

**Back in
1975**

**Park Farm
The Street
Moredon**



The Swindon Society Newsletter - April 2024



**... Now
sheltered
housing
-
September
2023**



Welcome to the April Newsletter

Hello and welcome to the April newsletter.

Wow! A quarter of the way through the year already, the clocks have gone forward and we have longer evenings ahead of us. Let's hope we also have some kinder weather so that we can enjoy them to the full.

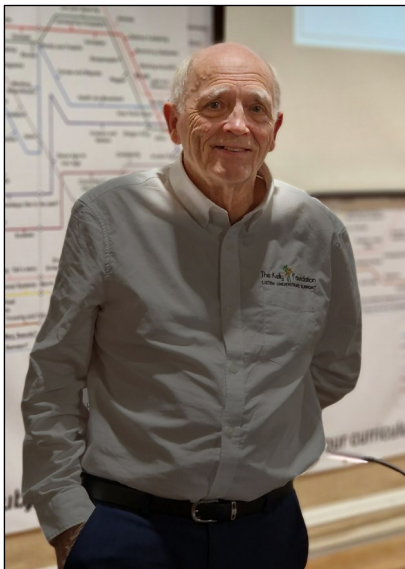
Tonight, we are delighted to welcome Gordon Shaw from the Rodbourne Community History Group with a presentation entitled *Tour of Rodbourne History*.

We had such an interesting evening last June on our summer outing, roaming around the streets of Rodbourne with Gordon as our guide. He is such an authority on everything Rodbourne, and this talk promises to be very interesting indeed. So, sit back and enjoy your evening.

Once again, don't forget to send me your stories and recollections - or just something factual about Swindon, or a building that you find interesting. Share it with us, we would love to hear about it.

Contact me at either of the following email addresses or you can even hand me your written piece - whatever is better for you:

- me - angie.phillips@ntlworld.com
- or - info@theswindonsociety.co.uk



Markets, Masons and Music

by

John Stooke

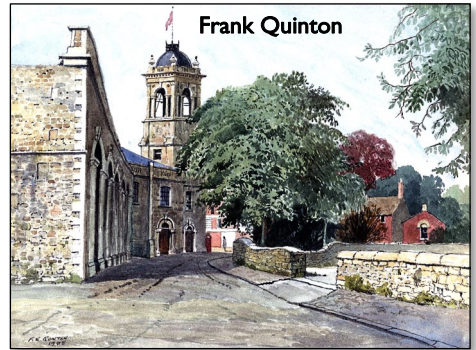
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13th March 2024

Last month we were given by a talk by committee member and all-round knowledgeable bloke John Stooke on the history of Market Square and the Corn Exchange/Locarno. John began by giving us a brief history of Market Square prior to the Corn Exchange being built. There were some transfers in ownership along the way, but probably the first bit of importance in establishing a market here was Thomas Goddard being granted a weekly cattle market

and twice-yearly fair in 1626. The markets weren't doing so well by 1640, however the cattle plague in Highworth (which John reminded us was bigger and more important than Swindon at this point) increased the trade through the Swindon cattle market.

We were then told that it was here that there was a pillory and stocks and other 'entertainment' held here included bear baiting until 1810. It was a regular sport for the time, but it got me wondering - where did the bears come from? It seems an awful lot of trouble to be shipping them in from the continent, as they weren't native to Britain by that point. Anyway, John then showed us an image from the early 1800s of the square by John Lockett Jefferies a relative of Richard Jefferies. He owned the bakery on the corner of the square. We then saw another artwork of the area, this time by Frank Quinton in 1980, this time showing the Corn Exchange (or Locarno as it would probably have been referred to at that point).



This led on to talking about the Corn Exchange, which was built between 1852-54 on land leased from Ambrose Lethbridge Goddard. It included a hall with room for



500 people and it housed the polling station and the Swindon Local Board within years of being opened. Although it was built as a corn exchange, it was found that ground floor of the building was too small to house the market! It was therefore leased to the wine merchant William Brown, and John showed us that they infilled the ground floor archways so that it

could be used to process the wine. They were known as Brown & Nephew and later as Brown & Plummer. We then got a surprise when Society member Royston Cartwright appeared on the screen, albeit it a younger version. He explained that he worked for Brown & Plummer and told us about his working day decanting (and drinking!) port.

