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Goods Shed
Marlborough
Road
1939...**



The Swindon Society Newsletter - April 2023



**...and
more
recently
2023**



3 April 2023



Welcome to the April Newsletter



Hello and welcome to our April newsletter.

I can't believe Easter has come and gone already, especially when it feels like Christmas was just around the corner! People say *time passes faster the older you get...* well, that certainly feels true.

So, we are half way through April already which means (if you are interested) you are just in time to look out for the Lyrids meteor shower, which can be seen between April 16th to 26th every year. And if you don't manage to spot that, there is also another meteor shower called the Eta Aquarids, which appears from 21st April onwards. Let's hope the sky stays clear enough to catch them. Good luck!

Tonight our guest presenter is Liza Dibble, who will tell us all about Coleshill House during WWII. Coleshill House was an English country house near the village of Coleshill, in the Vale of White Horse. It has an interesting history as we are about to find out from Liza.

Finally, as I say every month, if you have a story or memory to share with us, whether it's yours or from someone you know, please don't hesitate to contact either:

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

Courage Brewery's Offices - Alternative Information

In our February newsletter review, we said that the Oddfellows Pub in Old Town was the former offices for Courage Brewery... but this fact has been enthusiastically corrected by Terry Lambourne, whose dad worked for H&G Simmonds Brewery. Terry says:

In 1948, when the Transport Foreman at H&G Simonds Oxford Depot retired, Wilfred Lambourne, my Dad, was promoted from driver to foreman.

Then in 1952, he was summoned to Reading and told that if he agreed to move to Swindon he would be promoted to Transport Manger. He did agree, and dad then worked at the former Bowleys brewery, High Street, which H&G Simonds had bought. We lived at 10 High Street, Swindon, in a flat over the offices. Later we moved to 12 High Street, when the previous occupant retired. Just after this, Courage, Barclays, and Simonds Breweries all merged in a bid to prevent Guinness from purchasing Georges Bristol Brewery. The group later dropped the Barclays and Simonds names and became just Courage. The offices were at 11 High Street Swindon and they were STILL at number 11, when the branch was closed, and never at the Oddfellows location.

THE WILTS & BERKS CANAL

JOHN FARROW

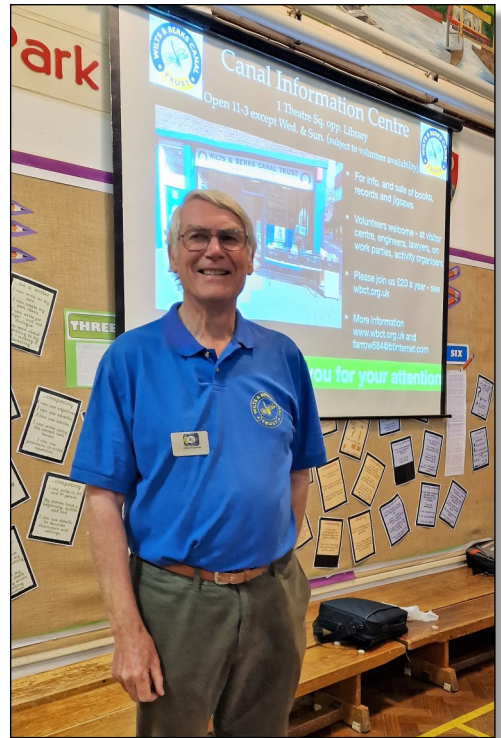
8TH MARCH 2023

John began by introducing himself to us all and told us that he used to work at the Research Council in Swindon for thirty years. Now though he devotes much of his time to the Wilts & Berks canal restoration project. In addition to this John is also a tour guide for the National Trust at Ashdown House and Avebury stone circle. He also told us that since becoming involved with the canal trust he is now also a trained dumper truck driver.

John gave us a background on the origins of canals which came from a need to transport heavy or fragile goods more efficiently and carefully. A horse and cart was not suitable to transport everything, and the first route that was deemed necessary was the London to Liverpool Canal.

