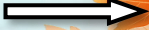


Back Then...
Burmah Oil
Under
Construction
Circa 1972



The Swindon Society Newsletter - November 2023



.. And More
Recently,
Awaiting

Its Fate
September
2023





Welcome to the November Newsletter

Hello and welcome to the November newsletter.

Did you see the reports of flooding in Swindon on the local news? The River Ray burst its banks and there were flood warnings issued for the River Cole and Dorcan Brook. It must have been very stressful for the people living in those areas and completely heartbreaking for those whose homes were subjected to floodwater. I do hope none of our members were affected.

Tonight's presentation is Making Plans for Swindon by Jon Ratcliffe. Jon's last talk was excellent and I am sure this one will be just as good. The title alone sounds exciting and I for one can't wait to see it! Over to you Jon.

Don't forget (as if you could as I always mention it) if you have a Swindon story or memory, or someone else's tale to tell, please do share it with us in our newsletter. Don't worry about the spelling or grammar as we can sort that out for you. Please get in touch on either of these:

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

Beaney Revisited

by

Diane Everett

and

Jennie Bridges

11th October 2023



Albert Beaney was born in Beatrice Street in 1914 and educated at Ferndale Secondary School. Upon leaving school, Albert entered the Swindon GWR Works before being called up to serve his two-year period of National Service with the RAF.

On completion of his National Service, Albert and his wife, Joan, returned to his home in Beatrice Street and Albert went back to his trade as a French Polisher "inside". When Albert was made redundant, he secured a job working for the Post Office where he stayed until the age of 60. His final job was at Square D where he stayed until he retired at 65.

Albert left an amazing collection of images which were predominantly taken during the 40s, 50s and 60s. We know there are well over 40,000, possibly as many as 65,000. Today these images show us the social history of people and events in Swindon and the surrounding villages. This collection is jointly held by The Swindon Museum and Art Gallery and The Swindon Society.

Diane and Jennie brought part of the collection along to our meeting and the evening started early so that members had the chance to peruse the images for about 45 minutes prior to the presentation.

Diane and Jennie started off with a photo of Albert and Joan outside their home in Beatrice Street. It was here that Albert kept his many books in which he recorded the details of all the photos he took and, with up to 65,000 photos in the collection, there must have been a lot of books!

It's difficult to write a review on photos of people, mostly groups of children just playing in the street or at a park. However, Diane and Jennie have been collating these images for quite a time now and over the years they have been able to put names to some of the children in the pictures and some of those they have identified are members of our Society.

Diane showed us some of those she knew, starting with her mum, Irene Bishop (who Bob Townsend pointed out to Diane when he was scanning in the images some years back), then Sandra Dowdeswell was pictured with her sister, and Tony Rudman with his sister in Beech Avenue. Sheila O'Connell was captured sitting in



Irene Bishop (Diane's mum) on the Left



her highchair, looking very cute! and we also saw an image of John Hacker.

We moved on to someone's wedding, which looked as though it was held at St



John Hacker - Right

Barnabas Church in Gorse Hill. And that's part of the fun with the Beaney images, even though you don't know the people, you can guess where they were taken and look to see how the surroundings have changed over the years. It can be complicated when trying to identify locations though as Albert's records show the addresses of where the children lived, not where he

shot the photos, so even though we think we know the sites in the images these are not always correct. Consequently we are always glad to hear everyone else's opinion to enable us to pinpoint more accurate locations.

Back to the photos, we then went from a family in Beatrice Street to one of Mervyn Lay in Bright Street. Apparently, he had seen himself in this photo when he attended the presentation at Christ Church and requested a copy. As soon as he got it, he was so pleased that he posted it on his Facebook page the same evening!

We then saw a group photo where someone was identified as Irish Pat, another with someone called McGinley and a lady who Diane knew to be Ann Challenger. The next image was of a little girl with a doll's pram and Diane gave us something to think about when she asked, "Do you see doll's prams these days?" Good question Diane.