A market hall was still needed in Swindon though, so Goddard leased more land and evicted some people to enable the building of an extension to the Town Hall building. It opened in 1866 to a banquet for 300 men followed by a ball. John detailed how the extension was built in Swindon stone and the whole building was combined on the inside, so they weren't two separate entities. Events were being held in the new hall very soon after it opened, with it holding up 1,000 people sat down and 10,000 stood up. Bearing those numbers in mind, John then told us of possibly one of the worst attended events in the hall's history when only 6 people turned up to an event called 'The State of England and the State of the World'!

We were then moved on a little in time when John told us about the huge fall in corn prices 20 years later, which led to the building being permanently converted into a 1,000 seat auditorium. The wine merchants also expanded into the basement. Further on again, a town hall was built for Swindon New Town at Regent Circus. When the Old and New Town Local Boards combined, all the functions being carried out in the Old Town Hall moved down the hill to the new building. The Masonic Orders later moved into the building and stayed for nearly 80 years. It was home to several lodges, most notably the Royal Sussex Lodge and the Daniel Gooch Lodge. However, they moved out in 1972 when they bought the plot of land adjacent to the building and purpose-built something rather less grand, in which they are still housed today.

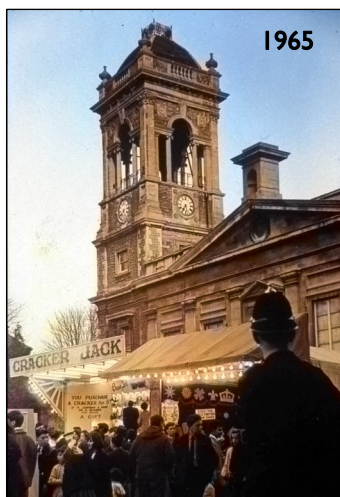


Also in the building for nearly as many years as the Masons, was a rolling skating rink. There was one in the building from 1909 right up until the building's closure in the 1970s. There was also a cinema from 1919 to 1949, which latterly became a concert venue called the Locarno. Initially the venue attracted big band music. John expounded his unrivalled musical knowledge then telling us about a variety of bands and people that I had



not previously heard of, such as the resident Ken Kitching Band. The slightly more famous Ronnie Scott and his band also played there. In the 1960s it was a popular venue for the bands such as The Kinks, The Yardbirds and The Animals. All the while though, the Locarno wasn't granted an alcohol licence. To get around this though, Mr and Mrs Spackman were brought in to sell alcohol on the premises from the nearest pub to the Locarno, the Bell and Shoulder of Mutton Inn.

Outside the Locarno, funfairs were held until 1965 when they moved to the roomier County Ground car park. As John described the range of activities going on in the building towards the end of its life, it struck me that the Locarno had become almost akin to a leisure centre, holding dancing, roller skating, wrestling events and bingo as well as concerts.





The Locarno was finally closed in the 1970s which set the stage for its current state of decay. It was bought by local business owner Gael Mackenzie in 1999 who over the years has had plans to convert the site into a nightclub, restaurant, hotel, cafe and residential spaces. None of these plans have come to fruition unfortunately and the

plans were also hindered by arson attacks in May 2003 and again in May 2004. There was a threat of demolition in 2012, although the building is Grade II listed. We continue to be hopeful that some future plans will give this beautiful Swindon landmark a new lease of life.

John then finished the talk by playing a selection of songs by some of the 1960s pop bands he'd mentioned earlier.

Kelly Blake - March 2024



Swindon Society Meeting 8th May 2024

Themed Selection of Swindon Slides (Preceded by the AGM) by Your Committee

Next month is the AGM - but don't fear because each year we have managed to whiz through this official procedure and move swiftly on to the main event - the presentation of slides selected by your committee.