The Wilts & Berks Canal came through Swindon around the late 1700s. The North Wilts canal was added in 1810 and joined the Wilts & Berks via a basin located roughly outside where Debenhams was, near the bus station. The new North Wilts Canal (which was 14 feet wide) was built to link up at the other end with the Thames & Severn Canal (only 7 feet wide). The two met at another basin at Latton where the goods were transferred from the larger barges to smaller ones to continue the journey.

The canals ran for nine miles through the Swindon area without the need for any locks as the layout was essentially



flat. Even so, this was the area where the canal was at its highest point which meant the water drained away at either end. This meant that the canal needed to be regularly topped up with water. Consequently, Coate Water was commissioned and built for exactly this, as a feeder for the canal.

By the early 1900s canals were falling out of favour, with the increasing popularity of the railway. By 1914 an Act of Parliament was passed allowing the Canal Company to abandon all canals, including Swindon's, and eventually the section running through the town centre was built over, with the rest drying out or going stagnant.

However, times change, and many years later, in 1977, the Wilts & Berks

Canal Trust was formed with a view to restoring the whole canal route. Much has been achieved to date, including a section in Swindon from Kingshill to Wichelstow that is operational again allowing trips along this route on the Trust's own boat, Dragonfly.

John took us along the route, showing us pictures of what has been achieved and of the volunteers working hard to clear up the mess. A fantastic effort by all it must be said. John was also adept at pointing out the nearby pubs and cafes where you could get a nice coffee or a tasty lunch... it seems he'd tried them all!

The old route of the canal can still be followed through the town centre, from Kinghill Road along Canal Walk. Upon reaching Fleming Way, the route crosses the Magic Roundabout and then turns to the left off Queens Drive running roughly parallel to Shrivenham Road, under Marsh Farm Bridge and continuing to Greenbridge and Stratton.

The route of the North Wilts Canal runs from the bus station under the railway via a cycle path just along from the station and continues through to the rear of the Oasis and then through Cheney Manor and around the west side of Moulden Hill Country Park, where the canal has been partially restored.

Then, halfway through the presentation, we were treated to a short film that was made around 2006/7 detailing the history of the canal through Swindon. It was brilliantly narrated by Roy Cartwright and it was extremely interesting. I heard lots of people say afterwards that they had never seen

that film before and how much they'd enjoyed it... And I whole-heartedly agree!

The trust has produced leaflets with details of various walks along the canal, including one for Royal Wootton Bassett. Some of these walks have activities for children such as things to look out for and objects that can be traced.

As the original canal route through Swindon is now built over, a new route for the canal is intended which passes Coate Water, parallel to the M4, and goes under the A419 near to junction 15. Once completed, this will help to clear water from the flood plain through the new development to the south of the town and will link up to the original route to the west of Shrivenham. The new stretch of canal created at East Wichel is also part of this plan. It is intended to bring the canal back into central Swindon and then northwards along the route of the North Wilts Canal.

Finally we were reminded how fundraising is important to keep the Trust functional and John told us that although the Trust currently has 2,500 members, it needs to have many more in order to get lottery funding. Anyone can join. The cost is £20 per year and details can be found on their website.



March Newsletter - Back Page Photo - Update on Location:

Our thanks to Gill (surname unknown) for taking the time to contact us with her guess of location. She correctly guessed it was High Street, Swindon, looking north. We managed to confirm this from the information provided by Kevin Leaky in the form of newspaper cuttings from the Adver, dated 30th March 1921.

They confirmed that the trial started outside the Corn Exchange in Old Town.

Thank you Kevin for providing this useful information.

A newspaper clipping with a dark background and white text. The title is 'HUNDRED-MILE RUN. Opening Event of North Wilts Motor Club Season.' Below the title, there are two paragraphs of text. The first paragraph describes the event as a most interesting run of just over a hundred miles, marking the opening of the 1921 season of the North Wilts Cycle and Light Car Club. It mentions that the weather was perfect and that 24 competitors started from the Corn Exchange at 10 o'clock. The second paragraph discusses the route, noting that it was a complete secret and that the organizers had spent a great deal of time in mapping out a most exacting route. It also mentions that many competitors were well acquainted with the roads and lanes, which were marked by a blue trail.

HUNDRED-MILE RUN.