We saw some ladies at Fairlanes Bowling, two boys on a witch's hat (a ride at a play park), a horse and cart in Beech Avenue, boys from either Ferndale or Moredon and a cycle track which showed Yorkshire Imperials in the background.

The nostalgia continued with an image containing a push-along toy horse, some lads at All Saints Church in Ferndale, a boundary marker in someone's garden and two little boys in one pram, possibly in Gorse Hill. Then more lads in Surrey Road and images taken in Harcourt Road and Hinton Street. I loved the next image of some little ones at a play park riding on one of those long rocking-horses that used to seat about



six children all at the same time. Some of us thought maybe it was taken in Monkton Close in Park South.

A few more names to add – there was the Wiseman Brothers in Leighton Avenue, and Bert Evans, then we were back to All Saints Church in Ferndale. Joy Stone in Ferndale was up next then Marylin Townsend (Bob's sister) who lived in

Cricklade Road followed by a Mavis at Cambria Bridge who I think Diane said was her friend. There was also a picture of Bob and his brother.

Onwards then to Plum's Pit pool and Penhill pool and a hand-made cart, referred to as a bogie, in The Broadway. Next, we were shown a photo of the working girls of Compton's Factory and another of a dancing Ann Challenger, then Barry Nash from Gorse Hill, Mr Cromer in Poplar Avenue and a building site, which some thought might have been Ripon Way... and that is what was also so good about the evening, everyone could add their thoughts and snippets of information as we went along.



Bob Townsend - Left
and his brother John



A man in his flat cap at a door numbered 75 was next, and another man who was Diane's friend's late husband. We travelled to Holly Close in Pinehurst, Harvey Grove, Ipswich Street and then a photo of George Hudson, the ex-Swindon Town goalkeeper who lived in Cornwall Avenue.

Then Diane told us the story of how she and Bob found the artist Ken White on his hands and knees at Artsite when the collection was being exhibited there. He was searching through images trying to find himself, but to no avail. Later, Bob and Diane found an image of Ken, pictured with two others, and presented him

with it as a surprise. Apparently, he was so delighted that it too appeared on Facebook that same evening!

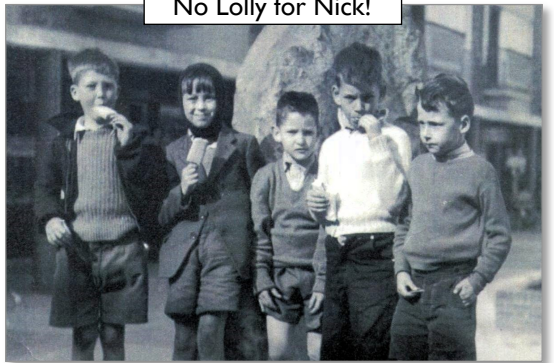
Jennie then took over proceedings starting with a baby in a pram in Hunters Grove and then a boy on a motor scooter. Albert Beaney's son Trevor, who was with us in the audience, confirmed that this scooter belonged to his dad and was sometimes used as a prop. There are many images of children sitting on it in the collection.

We moved on to an image in Ipswich Street taken in the 1970s (there are fewer from the 70s). Then a boy with a pigeon in Laburnum Road and a little boy or girl about two-years old in Little Avenue, before another scooter photo in Pembroke Gardens. Up next, a picture of what looked to be a sea cadet in Limes Avenue, then some football related photos in Buller Street, and Pinehurst. We then moved to Portal Avenue and an image showing the prefab houses in the background.

Jennie then showed us a photo of her brother with a group of boys, taken in Sussex Square, Walcot. All the boys had an ice-lolly except him because he'd remembered he had been told not to accept things from strangers... what a good boy!

We travelled again to Limes Avenue, Malvern Road, Montgomery Avenue and Mulberry Grove, where we saw two boys in wellies. There was also a birthday at Oak Tree Avenue and a boy with a fishing net in Pinehurst Road. We saw some girls on a settee at 4 Branksome Road, Moredon, and someone in a trouser suit at 61 Bourne Road. Then Dee Bedford recognised the person at 37 Bourne Road to be Suzy Horton. We saw some children on bogies, including twins, and a school group of girls from 60s.

