

Back Then...

St Margarets
Road

C.1910



The Swindon Society

Newsletter - November 2025



And
Now...
More
Recently
May 2025



Welcome to the November Newsletter

Well, the clocks have gone back and we are now well into the season of long dark nights... but never fear, we have our Swindon Society meetings to look forward to so that should cheer us all up!

We were pleased that last month's parking seemed to be back to normal after the hiccup in September. Please do let us know about any further issues though.

Tonight, we are revisiting Princes Street with our presenter, Gina Deyager. Gina did the first Princes Street presentation back in 2010 - 15 years ago! At that time, it was a joint presentation with Kevin Leakey, where he covered the Broad Street area. This time it's just the one area, but with an abundance of images to enjoy. The order of the images will take us all the way down the street and up the other side, with a visit to some of the roads that adjoin along the way. We hope you enjoy it.

Finally, I was thrilled to receive lots of contributions for this month's newsletter. Sincere thanks to all those who have contributed; and if you want to contribute too, just send your stories to me at:

angie.phillips@ntlworld.com
info@theswindonsociety.co.uk

William Hooper - And Still More Turn Up

Presented by

Paul Williams
8th October 2025

Paul began by saying that he had been collecting Hooper postcards for more than forty years. He explained that his interest had increased when he found out that he was distantly related to Mary Stroud, Hooper's wife, through his own father.

As the title of the presentation suggested, Paul had new images to show us and the first photo was of Thomas Hacker (grandfather of the late John Hacker who some will remember was a valued Swindon Society member and auditor of our finances), and then an image of an etching, created by Hooper and another of the postcard that had been produced from the etching.





Thomas Hacker lived in Merton Street with a business at the back of the house selling bread, flour and corn, etc. He was a Christian and a member of the Brethren movement in the late 1800s. They had a meeting place in Merton Street and a contact of Thomas' from the meetings was Joseph Dore, who was also a friend of William Hooper. Joseph received a summons for preaching in Princes Street and appeared in court on 3rd November

1881. He was fined for his actions, but it was someone else who paid the fine for him. We saw an image of Thomas Hacker, which Paul told us hung on a wall in William Hooper's own home. Then we saw images of two historical documents from Swindon & Wiltshire Records Office in Chippenham.

Eventually, their meetings grew too big for the Merton Street Hall and in 1891 land was acquired for £20 where they would construct a hall. William Hooper designed the new building, producing the plans and drawings, etc. The church opened in 1899 and if my notes are correct, Paul then showed us the only postcard image of the church, taken on 26th December 1899.

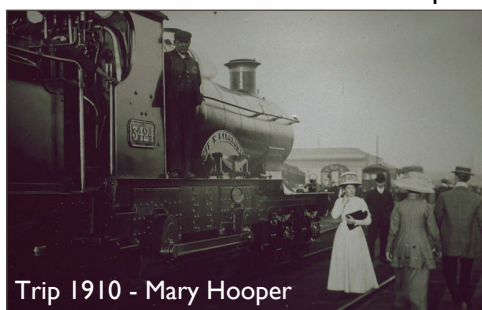
The church closed in 1967 and was demolished in 1972 so that the area could be redeveloped.



Paul informed us that Hooper worked in the GWR Works where he had a bad accident which resulted in his leg being amputated at the knee. He continued to work there but his real interest was photography, which later became his main occupation.

The next image was of a postcard of a works "Trip" to Chester dated 1st July 1910. Then we saw signalmen operating levers in signal box C. There were images of the crowds at the GWR fete and an open "soap box" meeting held in Bristol Street.

We saw GWR medical staff and a picture of a nurse from 1915. We moved on to a fire at the Great Western Hotel on 29th July 1913, and a photo of Sidney Maidment who was one of the firemen that attended the fire. Sidney received a long-service medal having spent twenty years with the Swindon Fire Brigade.