Opening Event of North Wilts Motor Club Season.

A most interesting run of just over a hundred miles marked the opening of the 1921 season of the North Wilts Cycle and Light Car Club, and the organisers are to be congratulated on the support they received in the way of entries from members of the club. The weather was perfect for the road and the first of the 24 competitors started from the Corn Exchange at 10 o'clock, the remainder following at intervals of a minute each.

The principal interest in the whole event lay in the fact that the route over which competitors had to travel was a complete secret, the brothers Spackman having spent a great deal of time in mapping out a most exacting route. In fact, many competitors who are well acquainted with most Wiltshire and Berkshire roads, were at a loss to know where they had been after returning since the turning points on the roads and lanes were marked by a blue trail.

A continuation of the newspaper clipping from the previous block. It provides a detailed list of the route taken during the race, starting from the Corn Exchange and passing through numerous villages and towns. It also mentions the total distance covered and the time taken. The text describes the lunch break at Hungerford and the arrival of the first competitor back at 5.15. It then lists the winners of the cup and the best performance in the first half of the run.

In view of this fact the following detailed explanation of the journey will be interesting. From the Corn Exchange they journeyed via Hodson, Burderop, Barbary Castle, Rockley, Ogbourne St. Andrew, Ogbourne St. George, Woodsend, Aldbourn, Russley, Baydon, Lambourne, Ashbury, Kingston Lisle, Chilton Foliat, Hungerford, Inkpen, Coombe Netherlon, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Ibbrope, Upton, Vernham's Dean, Oxenwood, Marten, East and West Guiton, Burbage, Wootton Rivers, Ourp, Alton Barnes, East Kennett, Avebury, Broad Hinton, Bassett Down, Excombe, and Wroughton, the total distance covered being 106 miles.

Lunch was taken at Hungerford, which represented the limit for the first part of the ride, and the first competitor arrived back about 5.15. In all 18 out of the 24 finished the course.

The winner of the cup was Mr. Phipps, who rode a 34 h.p. Coventry Eagle combination. Mr. H. Ristow, who came second on a 31 Ariel, was 20 points behind the winner, while Mr. Raven finished third on a 37 Douglas. The winner also put in the best performance in the first half of the run, Mr. Frank Welch performing a similar feat in the second half.

Most of the notorious hills around Swindon were included in the run, which also contained a water splash, which was safely negotiated by most of the riders.

Radnor Street Cemetery Walks

Join us on our first meeting of 2023 and find out about some of the people who are remembered here

Meet outside the chapel at 2pm
Sunday 16th April 2023

The Radnor Street team, Fran, Noel and Andy,
can be contacted on 07968 246792

Please also see the
Radnor Street Cemetery Facebook page



Swindon Society Meeting Wednesday 10th May 2023

Slide Selection - Preceded by the AGM Your Committee

This is our usual evening for the AGM. A time to put forward proposals for the Society's future and also an opportunity for you to have your say too.

The best part though, is the slide show afterwards; images chosen by your current committee members for your delight. Traditionally, there is no theme to the evening, just a random selection of interesting photos, mostly from our vast archive... and just like a box of chocolates, "you never know what your gonna get". (Thank you Forrest Gump!)

Enjoy!

As usual please bear in mind the following:

- If you have any concerns for your health, please continue to wear a mask, at least until you are seated.
- If you haven't been vaccinated, we respectfully suggest you wear a mask at all times for your own safety.
- Hand sanitiser will be available - please feel free to use it.
- Outside doors and windows may be open to allow air to circulate so please bring warm clothing in case it gets chilly.
- Please do not attend if you have any Covid symptoms.

SEE YOU AGAIN SOON!

The Headlands Story

As an ex-Headlandian driving down Headlands Grove, I sometimes wonder if the "home of my youth" ever really existed. I have undertaken a little research however and thought it might be of interest to members, especially those who may be ex-pupils. I'm aware it was a bit of an elitist institution, but it was a very good school that sadly enjoyed a very short life.

When the 538 children moved into the new building in Cricklade Road in 1952 it was the culmination of a train of events dating back half a century.

