without getting tagged by the bulldogs in the middle. Me being clumsy, tripped and hit my head on the approaching kerb. Ending up for the night in hospital.

Times seemed more innocent then. When I was 10, in 1960/61, I can remember walking all the way up to the Old Town's High Street where they held street fairs. I can hear now the great music blaring out from the rides. Do you remember the Everley Brothers' 'Cathy's Clown', Paul Anka's 'Diana' and the brilliant 'Runaway' by Del Shannon? 'Rhythm of the Rain' by The Cascades was also popular and was my favourite record



Also still aged 10, my father Jim, a train driver in the old steam days, entered me in the 1960 Swindon Jubilee Carnival as a robot.

It was a hot day as I remember, certainly inside my robot box and we had to parade around town! Anyway, I came first!

What's remarkable was the fact that children played in the street together safely, ages from 5 to 15, playing various games. Something perhaps our children are missing out on today!



Photos: taken outside 32 Reading Street, probably to celebrate birthdays.

Do you recognise anyone in these pictures?
contact swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

In 1962 the Wesleyan Chapel was turned into the home of some magnificent steam trains, and the front wall of the building was knocked out to get them in. The builders used to have sand out the front of the building and I used to play in it (when they weren't looking) with my Dinky vehicles. It closed in 2000 and now is The Platform.

Were you afraid of Jumping Jacks fireworks and Bangers? Now banned but we had fun with them, now to my shame. I remember having a tooth ache on Christmas Day of all days. My Dad found a dentist in Milton Road. They looked like Nina and Frederik, a popular Denmark folk duo of the time.

Into my teens, I went to College Street Junior School where I had the cane for (wrongly blamed) going into the girls toilets. The fine building, pulled down shortly afterwards, stood opposite Sanford Street Secondary Modern School, where The Parade now stands. Then I went temporarily to Euclid Street School, followed by Sanford Street until I left school at 14 in July 1965. We moved to Covingham.

Back to The Village, I think it's criminal how the Mechanics Institute has been allowed to deteriorate. I was taught to dance, play snooker and see shows there, even winning my first jackpot on a one man bandit. Last time I played on one - finish on a winning streak I say. Across the road and still there, is the Glue Pot Inn, where once a week I would get a drink and a packet of Smith's crisps with a little blue salt bag in it. **RICHARD KIMBER**

NOTE: do YOU have a similar story to tell? Please share – swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk

GRO DIGITAL IMAGES

From July 6th it has been possible to get downloads of (some) birth and death official certificate entries for £2.50 each from the GRO (General Register Office). This means that for the price you would pay for one paper certificate, you can get four online! It's a no-brainer if it is the **information** you want rather than the **presentation**. At present it is only available for births from 1837 to 1922 and deaths from 1837 to 1887. But that is still a lot of money you *can* save.

If you are used to using the GRO site www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/login.asp, log-in as usual and find the index entry you want. When you select the entry, you will be given the option to order and pay for a certificate, a PDF or a digital image. After going through the payment procedure, the image will be delivered (may be a short delay) to your computer.

Full guidance can be found on the Lost Cousins Newsletter for 12th July. To find this, go to the Lost Cousins website www.lostcousins.com, select "Latest Newsletter" from the menu, enter "GRO digital" in the search box and select "12/7/2023 Lost Cousins Newsletter". Lost Cousins Newsletters are completely free and you can sign up to receive them – always worth reading, if sometimes a bit strange! **JENNY POPE**

Still on the subject of certificates – births, marriages and deaths - family historians are always interested in baptisms also.

This was sent in by Ken Mumford.



SEPTEMBER 1981 – TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

Having chased children off a site very close to Winifred Street which was about to be dug up, workmen discovered a hoard of what looked to be lemonade bottles, about six inches long and made of clear glass, which lay close to the surface.

Then someone spotted a corroded sign close by saying 'BOMBS – store bombs (preferably in cases) in cool place. Underwater if possible.'

During WW2, with a Nazi invasion seemingly inevitable, a Home Guard Unit buried 245 self-igniting phosphorous bombs, the idea being that they would have been retrieved and hurled at German troops should the need arise. The invasion, of course, never happened and the bombs lay hidden and forgotten.

An Army disposal team gathered together the weapons and had a fire hose on standby – a wise decision as one of the bombs spontaneously ignited.

... on a Lighter Note

19 September 1960 Chubby Checker's 'The Twist' entered the US charts and launched a dance craze.

DOES ANYONE REMEMBER?

In the Swindon Advertiser recently Melinda Messenger 'opened' a new pet shop in Swindon and remarked that she remembered visiting Brett's the pet shop in Commercial Road. I also used to love going in there to see the puppies, kittens, baby bunnies and tiny chicks. I believe there may be a photo or two of the outside of the shop? But I wonder if there are any of the inside? Does anyone else remember it? Yvonne - swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk



An old Bowser that's seen better days and possibly a few harvests over the years.

(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)