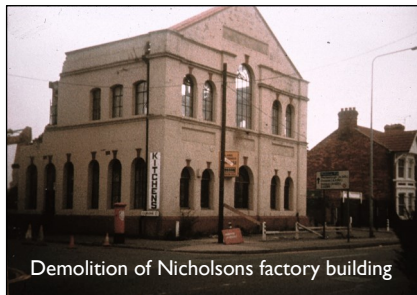


Trip 1910 - Mary Hooper

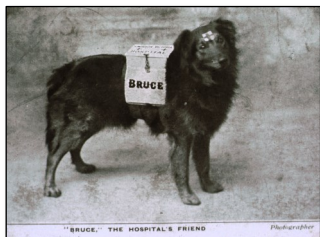
Next came John Toomer who was a coal and coke merchant. He was pictured outside Hooper's shop which he actually lived above. Then we saw a Euclid Street school team photo, another of someone called Percival Ball who used to play the organ (unfortunately I did not make a note of where).

Images of shops in the town appeared next; Central Bazaar Store in Bridge Street, Halford Cycle Co. Ltd. at 77 Regent Street, Hayward Bros., Watchmaker and Jewellers and a few more. Then we moved on to see children from the Primitive Methodist Church Sunday School on 25th October 1910.

We saw a photo of the Collard Family's tailor shop, situated at 23-25 Victoria Road, near the bottom of the hill; they later moved to Westlecot Road, and then an image of Broad Street. A photo of the Nicholson's factory in County Road was next and then another that looked down County Road from Manchester Road. Charlie Clack ran a flour and corn store in the area and we saw a photo of him with two of his four children.



Demolition of Nicholson's factory building



We moved on to something a bit different for a moment; an operation taking place at Victoria Hospital in Old Town, dated somewhere between 1910-1920. Then came a familiar character - Bruce the charity dog - who was well known at that time for being involved in collecting funds for the hospital.

Sanford Street School was up next, in particular the football team from 1914 - 15 - but there was no cup in the photo! Then up popped Tram Car No. 1 in Park Lane from 1904. Then we journeyed up to Old Town and saw a picture of Lawn Lodge in Old Mill Lane which was later demolished in the 60s. There was a lovely image of Drove Road with no houses, just lined with trees, and then back to William, photographed on his tricycle, followed by an unusual view of the back of Richard Jefferies' house (which hasn't changed much).

Then it was off on a rural trip around the outskirts of Swindon starting with Aldbourne, where Mary Hooper was raised having moved there as a child from Hereford where she was born. Ashton Keynes was up next then Calne. We saw a poorhouse, the golf links in Chiseldon, a nine-hole golf course on the Wiltshire Downs, we visited a vicarage in Clyffe Pypard, a railway station in Hannington, Hill View Cottage in Haydon Wick (occupied at the time by





the Cox family) and then Manor Farm and the Coombs. Then, Kingsdown Road, St Philip's Church, a girl's school in Upper Stratton, and a photo of Stratton night-school football club from the season 1900-01. Onwards to the church in Wanborough, then The Three Horseshoes pub in Wroughton (later to become the Brown Jack), Wroughton House, High Street

Methodist Church and River Coln House and Mill. There were so many interesting images including one of Windrush in Gloucestershire where William Hooper was born, Swindon Bicycle Club, Army bandmen and some gamekeepers with their guns.

We finished the show with one of Hooper's more unusual photos - not of people or places - but of an eclipse of the moon. The images were taken at 11.20pm, 12.09am and 12.48am and showed three phases of the eclipse. Hooper took these images from the roof of number 6 Cromwell Street on his self-made camera. Paul told us Hooper had a keen interest in astronomy - indeed, he was a man of many talents; he also enjoyed embroidery and was the secretary for his church for thirty-nine years. Aren't we lucky that he lived in Swindon, and we are also lucky that Paul has been kind enough to share his precious images with us all.

Thank you, Paul.

Angie Phillips - October 2025

Cows Outside My House!

My wife and I attended the recent open day at Lawn Community Centre and were pleasantly surprised to find a photograph of my wife's parents wedding day among the photos of unknown people. Also, pleased to see photographs of her grandparents' neighbours from the Gorse Hill area, the names of whom were already known to the Society.

I also showed the attached photograph to some of your members on the day and they asked me to send a copy by email with the story behind it.

