

Back Then...

**Cavendish
Square
Mural
Dec 2006**



The Swindon Society

Newsletter - October 2025



**And now...
More
Recently
March
2024**



Welcome to the October Newsletter

Our first meeting in the new hall went pretty well. There were some issues with parking, which was strange because we had the same amount of parking we have always had so we're not sure what caused the issue. Despite this, members seemed to find us okay. David's presentation was superb, as always. A lot of the images he shows are from his own personal collection, so thank you David for sharing some of them with us.

Tonight's show is based on the photos of William Hooper, and is presented by Paul Williams. Paul is quite an authority on Hooper and has an extensive collection of Hooper's postcards. Judging by the title he must have uncovered a few more - it all sounds very interesting!

Finally, a quick reminder that we would love you to share your memories of your life in Swindon with us. What school did you go to? Where did you work and what was it like? Where did you socialise? What shops do you remember that have now gone? Anything and everything is of interest to us so send me something by email, or write it down and give it to me. We all love to hear stories that prompt our own memories so don't be shy! You can contact me using the emails below. Many thanks.

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A Dip In The Collection

by

David Bedford

10th September 2025

It was wonderful to see such a busy meeting for our opener of the season, and it was a treat (as always) to have David Bedford's view of Swindon through a lens, over the years. We were having a dip into his huge collection of over 10,000 slides and 9,000 digital photos of Swindon, so we saw more photos than I can list here, although not quite as many as David's complete collection.

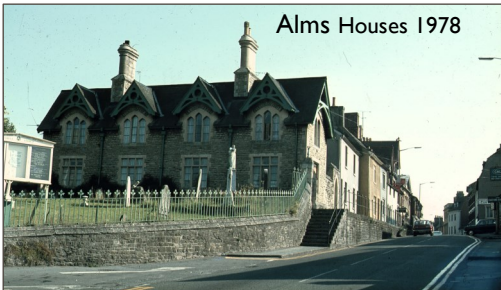
David described to us how he first got into photography through the camera club at his work in 1985 and used to take two photos - one for himself and one for the Society, which is how he ended up with quite so many of them. The presentation was chronological, apart from the first shot - this was a beautiful glowing sign saying Swindon, which was taken at Town Gardens Enchanted Gardens Lights Trail.



He started from 1985 and the shot was of the Day House Lane brickworks. We were then looking out over the Bristol Street car park from a 13th floor balcony and in the other direction saw towards the train station and the “new” office blocks being built. We then moved onto Shrivenham Road and the Garrards gate; then it was Kingsbridge Point (the Nationwide building) being built in Clarence Street. We moved on to the corner of St Margarets Road and Winifred Street to see the (literal) corner shop - Williams Groceries.



We then moved onto Jennings Street School (before it was demolished in 1987); the Majestic Wine Warehouse on Cricklade Road; and following that it was Drove Road in the snow of 1987. We saw the Pope Bros. yard a little further up the hill on Cricklade Street, and the stone plaque on the Alms Houses next to Christ Church. Going back down the hill, we stopped off at Queens Park and the rear of Belgrave Street where subsidence became a huge problem in 1987 and the council had to spend lots of time and money making it safe. We also saw the old hothouse in Queens Park, which had been built by Pope Bros. Alas, the restoration work



required on this building cost too much and it was later demolished.

Mirroring an article in the newsletter (where the old signage had recently become visible again), we saw a photo of Drury's Off Licence on Prospect Place, and (moving further along the road) Ken White's mural of famous faces from Swindon. Another mural was that on the wall of the Small Pool in the Health Hydro in 1987.



Then it was on to Harding Street where we saw the New Swindon Co-operative Society plaque from 1912. Back into the Health Hydro and it was the Well Women clinic space and the plaque commemorating its opening by Dr. Katherina Dalton - the “PMS Doctor”. We also saw the beautiful stained glass of the Health Hydro's main window, which we all hope to see again soon when the building re-opens next year.