Grammar school education in Swindon began with the erection, in 1895, of the Swindon and North Wilts Technical Institution at the bottom of Victoria Road, (later becoming The College), and within which, a day

secondary school for boys was quickly established with girls being admitted a few years later.

Following the Education Act of 1918, the Euclid Street secondary school was developed from the former Higher Elementary School which itself had been created in 1904. Also in 1919, sites were purchased at The Mall and in Drove Road for additional secondary schools. Plans were prepared for both schools in 1920 but the proposals collapsed owing to the post war slump and depression.



However, the Commonweal School on The Mall proceeded and opened in 1927. Meanwhile in 1934, the Education Committee decided to confine the use of the Victoria Road college building (now a rather attractive group of flats of course) to just technical education, necessitating the provision of alternative accommodation for the College Secondary School which shared the site.



As Swindon was planned to develop northwards towards Pinehurst, it was felt a location in this area was desirable, and in 1935 the 17 acres which eventually made up the Headlands Campus was purchased. The new school building was anticipated for 1939, but of course the war disrupted these plans.

In 1943, on the death of the headmaster of the College Secondary School, the school was amalgamated with the Euclid Street Secondary School and the combined school was named the Headlands Secondary School, in anticipation of its eventual move to the new site. The growing demands for day release technical



education in The College building, and the difficulties of the school working across two separate buildings, focussed the need for new premises.

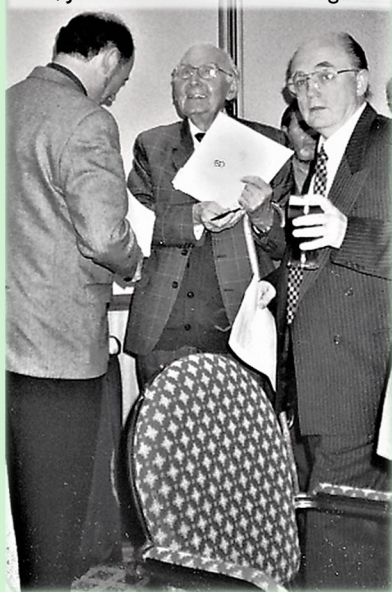
In 1947 designs were started under the direction of the County Architect, with the idea that the school would be built in five stages. The building was to be sited in the north-west corner of the acreage,

in order to obtain a principal south-east aspect overlooking the playing fields but also be close to the approach drive off of Cricklade Road. The tender from W.H. Chivers of Devizes was accepted and in late 1948 approval was given for the building to commence, as one rather than the five different stages previously proposed.

As those of us who knew Headlands will recall, despite looking like a traditional build, it was in fact a steel frame structure with external walls clad in silver-grey sand face bricks and the internal partitions hollow clay blocks. Most of the classrooms had fitted cupboards and revolving blackboards. Three of the downstairs classrooms could be thrown open to a paved terrace by sliding glass folding doors (although one of these was my early form room and I cannot remember this ever happening). There were six well-equipped laboratories providing tuition for biology, physics and chemistry and practical rooms including a needlework room, art room and a music room.

Remarkably, and I say this because on my final visit it looked tiny, the main hall was created to seat well over 500 people in comfort with a floor of beechwood blocks and a stage equipped to handle quite complex productions. There were two dressing rooms behind the stage and adjacent to the hall was the dining room where school meals were prepared and served through hatches. The gymnasium of course was a separate building and had a semi-sprung floor, changing rooms, showers, instructors' rooms

Me, John Sheffield and Tom Magson



separately for both sexes and timber wall bars along each of the opposite walls (to which I remember clinging limpet like, when we had to pick partners for ballroom dance classes!).

The whole school was heated by radiators with low pressure hot water from a boiler house in the basement below the medical room.

The best-known headmaster was Tom Magson, who was appointed soon after the building was constructed, and he made the school and its success, his life's work, only retiring when comprehensive education was imposed.

The pictures above include an early image of the school's grounds, and a couple of pictures I took, on its final days before demolition in August 2004. One is a picture of me and the late John Sheffield with school leader,



Tom Magson... and the last one shows the site when cleared awaiting the arrival of the small estate of houses which now populates what was one of Swindon's finest educational establishments in its 52-year lifetime. (Crikey, I've got socks older than that!)