My parents, older brother and sister, came to Swindon around 1956. As my sister was born in 1953 and my brother in 1955, both in London, I'm guessing that this is the year they all moved here. They moved to 7 Sadler Walk in Walcot when the estate was still being constructed around them and the photo you see below was taken from the front garden of number 7 shortly after they arrived. The cows are in the field opposite their garden, and beyond the tree line you can see the roofs of houses on Queens Drive.

I was born in 1965 at number 7 and by then Walcot School had been built opposite the houses in Sadler Walk and the caretaker's house was located where the cows can be seen in the photo. Today, the caretaker's house is no longer there and the view from our old house is of a high fence with a car park for the college beyond. Much less interesting than before.



My brother and sister attended Walcot School and despite the entrance being right outside our house, I'm told that they were often late. We moved to Lennox Drive around 1970-71 and I attended Churchfields School instead of Walcot. Before this, mum and dad were interested in moving to Covingham, but mum said that she didn't want to live in the middle of another building site as she had done in Walcot, so they stayed in the area which I think she regretted later in life.

Eventually, we moved to Northampton Street in 1979, by which time it was just myself and my parents as my sister was married and my brother had moved to Middlesex for work.

Dave Norris - October 2025

I was so excited about this email, I just had to reply to Dave - and this is what I wrote:

I am so thrilled to see this photo and here's why: My mum and dad moved to Park South in 1957 when that estate was also still being built. They moved into Thornbridge Avenue, and I still live in Crosswood Road to this day, which is almost opposite my parents' house. I often remember my mum saying that when they moved in, there were fields all around them, including where Crosswood Road now stands. She said the cows would be right up against the fence; it was a regular occurrence. She also said that sometimes the dogs and horses from the hunt would pass near the edge of the field. I used to say to her, "Mum, I wish you had a camera back then, a photo of that would be awesome!"... and now Dave, you have provided exactly that! It's wonderful!

Angie Phillips - October 2025

Paul's Presentation - Aftershock!

Paul Williams presentation at the last meeting was, without question up to his usual high standard, as he unveiled some of the rare Hooper photographs in his ever growing collection.

When he flashed up an image of a football team at Sanford Street School in 1914. I almost fell off the bench I was sitting on. I wasn't entirely sure because it moved on quickly, but subsequently Paul sent me the slide and who should be stood next to the bearded teacher in the back row, but my father, Albert Edward William Stooke (they liked to name children after royalty in our family!). I knew he attended Sanford Street School, and I knew he was a half decent



footballer, but the irony is, so many of my family can see very similar features, which made the identification so easy. My sister said she recognised him without even studying any of the other faces. The fact that William Hooper took the picture was also of huge interest and surprise.

I have enlarged the image and added a picture of yours truly, to see whether you can also see any resemblance.

John Stooke - October 2025

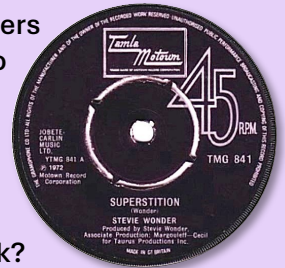


White Tiles

Some years ago, my wife and I were in a Las Vegas hotel listening to a band made up of session musicians from the various shows. They were highly regarded and often attracted other musicians who came to watch them. On this particular evening the band's leader introduced that evening's guest - Steve Cropper. At this I became quite excited and my wife asked who he was.

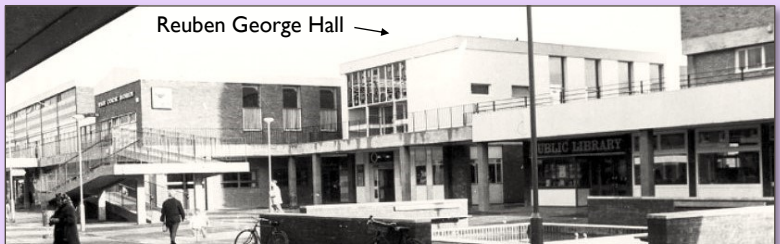
Steve Cropper, I explained, was one of the greats of soul music in the 60s. A guitarist, he was an integral part of the house band at Stax records in Memphis, and also one of the producers. He worked with other greats like Otis Redding, Sam & Dave, Wilson Pickett, etc. He co-wrote such songs as 'In The Midnight Hour', 'Knock on Wood' and 'Sitting on the Dock of the Bay'.

