

**Way Back
Then...
Hythe Road**



The Swindon Society Newsletter - March 2024



**... And
More
Recently**

**March
2024**



Welcome to the March Newsletter

Hello and welcome to the March newsletter.

Crikey, here we are, halfway through March already. It won't be long until the clocks go forward again and our evenings will become a bit longer - starting with Easter Sunday; how lovely.

Tonight, John Stooke is at the helm and we are really looking forward to his presentation entitled *Markets, Masons and Music*. It sounds like a good mix just what we like - Swindon history! Great - let's soak it up!

By the way, is there anyone out there that has a Swindon childhood memory they would like to share, or a good story about the mischief they got up to around Swindon when they were in their teens. What was your first job? Was it in one of the big Swindon industries? Let us know what it was like. Or maybe just tell us a little about you and which part of Swindon you grew up in, or moved to. Please get in touch with me or just send it to The Swindon Society email address. You can even handwrite it and give it to me; I can help with the spelling and grammar if you want me to so don't worry about that. I promise you we will all be interested. I'm surely not the only naturally nosey person among us... am I?

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



Running Out of Steam: Two Railway Artists and a Railway Poet

by

Philip Garrahan

-

14th February 2024

We had another unusual topic of talk for us in February, which was a talk primarily about two local artists, Leslie Cole and Hubert Cook. It also featured several readings from the work of the "Hammerman Poet" Alfred Williams, with whom we are a little more familiar after a talk several years ago. Philip began his presentation by talking about how he came to the subject, and as was so often the case in recent years – it was the fruit of the pandemic, when he had to stay at home with

little else to do. Philip also alerted us to the fantastic website artuk.org, where it is possible to view many of the works featured in the presentation, along with thousands of others from UK art collections.

Philip quoted from John Ruskin's *A Crown of Wild Olives* about how a working man cannot also be an artist because they put their working life and the earning of wages first. He disagrees - a working man can be an artist, but Philip argues that it takes effort to do so. I personally learnt a lot from this evening, but the most surprising fact was that the Swindon School of Art was the first purpose-built art school in the south west of England. It also had one of the first Arts Centres in the country. In the interwar period, Swindon was a thriving cultural centre and Philip posed the question - did art matter more then?

Photo credit: Museum & Art Swindon



Leslie Cole - Self Portrait

The first artwork we saw was actually a piece by JMW Turner - *The Interior of a Cannon Foundry*. Philip showed it to illustrate that between the time of that painting in 1797-8 and the interwar period in the GWR Works, little had changed in heavy industry. There was some mechanisation but it was largely the same in that it was very manual and very dangerous. There was then the reading of an excerpt by Alfred Williams describing life inside the Works.

We then had our first glimpse of the two artists in the form of self-portraits. The style was so similar that Philip thinks it may have been something taught at art school. They were like passport photos, looking directly towards the viewer and unsmiling. Cook and Cole both studied at the same time in the late 1920s and stayed friends for a long time afterwards. They were both very talented artists with Cole being a war artist and Cook winning many prizes. We were shown one of the prize-winning pieces, which was a portrait of Bill Silto's mum. Alfred Williams was better known for poetry and his chronicling of country life than his book *Life in a Railway Factory*. Philip then showed us the Manifesto issued by the Executive Council of the GWR Social and Educational Union which altered the objects to include developing social and recreational organisations. This led to the annual arts and crafts exhibition which was held every year from 1927 to 1939. Hubert Cook was awarded 30 competition medals from these. Leslie Cole was awarded fewer, but he left Swindon during this period.

We then learned from Philip that in 1932 there was a romanticised descriptive piece in a GWR magazine which described the "ancient art" of hammering white hot iron and how Swindon Works was the only place it was believed to still be happening. The job was that of a shingler and it went on to describe the men as having to wear iron boots! We were then read the Alfred Williams description which described the exploitation of and cruelty towards men in this role, who were almost abandoned after they became too old to work as a shingler, with their wages dropping as a result. Both Cole and Cook made studies of the shingler. It was one of the most dangerous jobs in the Works.