We were shown another mural, this one near Sainsbury's in the town centre, which commemorated the twinning of Swindon with Ocotal in Nicaragua in 1989. Then it was Sargent's Tools in Villett Street, where David said he bought tools for his apprenticeship - and he still has a few of them. Then there was some graffiti before the buildings of Villett Street were demolished - "People need homes not car parks". We then saw the same area post-demolition and flattened. There was quite a few photos taken around the town centre environs - Bubbles Wine Bar in Wyvern Square; Swindon Cable in Edgware Road;



Edgware Road



1968

and Brett's pet shop in Commercial Road on the day before it closed in August 1989. Dingley's cake decorating shop was next door and then it was down through town to the Central Cafe and Byron's Fish Restaurant, both awaiting demolition in 1989.

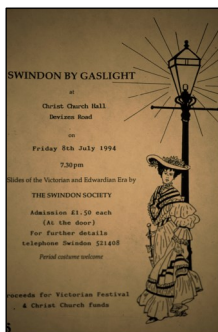
David then showed us a brilliant photo he had taken at the demolition site of the Wills factory in Colbourne Street. He framed the chimney stack through a hole in the brickwork - but then saw the same photo appear in the next day's Adver - he'd been copied by their photographer!

Moving into 1990 we saw a plaque from 1891 commemorating the opening of the Town Hall, but which got buried under the steps. Then it was onto the building of Tesco and then a view of Cavendish Square from the top in September. Then a photo which drew a few giggles from the audience - St Tropez on Victoria Road - a "massage parlour". Then it was another mural, this one from 1991 on Plum Records in the Railway Village. The photos then took a more sombre tone, as David showed us the flowers left in tribute to the five children killed on Akers Way in a horrific accident, also in September of that year. We also saw the commemorative plaque that was installed later on.

We saw many more photos: Regent Street looking down towards the centre from outside

Nationwide; the Skurrays showroom on Drove

Road (now the site of Aldi) with the old fire station training tower in the background; Gilberts fat and bone factory on Drove Road; and Pinkertons at Shaw Ridge. Then we saw some photos of people - Brian Bridgeman and Jean Allen presenting a £500 cheque to the Prospect Hospice in 1991, and a flyer for an April 1992 event - Swindon by Gaslight by Jean Allen and David.





Then there were some toilet blocks, which David started taking photos of because they started being closed; these ones were at the County Ground and in Gorse Hill. Then there were some hot air balloons lifting off from Mannington Rec in July 1992. Some more people appeared in David's photos as there was a shot of Society members in hard hats on a trip to the Works, which was being transformed into what became the Outlet Village. Then it was the old Town Gardens aviary in March 1994, then onto Davis House in Corporation Street (temporary accommodation for homeless men). Later the same year we had the

assembly of the Tented Market in the town centre. Skipping on a little, we had the North Swindon District Centre (as it was then known) in 2009 showing the water fountain in action - it did actually work!

Feeling like it was only yesterday, we saw a photo from 2011 of the trees being cleared at the Whalebridge subways, which



became the “gyratory”; then a billboard of the “Olympics coming to Swindon” with the torch relay in 2012 and the living wall on the side of the Brunel Centre in Canal Walk from the same year. From 2015 we saw a photo of the Suffragettes March through Old Town, (featuring some familiar faces!). We then saw the March 2019 protest at the County Ground about the closure of Honda and the march up Princes Street; then the blue plaque unveiling for Harold Fleming on Durham Street in August. Then it was Covid times - “Keep Calm and Carry On Social Distancing” by Woodbine Terrace and “Thank You Key Workers” on Fleming Way, as well as the Beckhampton Street test centre.



Next up it was the Coate Water Garden of Reflection wildflowers in all their glory and then we had the death of Queen Elizabeth II (commemorated on the board at the County Ground) and coronation of King Charles III painted onto the road on Wood Street outside the Kings Arms. In 2023 we had Swindogs and in 2024, Ukraine Fest. Bringing

us right up to date was a photo of the Food Festival which took place in August of this year on the closed Devizes Road and the brand-spanking new bus boulevard.

I can't do David's presentation justice in this brief round-up, but suffice to say it was thoroughly enjoyed by all those in attendance. Thank you once again David.

Kelly Blake - September 2025

The Swindon Society Open Day

Lawn Community Centre - 20th September 2025



We held our second open day on Saturday 20th September, and we are so pleased that it turned out to be just as successful as last year's event.