Each committee member has thoughtfully selected a set of images with a common theme. They will enlighten us all as to why they have chosen the images and possibly impart some additional information, you never know.

We hope you enjoy our selections

HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!



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Gallery: www.flickr.com/swindonlocal

Opening Hours

Mon: By appointment only
Tues: 10am to 4.00pm
Wed: 10am to 4.00pm
Sat: 10am to 1.00pm

'European style' Victors make Swindon bow

ABOUT 50 Wiltshire dealers and traders were introduced to the new Vauxhall Victors by Skurray's, the Swindon Vauxhall distributors, yesterday. The cars were also introduced to the Press.

The Victors, which from today are on general show, are the Standard and Super versions, and a de luxe saloon, with a four-speed synchromesh gearbox with a short floor-mounted lever, is available for demonstrations. A new estate car will be introduced in October.

The shape of the new Victors will surprise many people and should prove much more popular with motorists who thought the old models were too American in their style. The new versions have very smooth lines and loow elegant cars.

"The public likes something new but it doesn't know how new," said Mr. J. L. Vaux, assistant sales manager of Skurrays. "The Victor was too new for them and this styling is more to European tastes. The new head of Vauxhall is an Englishman instead of an American and the new Victors reflect this."

So, I decided to investigate myself, But... I had the added advantage of seeing the whole newspaper clipping which included this small piece which led me to do a Google search of "Battle of Britain Day at Colerne Airfield."

Ta da!... Only a little further probing and I discovered that the Battle of Britain "At Home" Air day at Colerne was held on Saturday 19th September 1964.

So, there you have it. The whirlwind must have taken place sometime during the week preceding Saturday 19th September 1964.



Angie Phillips - April 2024

Rodbourne's Miniature Whirlwind ** Dating the Event **

Following on from last month's article and newspaper clipping, I have been contacted by quite a few readers who cleverly noticed the additional news article that was on part of the clipping regarding the introduction of the new Vauxhall Victors to Swindon by Skurray's.

- My sister Barbara was the first to say that she tried to find out when the European style Vauxhall Victors were introduced. At first she thought 1960 but then found a brochure for 1964, so wasn't too sure.
- Then I had an email from Steve who said "I think the Rodbourne hurricane must have been September 1960 - only because that was when the Vauxhall Victor FB was announced (14th September 1960 according to Wikipedia)".
- Then Julia emailed me to say she thought it was the Vauxhall Victor was new in 1957 when she was 10 years old - but she had no memory of the whirlwind.



U.S. aircraft in Colerne display

A new attraction in the Battle of Britain Day 'At Home' at RAF Colerne near Chippenham, on Saturday, will be a demonstration of in-flight refuelling.

A U.S. Air Force KB-50J tanker will simultaneously "feed" three aircraft—a B-66, F-100 and F-101, as they fly over the Transport Command airfield.

Eight aircraft are expected to take part in the annual handicap air-race which is one of the main events of the day. Taking part this year are a Hastings, Anson, Chipmunk, Vampire, Canberra, Jet Provost and Javelin.

A wide variety of aircraft will be taking part in the flying display and will be on show in a static display.

Programme - 2024

April 10th

Tour of Rodbourne History

Gordon Shaw

May 8th

**Themed Selection of Swindon Slides -
Preceded by the AGM**

Committee's Selection

June 12th

Summer Outing (TBA)

Everyone

*We meet at 7.30pm on the second Wednesday of the month
at Goddard Park School, Welcombe Avenue, Swindon SN3 2QN
(except for June, July and August).*

The Search is Still On...



Are you good with numbers? If so, you could be the one!

The Society is in need of someone to "audit" the financial accounts at the end of next month in readiness for our AGM in May. If you have a financial background or quite simply are numerically competent we would really like you to look over the figures of our simple profit and loss account to ensure that the calculations are correct and the figures tally.

Can you help? Please let us know as soon as possible so that we can call off the search. Contact: Info@theswindonsociety.co.uk

Thank you!