No Lolly for Nick!



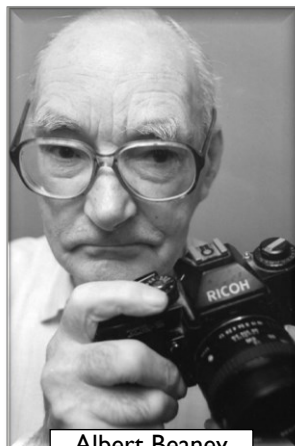
Back then to Moredon and the school, which is now demolished. Then there was a picture of four Brownies and a photo of a child on a skateboard wearing shorts, sunglasses and gloves all at the same time! Then three girls in a house in Pembroke Gardens (the sofa had caps to cover the arms which is something you don't see these days), then we saw a photo of David Hempleman Adams in Bourne Road, a boy sitting on a wall by Clarks Chemist, a girl by the chip shop in Cheney Manor Road, and three boys with a small trike in Oak Tree Avenue.

The next photo I loved. It was of a wedding outside the Registry Office which at that time was a converted house in Milton Road, in the photo was one of those old-fashioned litterbins with the wooden slats. My elder sister got married there when I was eight, and it reminded me of her wedding day.

We finished up the evening with a visit to Pound Lane, a picture of Barry Odey in Cricklade Road, Kevin Weaver in Ferndale Road and a photo of Albert Beaney himself, taken by David Bedford.

It is amazing to think that all the time Albert was working, whether "inside", at the Post Office or at Square D, he continued with his hobby and produced this vast number of photos, not only taking them, but developing them too! Where on earth did he find the time?

Thank you to Diane and Jennie for another excellent presentation.



Albert Beaney

Angie Phillips - October 2023



Swindon Society Meeting

13th December 2023

Members' Christmas Party

Come along and join in the festive fun!

We hope you can make it to our fun-filled evening where you can mingle and mix, have a good old natter and have a go at the picture quiz.

As usual, there will be music, drinks and nibbles to enjoy to help us while away the evening.

There will be a free raffle on the night. A raffle ticket will be given to you upon entry.

Be there or be... without a raffle ticket!

SEE YOU AGAIN SOON!



LONDON OVERSPILL KID

We were on our way; it was 1956 and a new house was waiting for us. Swindon Corporation had acquired over 1,000 acres from the Goddard Estate to build a huge housing estate. The corporation had become a receiving district for the London overspill and between 1954 and 1960 some 1,500 dwellings had been built on the estate known then as Walcot East. What had been farmland consisting of Upper and Lower Walcot, Church, Manor, Coate, Park and Prince's Farms became homes for a new generation.

We were to be just one of so many families making a new start in a town that was new to us.



FULHAM 1956

We were leaving behind a flat in Fulham London for a new life in what must have seemed like the countryside at that time. Home was within a terrace of fairly large houses in Fulham. What was once a family home, became accommodation for two families. This was the usual thing at that time and very enterprising for the landlord and landlady who lived downstairs. I don't remember the flat really, I was too young, but it was the top half of a house. There was a small garden, but I have the impression that children were not really made welcome. Sometimes you can understand why. I don't think they were very happy when my older brother picked the heads off their flowers for example! There was a photo of him in the garden, maybe just before or just after the deed was done. I can remember the photo but sadly it has since disappeared which is a shame. Not really the ideal place for two small children. So, of course, when the opportunity came up for a three, yes three-bedroomed house with garden front and back there would be no time wasted in making a choice. Dad had been brought up in the Fulham area and would be leaving everything familiar behind to make this move. But - a house, plenty of work for the new influx of people - easy to choose. Mum of course was delighted, and I am sure she couldn't wait to make the journey. I always say I can remember travelling in the front of the removal lorry but it may just be that the story was told many times. Interestingly I have recently spoken to another person who has the same memory. Not from the same family of course but perhaps it really did happen that way.