Photo credit:
Museum & Art Swindon



Electric Welder
Hubert Cook

Hubert Cook won a prize for a lithographic print which was then exhibited in the Paris Salon and the Royal Academy in London. It is one of several which are held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He also captured a riveter at work and Philip pointed out two significant features of the work; the way the light was captured and the fact that he was wearing an asbestos suit.

Photo credit: Museum & Art Swindon



Railway Works Interior
Hubert Cook

He also painted the riveter in oils, which I thought was very effective. There was much more colour and it was impressionistic. By the time Cook painted this one, he was based in York with the RAF. Hubert Cook's last work was called *The Toilers*, which was completed in 1965. He died the following year.

We then moved on to Leslie Cole and learned that he actually left Swindon to study art in London. We saw several of his pieces including one called *Shove-Halfpenny* and another called *Blind Woman*, which were both in black and white. Philip did a marvellous job of drawing our attention to several aspects of these works which we may not have otherwise noticed. He then described how Cole wanted to become an official war artist and in order to gain the commission he went on a trawler in Hull and painted a below-decks scene. It succeeded in getting him the job. In this capacity he travelled

Shove-Halfpenny - Leslie Cole

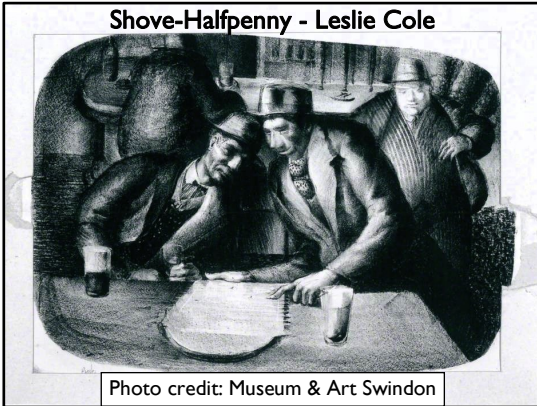


Photo credit: Museum & Art Swindon

to Malta, Greece, Germany and the Far East. He sometimes focused on some of the more mundane work that was happening, such as the women preparing the beds in a cathedral crypt in Valletta, Malta. His work as a war artist also captured some of the most distressing aspects of war, such as the body of a murdered priest in Greece in 1945 and the liberation of the women in Belsen Concentration Camp. Other works we were shown by Philip included soldiers unloading a convoy in Malta during an air-raid; and the more humorous *Dentistry during the Hour of a Gas Practice* which showed a role-reversal with all the dentists wearing gas masks during work on a patient.

Philip finished by saying that neither Hubert Cook nor Leslie Cole would be described as great art in the larger art world. However, he argued that it definitely is great art because it tells the truth. He then said that it would be wonderful if there was some exhibition space in the Outlet Village where local art could be displayed. I think that sounds splendid – and might even tempt me to visit the Outlet Village once in a while!

Many thanks to Philip for a different, but nonetheless fabulously engaging evening.

Kelly Blake - February 2024

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The View from a Hill

Along a stone track, through the bushes and trees, sloping up with a gentle rise,

I reach the spot that I truly adore, a feast before my eyes.

And there all alone, between pillars of stone, and a grassy field laid out before me,

There's a once-gated view with skies so blue; my own place of local history.

Just to my left, the old icehouse still stands in this place that my young-self would roam,

And I stare out and soak up this wonderful view, it's the landscape of all of my homes.

I turn back the clock over 70 years and imagine the picture I'd see,
Of farmland that stretches out so far and wide and farmhouses; two, maybe three?

Today in the foreground's, the secondary school where I showed up for years as a teen,

Lower and upper schools present at first, then a new block was built in between.

Then just behind this, see the two blocks of flats. Left one, seventh floor, I once lived there,
And then to the right, the single high-rise in the middle of Cavendish Square.

And now looking left, the four floodlights you see mark the site of the Swindon Town grounds,

I worked Saturdays here a couple of times earning only a few extra pounds.

But the view has evolved over so many years and some buildings that stood are now levelled,

And new housing estates have appeared in their place and on allotments that were looking dishevelled.