He was invited on the stage, played a couple of numbers and gave us a few anecdotes. At the end I felt I had to say something to him and told him how much I admired his work, it had formed part of the soundtrack of my youth. He spoke to my wife and I for a few moments, a nice guy and a real gentleman.



And what has this got to do with Swindon you may ask?

Well, my teenage years were the 60s, Beatles, Stones and all. But my real passion was for Stax and Motown. This passion was fuelled on Saturday nights at the White Tiles Disco, Reuben George Hall, Cavendish Square. I must have been 16 when I went there first, in 1967, and I continued until I went to college in 1969. At the time I lived in Broome Manor Lane so it took me about 25 minutes to walk down to Cavy. From what I remember



the hall was on the first floor. I can't remember how much it was to get in, it couldn't have been much though. Once in, it was magic, about the size of a school hall it was dark and had, wonder of wonders, a glitterball.

In addition to this there were the two most interesting things, girls and music. I'll try to focus on the music. Most of the time it was a disco, the records played were mainly Stax and Motown. It was during the mid-60s that these two great labels were at the height of their creative powers, churning out hit after hit. I'm sure there was other music but that's what I loved. I was a real fan of Otis Redding, for me the greatest soul singer of all. I was shocked when he died so young in December 1967.

It's important to remember that music in those days wasn't nearly as accessible as it is today. Until Radio 1 began in September 1967 pop music was the preserve of Radio Luxembourg, or pirate stations. Singles and LPs were relatively expensive. The White Tiles meant that I could listen to the music I loved, nice and loud as well.

Occasionally there were live bands, the two I remember in particular were The Idle Race and The Coloured Raisins (it was the 60s). The Idle Race were a Birmingham band which at that time had Jeff Lynne (of ELO fame) as their

lead guitarist. The Raisins were a soul band with a great sound. I've tried to find a record of their appearances there but to no avail. I did find a reference to Carl Douglas and the Big Stampede who appeared there in April 1968.

All things come to an end. For those two years of my life Saturday nights at the White Tiles were the highlight of my week. They did indeed form the soundtrack of my youth.

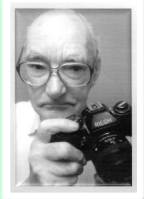
Does anyone else have any memories of the White Tiles?

Ray Norman - November 2025

BEANEY CORNER

Welcome back to Beaney Corner where each month Diane Everett selects a few photographs from the vast Beaney collection to share in the newsletter.

Here's another great selection. Let us know if you recognise anyone. More next month!



↑
Severn Avenue
Cambria Bridge
→

←
Wheeler Avenue

→
Penhill



My Favourite Time of Year

I love this bit of the year, September through to December, but it has changed so much since the 1980s and 90s when I was growing up.



It began in September with going back to school - getting new stationery and maybe a new school bag. The best place to go for the former was WH Smith, although we rarely actually bought anything, as it was a little too pricey for my pocket money. After looking at all the things we couldn't afford, we'd go further up Regent Street to Woolworths to make our actual purchases. These days, all stationery is provided in primary school, and parents are encouraged not to supply individual pencil cases and stationery. It's a bit different for secondary school of course, but WH Smith has been replaced on our high streets by the unknown but seemingly familiar TG Jones. And of course, there is no Woolworths to buy from or even its spiritual successor, Wilko. So, last year we bought what was needed with the weekly shop at Tesco.