There were various images from our archive on display, and additional displays from some of our members' own collections. Other selected Swindon groups also came along with information to show what they were all about.



Courtesy of Roy Cartwright



Once again, there were a variety of short talks, which seemed to go down very well. The rolling slide show, once again, drew a lot of "bums on seats" for a short while as it displayed all the images it had to offer.



Courtesy of Roy Cartwright

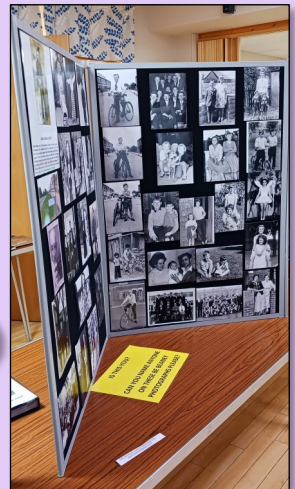




And the Beany collection was manned, as usual, by Diane and Jennie who dealt with everyone who had queries or information to impart.



Courtesy of Roy Cartwright



Many thanks for coming along!



Courtesy of Roy Cartwright



What Do You Remember?

Following on from my previous article, I was thinking about how life was when I was younger and how times have changed. Here are some random memories that run through my head from time to time and they always make me smile. Do you have similar memories? Please share them with us all. I would love to print them in the newsletter.

I think I'm probably a bit too nostalgic for my own good, but I can't help it. Memories of a simpler way of life are uplifting sometimes, so why not? Here are some of the random things I remember:

We lived on a new estate with no shops close by so there were lots of tradesmen who brought their wares directly to our street that we could buy if we wanted to. I can clearly remember the Wonderloaf man coming round the streets, delivering bread. Mum would usually get a crusty loaf and



occasionally something we called a bun round. This consisted of a ring of currant buns that you pulled apart, a bit like a "tear and share" and it was topped with icing and a glace cherry on each bun. The Wonderloaf man would bring a large basket of bread and cakes to our door to choose from. If I was at home, I would follow Mum to the door and pester her to buy a bun round - they were delicious.



Usually, I think about once a week in the late afternoon, the Corona van came round the streets. We harassed Mum



for a bottle of pop every time and sometimes she gave in; Cherryade was my favourite back then. And it was the same nightmare for Mum when the ice cream man came round, it was always "Quick, quick before he goes!" Poor Mum!



Do you remember the "Beer at Home Means Davenports" advertisement? Mum occasionally bought a couple of bottles of stout or something when the truck came round the streets. Mum and Dad were not big drinkers at all. It's funny, I can't really say the same for some of their offspring!



We also had a mobile grocer's shop that came around the neighbourhood. This was essential in the early days of the new estate, before the shopping centre was built. Mum and Dad knew the owner, Merv, and he would usually stop for a cup of tea at our house.

The coalman was another familiar figure when we were younger, (our streets were



busy in those days!) We had no central heating back then, just the coal fire, which also heated the water by means of what was called a *back boiler*. This was situated at the back of the coal fire and deposited the hot water into a big tank upstairs. The rumbling of the whole hot water system scared the life out of us kids, I always thought it was about to explode!

There was no telephone in our house either when I was young; I

remember walking round to our local telephone box every Sunday (I think) with my mum and my sisters to call my nan. If you've seen the film *East Is East*, you will know exactly what we must have looked like, cramming into the phone box. Every so often the pips would go, and Mum would push another shilling or threepenny bit into the slot so that she could continue talking. Our phone box did not have the A and B buttons so must have been a "modern" one.



Later in life, as teenagers we used to phone a certain number and listen to a current pop song - on repeat. The song changed every day. This service was known as "Dial A Disc". By this time, we had a phone at home, so we used to phone Dial A Disc from there. It wound my mum up no end because it cost her a fortune in call charges!

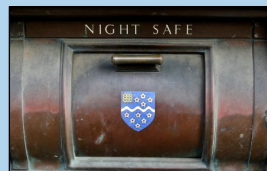
Every December, I remember Father Christmas coming down the street sitting on his sleigh with his reindeer up front and Christmas carols blaring as he went along. Actually, the sleigh was on the back of a truck and was cruising the streets raising money for either the Lions Club or Rotary Club, I can't remember which. If the loud music didn't alert you to the drive-past, you still wouldn't miss it because the door-knockers would come down the street in advance of the sleigh with their buckets of toffees. If you put some coins in the bucket, you could take a toffee in return. I wonder if they knew that not only were they raising money, but they were also creating memories for us kids.