Look further afield where WH Smith stood, and closer, right-side on Queens Drive,
More houses erected with parking in mind so have either a garage or drive.

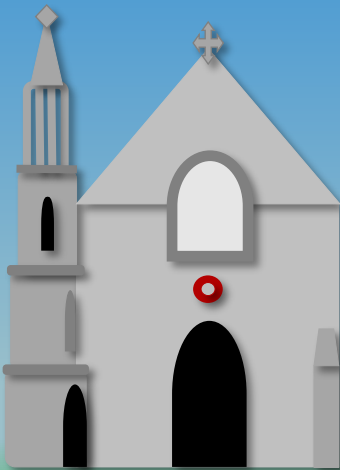
The look of these dwellings is taller and thinner, and very distinctive in style,
And in years to come we'll be able to tell the date of their build by a mile.

But for me, here is quiet and peaceful and calm, and a place where there's
time for reflection,
On how I'm just small insignificant me, in this huge world where I've no real
connection.

Angie Phillips - March 2024



1936



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 31st March 2024

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

10th April 2024

Tour of Rodbourne History

by

Gordon Shaw

Next month we will be visited by Gordon Shaw from the Rodbourne Community History Group. You might remember he took some of us around Rodbourne on our summer outing in June last year.

Rodbourne is steeped in history. It was a thriving village long before the railway works came to Swindon so there is still much to find out about its history. I wonder what surprising information Gordon might have up his sleeve? Come along and find out!

HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!



PLEASE NOTE: A CHANGE OF TITLE FOR APRIL

Programme - 2024

March 13th	Markets, Masons & Music	John Stooke
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).*



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
Tues: 10am to 4.00pm
Wed: 10am to 4.00pm
Sat: 10am to 1.00pm

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The shop window in Rodbourne Road (top) smashed by a small whirlwind yesterday afternoon. Below, a Corporation employee clearing the debris of smashed roof slates.

TEN SECONDS OF FEAR IN A SWINDON ROAD

A MINIATURE whirlwind struck Rodbourne Road, Swindon, yesterday (as reported in last night's Evening Advertiser), with the speed of lightning, and for about ten seconds a 50-yard stretch of road was devastated.

Slates were snatched from the roofs and sent whirling through the air, to crash on the pavements and through a shop window; trees were bent at right-angles to the ground; an elderly man chased

his hat—without luck—through the street; and a television aerial on the roof of Rodbourne Post Office was half-snapped off.

"I never want to see anything like it again," said Mrs. Pearl Bavan, who was visiting her mother in Rodbourne Road at the time. "It started quite suddenly—just like a big explosion."

There was no change in the weather, she said. It had been quite calm before the whirlwind, which brought no rain.

AFTERMATH

But the aftermath in Rodbourne Road was far from calm. One shopkeeper, Mr. E. H. Hoare, a grocer, of 7 Rodbourne Road, had his plate-glass window smashed.

The road was scattered with the smashed slates, but within half-an-hour order had been restored by a passing Corporation Cleansing Department lorry which had been patrolling the area in case of damage by a threatening storm.

Another eye-witness, Mrs. Doris Howlett, who was serving in her mother's sweet shop at 167 Rodbourne Road, said: "We heard a sort of rushing noise, and when I looked out through the window I could see all the slates whirling through the air. The sun blind on the shop next door was blown right up to the roof."

'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. I. J. Vaux, assistant

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Rodbourne's Miniature Whirlwind

I found this newspaper clipping among some paperwork whilst I was looking for something else. I thought it was an interesting read, and then realised the reason I had the clipping in the first place... The council workman who is sweeping up the debris is my dad, George Phillips. Dad started working for the Cleansing Department in 1957. Our family moved down from London as part of the "overspill" after Dad secured a job at Pressed Steel. He hated that job and when the factory went into its two-week shut down period, there was no money coming in so he found "temporary" work with the council, road sweeping. It was half the pay of Pressed Steel but he preferred it to the alternative and never went back. By the time he retired, he had worked his way up to Cleansing Superintendent.

