



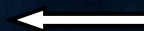
Mission  
Nightclub  
back then  
Circa 2000s...



# The Swindon Society Newsletter - October 2023



...and  
more  
recently  
February  
2023



# Welcome to the October Newsletter



Hello and welcome to the October newsletter.



Wait... how can it be October already!? Shorter evenings and longer nights are already knocking at the door and thoughts are turning to that 'C' word... no, actually I was thinking of crumpets!

Tonight we have the long awaited presentation from Diane and Jennie, Beaney Revisited. Once again we delve into the Beaney archive, wondering whether we might recognise someone in the photo and always hoping of course that it might be us in the picture.

So, now the wait is over, sit back and enjoy the show.

Remember, if you have a Swindon story or memory to share with us in the newsletter, it could be yours or someone else's, please get in touch on either of these:

- me - [angie.phillips@ntlworld.com](mailto:angie.phillips@ntlworld.com)
- or - [info@theswindonsociety.co.uk](mailto:info@theswindonsociety.co.uk)



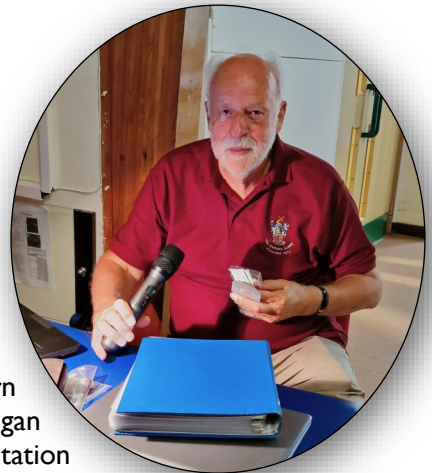
## Around Swindon in 1999

By

David Bedford

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13th September 2023



In a wonderful welcome back to the new season, we had a brand new presentation from David Bedford. We were transported back in time to 1999, in one of the more modern events we have had in recent years. David began by telling us that he got the idea for the presentation when he was scanning in the photographs and realised he didn't remember taking them!

The photos started with some context for the year - whilst it feels like it wasn't that long ago there were certainly some things that I'd forgotten. There was the Millennium Bug and the introduction of the euro as a currency (albeit an invisible one).



Our first photo of Swindon was the hoardings for the Designer Outlet Village, which opened its second phase in 1999. Then it was the building of Keypoint out by what is now the Gablecross roundabout. This was followed by a picture of



Gilbert's on Groundwell Road with all their fresh fruit and vegetables on display outside. Then it was the Halifax in College Street, just as it was due to close down. Slightly further up into Regent Street was the site of Mclroys and we saw an architect's illustration of what the new site would look like.

We had a newly installed pub sign for The Bulldog pub on Queens Drive, which was interesting because although they had put a new sign up, the frame was not replaced, so the contrast between the new and old was marked. Then it was up into Old Town and down Prospect Place to Workman's with all its wares on display (just like at Gilbert's). Next, we went up to Stanwells on Eastcott Hill/Bath Road and then back down Victoria Road to the former Trynix Motor Company garage. At this



point the building was long-empty, but an application had been submitted to change the premises to a restaurant. This obviously didn't happen and the building is now residential.

We moved out of the town centre and over to Shaw Ridge to the Exchange Bar and Grill - it was previously Pinkertons Wine Bar, then a TGI Fridays, and is now called The Ridge. We had a photo of Eros nightclub (formerly Cairos) and then the Virgin Cinema, which was showing Pleasantville and Shakespeare in Love at the time.

The Sportsman pub was our next stop, which was previously The Sir Daniel (in its original incarnation); The Sportsman was demolished the following year. David then took us further afield out to the Fitness First Gym at Eldene which was previously a car showroom. We saw Videostop on Eastcott Hill (opposite The Globe pub), which had some wonderful artwork around the exterior of the building, including Pinocchio. We then travelled back to Victoria Road to the short-lived Restaurant @ the End of The Universe, which was only open for about four weeks.