During the summer, if you lived in a council house, every so often, council workmen would come round and paint the window frames and the front doors. The home owner had the option of three or four colours for their front door and could pick what they wanted. A row of houses could be very colourful as you walked along. I think Dad painted our front door sometimes, just so it was different to everyone else's.

And speaking of the colourful front doors, do you remember walking down the street and seeing plastic bags hanging from all the letterboxes? These bags usually had a colouring book and crayons in or something enticing for a young child. I always wanted what was in the bag, but in order to have the goodies, you had to fill the bag with old clothes in return. We rarely had any old clothes to give away - we were too busy wearing them! Sadly, the bag had to stay hanging from the letterbox until it was collected up again.

One of our favourite things to do after the council lawn mowers had cut the various patches of grass around our neighbourhood was to collect the grass cuttings and start building a “house”. The layout from the cuttings had a front door and usually a second room with a door between them. We had great imaginations back then, and we used them!

Thinking now of being dragged around the local shops. There were no big supermarkets back then so you were needed to carry something home. There was always a bank of some sort close by the shops, and do you remember the sturdy metal night safe deposit facility that was usually built into the wall of the bank? I never saw one in use, but I believe you pulled down the heavy-duty metal handle to reveal a big chute where shops could deposit their day’s takings. I remember holding on to those metal handles and lifting my feet off the floor and dangling. Was I the only one?



Do you remember Ladybird clothing for kids? I had a Ladybird anorak and loved it! I think it came from Radnor Stores. Before that, I had a duffle coat - every kid had a duffle coat with toggles at some time or another.



And speaking of duffle coats - what about the duffle bags that were the norm for carrying kit in back then. They were the predecessor to the square Adidas sports bag that became so popular in the 70s. And on the same subject of carrying kit, I think every girl that did cookery at school in the 70s used a basket with a cover to carry all their ingredients to school, and which was also very useful to carry home whatever dish you had created.



Did you ever go jumping ditches at Lawn Woods. Years ago, there were properly defined channels of muddy water which were not surrounded by under-growth and bushes. We’d spend hours in there jumping the ditches. Or in my case failing - so more like jumping into ditches. My mum gave me “what for” quite a few times for that!

When you visited Coate Water, do you remember having to put a penny in the turnstile at the gate to get in? The swimming pool and fountains were always freezing cold!

Also, do you remember the big silver dustcarts that sometimes towed a huge, caged trailer behind for collecting cardboard to be recycled. Sometimes they would uncouple the trailer, leave it in your street, and come back for it a bit later.

And finally, did you ever jump along the sleepers on the old MSWJ railway line, before Burmah Oil was built. We did. A whole bunch of us kids from our neighbourhood. Now that sounds like something out of Enid Blyton - but that’s how it was!

Do you know, I wish I had owned a camera as a child and taken some pictures of our escapades.

Angie Phillips - October 2025

Programme 2025 - 2026

October 8th	William Hooper - And Still More Turn Up!	Paul Williams
November 12th	Princes Street - Revisited	Gina Deyager
December 10th	Members' Christmas Party	Everyone
January 14th	Health Hydro: The Past - The Future	Guest Presenter
February 11th	The Life & Death of Charles Collett	Graham Carter
March 11th	Iron, Stone & Steam: Brunel's Railway Kingdom	Tim Bryan
April 8th	South Swindon Parish Council Green Trail	John Farrow
May 13th	Queenstown (Not Kimmerfields) Preceded by the AGM	John Stooke & Kevin Leakey
June 11th	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).*

Here's the answer to the mystery location.

Nobody contacted me with the answer. Was it too hard? Just so you know, the signpost is in the alleyway between the Hoopers Place car park and Wood Street. It runs alongside Food Magpie in Wood Street, and comes out opposite the Kings Arms.

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Argos Store, The Parade - Circa 1973?



Stads Stationery & Printing Shop - The Railway Village