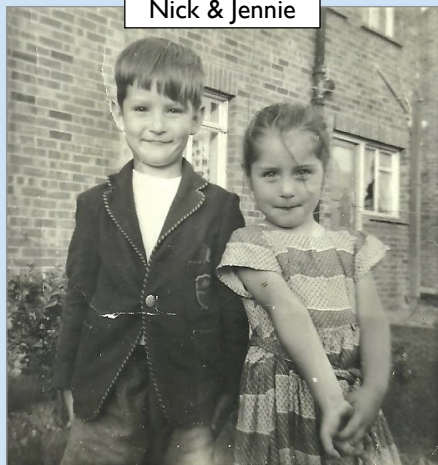
So, there we were, a family on the move; Dad, Mum, my brother and myself. The journey must have taken several hours as this was well before the M4.

The Chiswick Flyover was three years away, being constructed in 1959 and even then it was not originally classed as a motorway, this was yet to come. I think the route would have been on the old A4 taking us from West London down to Maidenhead, Reading, Newbury and onto the picturesque town of Marlborough.



Eventually we would arrive at our new house in Walcot Swindon in the county of Wiltshire. Even the sound of the name Wiltshire makes you think of the countryside. After spending the first years of married life in Fulham this was going to be very different for our parents. There was at this time, after WWII, a huge shortage of housing in London. Swindon was a growing town, new industries were moving into the town. There would be no shortage of employment for all those who made the move. An exciting opportunity – pioneers of the 1950s. Or maybe a case of needs must. Dad would have had to register for work in Swindon to get an offer of a new council house. Houses, I guess were allocated as

Nick & Jennie



employment was offered. I don't know if they had a chance to see the house before the day they moved in. I know not everyone did. I do have a vague recollection of being in a park which I realised several years later was in fact Faringdon Road Park. I can only remember myself, my brother (both being quite small and running around) and my dad being there so that would fit in. Could this have been our first visit to Swindon?

I am sure they would have been very sad to leave Fulham behind in a lot of ways.

Everything was close at hand; shops, a library and pubs. Walcot in the early days had none of these. We were leaving dear Granny behind as well although she did eventually move to Swindon in the 1970s.

Fulham now has become quite an upmarket area. Many of the houses had been refurbished and it is quite the place to live. The whole area is indeed very pleasant now, quite different to the 1950s!

EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS

The main employer had traditionally been the Railway Works where the majority of Swindonians worked. Some worked "inside" as they called it all their lives. Then their sons followed in their footsteps. New industry would be needed to provide work for all these "overspill" men.

In 1955 Pressed Steel Fisher had established their factory on the Parsonage Farm site which was ironically just over the Swindon Borough boundary. By 1965 over 6,000 people were employed there. The majority of them being married men from London. There were other employers who decided to expand their operations in Swindon as well. Plessey and Vickers were two more who employed vast numbers of the new Swindon residents. With the arrival of the larger companies many others expanded. British Road Services (BRS) had their depot at Greenbridge, close to the Pressed Steel Fisher site. Not forgetting the actual building of the estates. This must have provided work for so many men. From civil engineers right through to bricklayers, painters, and carpenters. There was no shortage of employment and of course many Swindonians were also employed by either the new companies to the town or within the building trade. It wasn't just all about the London overspill. Swindon was a rapidly growing town, a post-war boom town in a lot of ways.

ARRIVAL



Those early days must have been quite a trial for our parents, no roads, paths or shops. It seemed to be like that for years as the estate was being completed. We must have been amongst the first batch to move in. If you can imagine, the building started at one end and continued to stretch further down and across the whole area. Once we were old enough to play outside, for us kids it was heaven. Everywhere was a place to play, loads of other kids, no worries about traffic. There were plenty of children about, all the young families with at least two children. Many more families with a lot more children too!