I got quite excited at being possibly the only person in the room that could identify the Po Na Na logo - but then I turned 18 in 1999, so it was quite fitting that I did! We saw Bon Marche, located next to Abbey National (now Santander). We had a quick look at Chiquitos and Frankie & Benny's over at Greenbridge. Then we moved on



Theatre Square 1979 - Po Na Na was here years later



St Margaret's Hospital

to St. Margaret's Hospital, where the West Wing had just closed but the main block was still in use. Later in the presentation we returned to the hospital on the day it closed - 26th June. We then had a photo of a small building on Hyde Road, which David rushed to photograph after being told it would be knocked down imminently... the

building is still there! My favourite photo of the evening was of the "temporary" library at Regent Circus, accompanied by all the phone boxes lined up outside. A little way around the corner we had Rockin' Emporium, Tennessee Fried Chicken and Victoria Amusements, all in a row. Across the road at the bottom of Victoria Hill was Nick Jones hairdressers and Wayne's Barber Shop. Back across the road to



Temporary Library (Newer Phone Boxes)

the top of Groundwell Road was Lloyds Chemist, a betting shop and the Amazon Laundrette, which we were later reminded exploded. This happened not long after the photo was taken and David returned and got a photo of the building all boarded up, which we saw later in the evening.

There were a few more photos in between our two visits to the Amazon Laundrette, including the greens near Coate with the old bus lay-by and new banks to stop travellers from camping. Then Taylor James Estate Agent on Moredon Road and the re-excavation of the Wilts and Berks Canal near the site of the old Moredon Power Station. We also saw the new roads being built in and out of Great Western Hospital on Marlborough Road.

By this point we were only about half-way through the evening - David knows his audience well and packs in the pictures! We continued with the steel framework for the building which housed the original Wilko store at the bottom of Bridge Street. Then it was onto the Lawns for the Old Town churches Pentecost celebrations. The Sikh community in Swindon celebrated the tricentenary of the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1999 and they walked from the old Gurdwara in North Street to the new site at Kembrey. Unfortunately, it was a very rainy day and David abandoned his photo-taking to get out of the bad weather!

We had a photo of the Cheney Chippy opposite the Steam Train pub (now The Manor). Then the Cheney Manor Road Spar, which had just closed. On a happier note, there was a photo of a crowd outside the Elm Tree pub in Chiseldon in the sunshine - it was



the Swindon Society waiting for the summer outing to start! Another visit that the Society went on was to the Cellular Phone Company at Peatmoor Lake - which was apparently memorable due to the “stunning” toilets; we also saw a photo of the framework of that building. Then there was a shot of the Locomotion Luncheon and Tea Rooms (complete with the old SBC tree logo), followed by the Old Town festival on the Lawns and Quarry Road. We were reminded of the Honda advert “Swindon for a better quality of life” which was photographed on the corner of Elmina Road. To remind me of turning 18 in this year, there was a photo of Mission nightclub in Old Town (where I went to celebrate). Then we moved to Winifred Street and the corner shop that had just closed down. We also had Warehouse and Miss Selfridge both boarded up on Canal Walk, ready for the building to be redeveloped. Those two shops moved across the street into the corner building retail space.

Another shop that was closing down was Limmex, and David had a photo of the retirement sale being held. Something very different then followed - it was the Moscow State Circus on Wootton Bassett Road, with a man walking across the top of the tent!



More acrobatics followed with the closure of the GWR Museum on Faringdon Road and having to move the trains out and down to the new STEAM Museum. David knew someone who let him in to see the trains being moved out and get some all-important pictures. Then there was the Old Town Bowl, with the murky, horrible pond in front of the stage, which has now (thankfully) been filled in. In 1999 the old Green & Co. signage was uncovered on a shop in Wood Street; it is still visible and in good condition on what is now Food Magpie. Staying nearby, we had the snow of December at Holy Rood on the Lawns and then the Christmas and Millennium painting in the windows of Expressions Cards. Fittingly, we finished with the Millennium Beacon being lit at Christ Church. It was a whirlwind trip through the year, but what a lot of reminders we had of things that have changed in the last 24 years. Thank you David for another brilliant evening.