**The Swindon Society - recording
the changing face of Swindon**

1.8K likes • 1.9K followers



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FACEBOOK



Have you seen our Facebook page recently?

Kevin is doing a fantastic Job and we now have nearly two and a half thousand followers!

Don't forget to like and follow our Facebook page.



www.facebook.com/theswindonsociety



Princes Cottage Lives On



I came across this picture in our archive. Unfortunately, it was one of a few that have not been catalogued with a great deal of information... but I know that this is Princes Cottage which is located in Purley Avenue, Park South. And the reason I know this is because I once had a sleep-over there with my sister Gina

because this was where our friend Lorraine lived. As I remember (it was a while ago mind you so I might be wrong!) the rooms inside were small and cosy and it had a really narrow, turning staircase at the side, which I think you accessed through a door at the bottom.

Anyway I saw the above picture and thought how sad it looked - all boarded up like that. However, all is not lost because this cottage still exists - well it kind of does - it doesn't look very much like this anymore. The cottage has been built upon and restructured and is now four separate dwellings, numbered 1 - 4 Princes Cottage. Here's another photo taken in 2009, courtesy of Google, that more clearly shows the new layout.



It was quite a coincidence that I was reminiscing with my sister Barbara only the other day (which is par for the course when we get talking) and she was telling me that when our

family first moved to Swindon from London the estate was obviously very new and all local activities were held in a farmhouse up the road. She and my other sister Cheryl (I think I've mentioned them all now) used to go to

dance classes there and mum went to Bingo sometimes. She mentioned that the farmhouse would have been roughly about where the Park South Community Centre is now, although it seemed like a long way away when they were literally walking over fields! So when I mentioned Princes Cottage to her and where it was located we came to the conclusion that this must have been the “farmhouse” where they danced their little socks off... And just that little thought in my head makes me want to chuckle.

Angie Phillips - April 2024

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Manchester House

Little Bit of Information on an Interesting Building

Following our back page image of the Cleverley & Son premises, Yvonne Neal very kindly sent me details of an article that was in the Evening Advertiser on 12th September 2019. It was a piece written by Barrie Hudson and it had an accompanying picture that was near-on identical to our own image. The words read as follows:



Manchester House was built at a time when Swindon was a market town and railways were undreamed of.

This Swindon building was first seen in about 1700 and last seen in 1964 when the wrecking ball came for it. Just visible at the left of the image is a clue to its location - the corner of High Street and Newport Street.

Part of the Co-op now occupies the space where the building and the structures attached to it stood.

According to the Victoria County Histories volume for Wiltshire, the old building with its six bays of windows was called Manchester House.

It seems to have been built for a member of the merchant class in what was then a market town.

This building was later occupied by Skurray's Motors and was restructured in 1926 and given the familiar mock-Tudor frontage that a lot of us oldies still fondly remember. Certainly a little strange-looking for a motor showroom. However, this all changed in 1971 when what was left of Manchester House was demolished and gave way to the new Skurray's showrooms - a bit more conventional, but not as pleasing to look at.



Unfortunately, this building only stood for thirteen years before it too was demolished to make way for the new Co-op store.

Radnor Street Cemetery Walks

Join us and find out about some of the people who are remembered here

Meet outside the chapel at 2pm

Sunday 24th April 2024

The Radnor Street team,
Fran, Noel and Andy

can be contacted on 07968 246792

Please also see the
Radnor Street Cemetery Facebook page



www.facebook.com/radnorstreetcemetery



Swindon Quiz - Just for Fun !

This month's quiz is one of mine.

Where was this sign?

Easy peasy isn't it? In that case let me know that you know. Get in touch on the email address below or directly email me at: angie.phillips@ntlworld.com.

Come on - you'll get a name check in the next newsletter!



Last Month's Answer



This is the answer to last month's picture. The emblem was on the Prince of Wales pub in Union Street.

Surprisingly, we didn't have any responses to this one... perhaps you thought it was too easy. Or maybe you genuinely did no know!



The Parade - 1976



Carlisle Avenue Area 1935