The houses were laid out in a mixture of long driveways, roads and closes. The names, Frobisher, Walsingham, Raleigh, Marlowe, etc. meant nothing to me as a child. I found it quite amazing when I realised who these roads had been named after. All these Elizabethan names, a lot of thought by the Corporation had gone into choosing the road names no doubt. There was a mixture of building material used as well. Our house was traditional red brick, but a lot of houses were constructed from Easiform Prefabricated Concrete. Some were semi-detached, as ours was and some were in a terrace of three or more. There were flats and OAP bungalows too. There were houses to make homes for a variety of family sizes. A brand-new community built in a brand new area.

We couldn't play in the gardens to start off with as they were complete mud heaps full of Kimmeridge clay. This was one of the first things the dads got on with, clearing and preparing the gardens. First thing that was needed was to plant potatoes, yes even in the front garden. This breaks up the clay apparently and improves the soil for grass and flowerbeds. The whole estate would have had potatoes in the front garden for that first year. I really don't think people laid turf in the garden, it would have been grass seed with cotton threads stretched across to keep the birds off. In the in-between time my brother found half a snake in the front garden one afternoon and held it aloft for all the kids to see. Once the mums were aware of the commotion it was taken away from him and disposed of, who knows where. We all thought it was scary, but I can't remember wondering why it was only half a snake. Just goes to show how kids don't always think too deeply about things. So where did we play? I think I was



Nick & Jennie

probably too young at first to be allowed to play outside the house. I imagine the gardens would have been well under way after the first year, and the back garden would have been the first place to meet and play with new friends.

We always say the summers were warmer and longer when we were kids. Is it true? Who knows, certainly seemed like it. Warm, sunny days, playing in the garden. All the

children played in their own gardens in the early days. Getting to know new friends and talking through the wire fence that divided the gardens. We were perfectly capable of playing together even with a fence between us.

The mums used to bring out drinks and refreshments for us all. Cold orange squash and bread and jam were the usual. Oh, but one particularly hot day my little friend's mum brought out a plate of bread, butter and jam. The butter was melting in the heat and the jam was sliding off making a huge mess. I could never eat butter after that day, except on toast - sometimes! My very first friend lived next door. I have no idea

when they moved but have a recollection of it being not too far away. I am sure we went to visit them at their new house. My Mum may have kept in touch with them for a while. They may even have been godparents to a younger brother but that may be my imagination!

Some families only stayed a short while before moving on, maybe to a bigger house as more children arrived. Others stayed for a long time. We lived in that same house for what must have only been about 5 years; it still



feels like longer than that. It could be because these were the first real memories. Where we lived when we started school, where we started to make friends and develop our own personalities.

Jennie Bridges - November 2023



Swindon Quiz - The answer to October's question:



Last month, we asked if you knew where this photo was taken. We didn't get any answers, but I reckon that was because it was too easy. It is of course, Manor Farm House in Cheney Manor Road



Remembrance Sunday at Radnor Street Cemetery

A service of remembrance will be held here on
Sunday 12th November 2023

At 2pm

Please attend and remember the fallen
Lest we forget



We Need Your Thoughts



For our annual summer outing next year, we are considering a trip to the **National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire**. The trip is likely to be on a Sunday in June.

We will obviously need to book a coach to get us there and back, and we calculate the probable cost for this will be around £20 per head, assuming there are at least 50 people or so that would like to go.

The invitation to come along is also thrown open to friends and family so this could end up as a lovely day for a get-together as well as a visit to a beautiful place.

It is important for us to know if there is enough interest in this trip before we proceed any further so Andy will be asking for a show of hands before the meeting commences tonight. This should give us an indication of whether this is indeed a good idea. Please have a think about it and be prepared to stick your hand up if you are interested!

THANK YOU

Queens Park - Subsidence at the tunnel site. This bank was once a wooded part of the park - 25th May 1986



Old Town to Freshbrook Cycle Track. Once there were two railway lines here; The Lower and The Higher - 5th June 1983