After the excitement of going back to school in September, it would be my birthday a few weeks later. Unlike a lot of kids these days, most children wouldn't have a birthday party every year, because it was a big undertaking. In the 1980s you would probably be holding it at home, making all the food yourself and coming up with games and forfeits. There wouldn't necessarily be a prize in every layer of pass-the-parcel and Party Rings were still something special! There were no trampolining or soft play parties, but there were Wimpy and McDonalds parties. I was lucky enough to go to a friends' Wimpy birthday party in the old restaurant



on Regent Street - but I can't remember what it involved apart from eating the food, and meeting Mr. Wimpy. Although, unluckily for me, the person inside the very large mascot costume mis-judged the space needed to manoeuvre in it - and I ended up covered in milkshake as a result! I had a McDonalds birthday party when I was 7 or 8, when there was only one McDonalds in Swindon. Strange though it now sounds in our age of risk assessments and health and safety, the birthday person and a friend were allowed a trip around the kitchen and then could make their own cold drink. Having later worked in the kitchen at a McDonalds - I can't believe anyone ever thought that was a good idea!

Into October and it was half-term, the clocks changing and Halloween. Back when I was at school the October half-term was only one week - Monday to Friday. Now the half-term starts on Thursday and runs through to the end of the following week. The clocks changing used to catch a lot of people out - twice a year! But now it's not a problem because all our smart devices change the time automatically. No more re-programming the video recorder! Halloween has grown in popularity since the 1980s. Trick or treating is the norm for lots of school-aged children, but I only remember going once when I was 12 or 13 and big enough to roam the streets with friends. Halloween decorations were unusual, so everyone's door would get a knock if it looked like they were home - and most people wouldn't give you anything!



I remember we'd get knocks on the door at home with groups of kids chancing their luck having stuck a bin-bag on as a costume. These days it's much more sophisticated – there are relatively few home-made costumes, and everyone has a special bag or basket to put their treats in. We went trick or treating properly for the first time last year with our youngest, and it was a revelation as to how many households were taking part and how incredibly generous everyone was too. It's a very different experience to Halloween in the 80s and 90s.

Into November, and of course it's Bonfire Night. That was something I used to look forward to much more than Halloween, but now that the latter has grown in popularity generally, I find there is more to enjoy at Halloween. I realised a few years ago that my kids had never made a Guy for the bonfire – or even attended a bonfire all that often. I

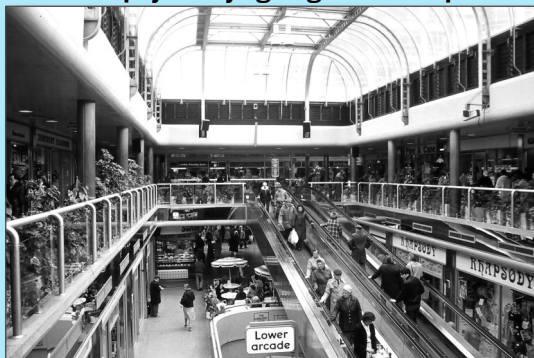


remember making a Nora Batty for the bonfire one year (it was the saggy tights that inspired the name), stuffed full of old newspapers and dressed in old clothes. But it seems to have fallen out of fashion entirely these days, and you definitely don't see any children asking for a penny for the Guy – perhaps because the penny won't get you very far these days! Having been subjected to many a public information film in my childhood as a telly addict, we don't often have fireworks at home. But fireworks are used for so many celebrations these days (such as New Year) that Bonfire Night is not quite so special anymore.



Once Bonfire Night has gone, we're into the real Christmas preparations - does anyone else remember a time when mince pies and chocolate tubs weren't available in shops in August?!

I'm a fan of spreading the cost and being organised, but that is still a bit early for my taste. I love Christmas – I've got a list of all the films and TV specials I like to watch to get me feeling festive, and the Christmas songs will be playing from November (there's no Whamageddon for me!). Whilst I would never have time for it these days, I do miss physically going into shops to



browse for Christmas presents. But there aren't many shops left in town to do that in anymore - I'd go to Boots, Superdrug, Woolworths, Argos, the indoor market, Rhapsody (in the Brunel), BHS and maybe Marks & Spencer, Debenhams or House of Fraser. Only two of those have survived in Swindon town centre – and not a huge amount of anything else, unless you're gifting vouchers from Costa or Greggs... So I'm looking

forward to the Society Christmas party next month as I will definitely be in the spirit by then – and I hope you are too.

Kelly Blake - November 2025

Barnes Timber Mill, Rushey Platt - Date Unknown



Belle Vue Road