*Kelly Blake - September 2023*

Canal Walk 1984



## Swindon Society Meeting Wednesday 8th November 2023

### Making Plans for Swindon Jon Ratcliffe

Make sure you don't miss next month's meeting!

Local professional photographer Jon Ratcliffe delves into the plans for Swindon that didn't make it off the drawing board.

From Victorian New Swindon modernisation, to post-Second World War grand boulevards, and the bold visions of the present day.

Be taken on a tour of some very different ideas for the town that's always got change on it's mind.

**SEE YOU AGAIN SOON!**



# Swindon Library Shop

The Swindon Library Shop, located on the ground floor of Central Library, now has a collection of local history books from Wiltshire based Hobnob Press who are a publisher of books mainly about Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset and Gloucestershire.



Titles range from Little Imber on the Down by Rex Sawyer, The Church in Wiltshire by John Chandler, Small Earthquake in Wiltshire by Eric L Jones, and Forests of the Dinosaurs - Wiltshire's Jurassic Finale, by John E Needham amongst others.

The Library Shop has a good variety of local history books, some that are not available elsewhere including titles written by the local studies team in the library. This collection from Hobnob Press further enhances that selection and provides a good source and range of titles for people to choose from.

For more information please visit their blog here:

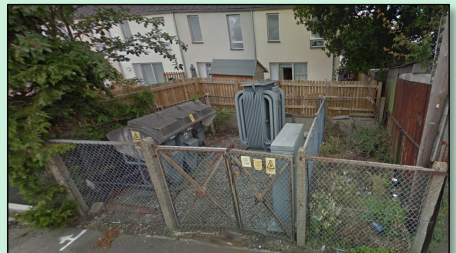
<https://libraryshop.wordpress.com/>

Or follow on Instagram @swindonlibrariesshop.

## The Hackett Lane Mystery...

In our last newsletter we wondered why a *backsie* in Ferndale, where an electricity sub-station is located, had been given a name.

We had an interesting response from a reader who wrote to say that the unknown street had been named so that the Post Office could give it a postcode, thus enabling emergency services to put this into their satellite navigation systems if necessary. They further commented that a certain hall in Royal Wootton Bassett could benefit from having its own postcode. Currently they have to use the postcode for a house in a nearby street backing onto the location when using sat navs.





## John Hacker

1938 - 2023



A wonderful, uplifting service of Thanksgiving took place on the 4th September 2023 for John Thomas Hacker.

Our highly esteemed member and auditor was born 11<sup>th</sup> July 1935 and sadly passed away 16<sup>th</sup> August 2023. Throughout the service we heard about John's life, his younger years, his family and his faith.

Freshbrook Church rang out with the voices of so many in the congregation, the songs filled with a mixture of joy and of course sadness for the occasion. The heartfelt eulogies read by those close to John were truly inspiring.

John was a remarkable man who clearly will be missed by so many and remembered with much affection.



## Feedback from our Newsletter...



Our online newsletter reaches far and wide and we get some lovely comments, often via Yvonne Neal from the Wiltshire Family History Society. Here are a couple of comments we have had more recently:

**Susan Hatton**, who is a published poet wrote this about the summer edition:

*“What a fascinating newsletter. It’s an area I don’t know but, believe me, I joined you in your walks and I found the buildings, shops, etc very interesting. Isn’t modern science wonderful, that I could - through the internet - meet a kindred spirit then, through pictures, etc, walk in mind through the area? Of interest was the article about the Baptist Chapel. My Mother and her nine brothers and sisters had a strict Baptist mother. If I stayed with my grandparents in Tubney as a child, Sunday seemed to go on forever because, chapel three times, and you could not even read a book. My mother and most of the others joined the C of E although one uncle joined a strange sect.”*

**Able**, who is the Booking’s Manager at the New Mechanics’ Institution Preservation Trust said this about our May edition:

*Thank you for this wonderful newsletter! I love looking at the pictures of our town's history! The petrol pumps on Devizes road- wow!*



## HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

We are very lucky in Swindon to have a range of Heritage Open Days events happening every September and this year Local Studies partnered with the Mechanics' Institution Trust to present two free talks at Central Library.