Unfortunately, as this was only a clipping, I have no idea when this incident occurred - other than it was pre-decimal because some of the surrounding adverts are in pounds, shillings and pence! I have tried to search the Swindon Adver site out of interest but to no avail.

If anyone has more information, I would be interested to know.

Angie Phillips -March 2024

2007

THE YEAR OF THE FLOODS

Do you remember when this happened on 20th July 2007? As I remember, it was quite a day!



I left work early to pick up my son from primary school. I got on the bus at the bus station but it could only go as far as the Magic Roundabout.



I got off and started to walk down Queens Drive. My car was parked opposite New College and these are the photos I took as I walked along.

The flooding at the then Texaco garage was almost meeting with the water rising on the opposite side of the road. These houses are actually in a separate parallel road... Good job they are! I couldn't help thinking that if the subway was still there and had filled up, as it usually did, it may have taken some of the water away and reduced the extent of the flooding.





By the time I got to my car and drove out of the junction at Upham Road, the road was just about passable and I managed to get to the school - just in time... and still out of breath!

Angie Phillips - March 2024

Do you have any art from Swindon in the inter-war years?

The Swindon Society recently enjoyed a talk about this by a retired university lecturer, Philip Garrahan. He focused on depictions of working and social life in Swindon, which he is researching for a forthcoming book.

If you have any paintings or drawings about Swindon in the inter-war years, he would be delighted to hear from you. All help will be acknowledged in the book.

His contact address is:

pgarrahan48@gmail.com

Swindon Quiz - Just for Fun !

This month's quiz has been set by Diane Everett. Come on then... where is this stonework embedded into the wall of a building? Any ideas?

Don't forget to let us know and I will make sure you get a name-check in the next newsletter. Smashing!

Last Month's Answer



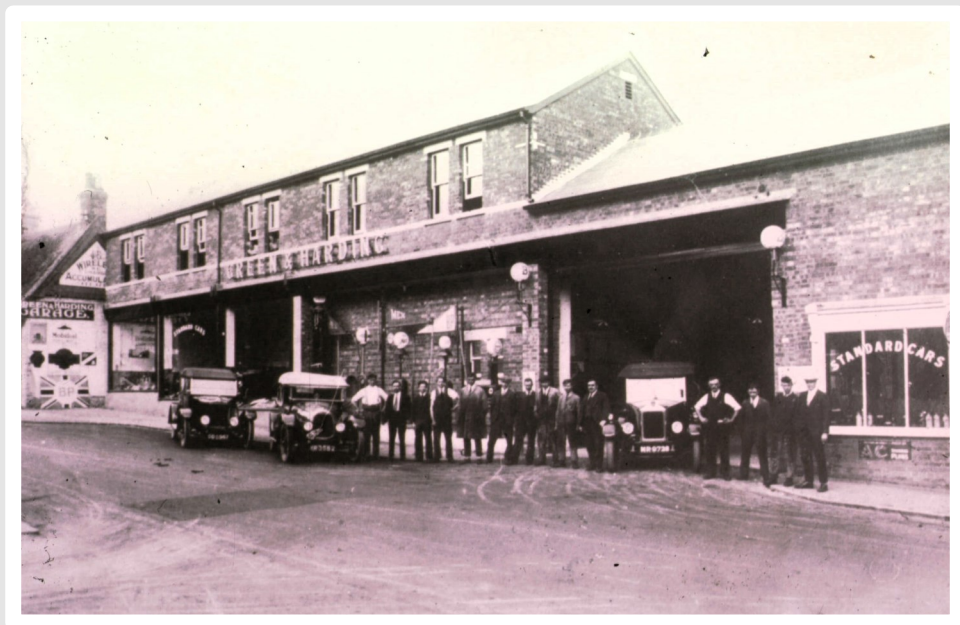
This was last month's picture.

Well done to Tom Smith who emailed me to say, "*The photo on page 11 is of the former Post Office on the corner of Ashford Road and Hythe Road.*" Thank you for getting in touch Tom.

Know this month's answer? Please contact:

info@theswindonsociety.co.uk

Green & Harding Garage - Marlborough Road 1930s



Cleverley & Son - High Street 1960s