John Stooke - April 2023



Central Library, Regent Circus Swindon SN1 1QG

Tel: (01793) 463238

Email: localstudies@swindon.gov.uk

Website: www.swindon.gov.uk/localstudies

Gallery: www.flickr.com/swindonlocal

Opening Hours

Mon: *By appointment only*

Tue: 10am to 4:00pm

Wed: 10am to 4:00pm

Sat: *By appointment only*

Swindon - A Poem by Eric Looker

Foreword:

The following poem was sent in by Alison Munro, via Yvonne Neal (from Wiltshire Family History Society). Alison says:

“My uncle, Eric Looker, sent me one of his poems about Swindon just before Christmas. Eric was born in October 1928 and lived in North Street and Beatrice Street when growing up. He wrote the poem some time ago and the content reflects on Swindon in a different era. I thought that other people might be interested in seeing it”.

We certainly are Alison... so, here it is:

SWINDON

Proud ancestral home of Diana Dors and Steam,
Mecca for playing football when Don Rogers was in the team,
Place where Richard Jefferies lived his rustic life and died,
Famous railway centre when nearly everyone worked 'Inside'.

Some railway workers travelled miles to 'clock on' inside the gate,
The 'hooter' helping slackers who otherwise would be late,
By it people set their watches and their clocks at home would chime,
For the 'Swindon factory hooter' always kept the proper time.

Then there was the annual 'Trip Week' when the factory always closed,
When without its regular hooter the place went dead or dozed,
Shops put up their shutters, or openly 'kipped' - to coin a phrase,
In a town where nothing seemed to move for seven summer. days.

For those without 'Free Passes' who spent their holidays at home,
Swindon had some lovely places where its families could roam,
Gardens with scented roses, where a band sometimes would play,
And the popular Coate Water where some folk might stay all day.

As a youngster, I remember being taken to the park,
Where there was free cake for the children and fireworks after dark,
People had no parking problems 'cause no one owned a car,
We simply walked, or caught a bus, as we came from near or far.

Swindon is now a massive town which has changed beyond recall,
From the days when Harold Fleming used to cleverly kick the ball,
No more a railway centre where a hooter tells the time,
But a place of great expansion - so modern and free from grime.

With its Brunel shopping centre and well stocked market stalls,
A theatre called The Wyvern and shows that win applause,
With its wonderful 'Oasis' where families can relax,
The town has been refurbished, and they've plastered up the cracks!

But tracing a town's beginnings may sometimes raise a yawn,
Yet dare one mention Swindon, and not the Goddard's at 'The Lawn'?
'The Lawn' was always haunted, or so the locals used to say,
Which makes one wonder if the ghost, still walks 'The Lawn' today.

If so, perhaps a question one may ask of him, with grace,
Is whether because it's larger, the town is a better place,
For big may not be beautiful, and modern may not be good,
But we cannot now put back the clock... if Thomas Goddard would!

Eric Looker - April 2023

Swindon Society - A Request for Occasional IT Assistance

Occasionally, when we are setting up the equipment for our members' evenings, we encounter an IT issue which we cannot immediately solve and causes a bit of a headache for all concerned. Unfortunately, none of the committee, are specifically trained in the setting up of IT equipment.

So we are asking - if any members are familiar with the connection and setting up of IT equipment and wouldn't mind helping out when needed, please could you make yourself known to the committee so that we know who we can call upon when something randomly goes awry.

Many thanks from your Committee

Swindon Quiz - Just for fun! Can you answer this?..



Here is the seventh of Andy's quiz questions - This image was kindly shared by one of our members (MS). Many thanks.

What was the first and last film to be shown at this cinema?

Think you know, then let us know. Our contact details are: info@theswindonsociety.co.uk



Last Month's Answer 

Last month Andy asked us - where is is plaque?

Here is the answer.

It is on the old Wilkinsons Shop on the corner of Bridge Street and Fleet Street. Members will recall it is where Stead and Simpsons used to be and was commonly referred to as the Tram Centre.



Railway Works - A Shop 1973



Red Carpet Records, 37 Havelock Street - c.1981