*From Steam to Stegosaurus: Swindon's Questions Answered* showcased the variety of enquiries that the Local Studies team answer every day. It's not all family history, old buildings and the Swindon Adver. The team attempt to answer every question that comes their way - and there were some really interesting ones asked on social media when the request went out for people to ask them anything. And the only one they couldn't find the answer to? Mine (whoops!).

Kelly Blake's question is giving me a headache!

As we probably all know, asking a question on social media can result in some comments that are not always what you expect. One of the first questions asked when the request was sent out was "No such thing as a silly question... Is the author new to the internet?" This was obviously not necessarily Local Studies related, but Jenny and Sara did their utmost to answer the question anyway. And they found out that Swindon Libraries are definitely not all that new to the internet - back in the mists of time (the mid-1990s) they had one computer in the Reference Library that had a dial-up internet connection. If staff at other Swindon library branches were unable to find the answer to an enquiry any other way, they could phone the Reference Library and ask the one member of staff who knew how to use it, to look it up on the internet. Presumably they were phoned back with the answer though - it could take a while to load up a computer, get the connection going through the squeaks and hisses of the modem, and then load up a web page!

Other questions that Jenny and Sara were able to answer in their talk included:

- Is it right that the first Stegosaurus bones discovered in the world were in Town Gardens in Old Town?
- Where is the Swindon Stone Circle and how could it be visited?
- Are there tales of dragons associated with Cricklade?
- Have there been any cults run in Swindon?

- How many families would go on the annual railway “trip” organised by GWR?
- Which amateur dramatics group started out by performing in a Nissen hut in Gorse Hill?
- How were the twin towns chosen?
- Why did the hot house at Queens Park have to go and did it really have a fern in it that closed its leaves if you touched it?
- Were those who moved from London to the overspill estates housed according to previous location i.e. those from North London went to Penhill and Pinehurst (in North Swindon)?
- How many aeroplanes have been built in Swindon?
- Is there something super cool or super mundane that was made in Swindon?
- What measures were taken by Swindon businesses to prepare for the Millennium Bug?
- Andy Partridge referred to Swindon as a “cheap-joke town”. How and when did it get this reputation?

And there was more that could just not be fitted into the evening! Every question was answered fully and answers to the other questions which were asked will be published online.

So what was the one question that couldn't be answered...

A small part of the TV adaptation of *The Lives and Loves of a She-Devil* was filmed in Broome Manor - do you know which one of the Gates it was filmed in? (For context - this was a BAFTA award-winning 1980s BBC adaptation of the book by Fay Weldon, which starred Julie T. Wallace, Dennis Waterman and Patricia Hodge.)

It turns out that the question couldn't be answered in the time available. The team could find references to the filming of the show (and the climactic burning down of the house) in the *Swindon Advertiser*, but

Still from the TV drama



they weren't specific enough to narrow down when the filming happened (and was therefore reported on in the Adver to find the specific details of the location). So I stumped Local Studies - and as you can see from the number of questions answered and the breadth of topics covered, that doesn't happen very often.

We did find the answer a short while later via the magic of simply asking someone who lived in Broome Manor at the time - but I'll leave that to be revealed online by Jenny and Sara for those of you who are interested.

*Kelly Blake - October 2023*

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



Easy one for you this time.

Where is this?

Think you know? Then let us know:

[info@theswindonsociety.co.uk](mailto:info@theswindonsociety.co.uk)



### Answer to the Summer Newsletter's Teaser

This was a difficult one but we were contacted by Glyn Harris who knew the answer and told us:

*"This is is/was the exit sign from the station car park in London Street. It directed pedestrians to both the bus and rail stations to the left and to the town via Bridge Street (to the right). Now many years since I have had need to use that car park I do not know whether it still exists."*



Well Glyn, we can confirm that it does. Furthermore, Andy informed us that a couple of policemen asked him what he was doing when he was taking the photo. Well, he does look like a wrong'un!

**Beales Café - Date Unknown**



**Ladder Lane M4 Bridge (The Curly Wurly Bridge)  
Date Unknown**

