

Back Then...

Pipers Way
Roundabout
1987



The Swindon Society

Newsletter - December 2025



And
Now...
More
Recently
May 2025



Happy Christmas!



Welcome to the December Newsletter

Can you believe it? Christmas is almost here! Where has this year gone, it passed by so quickly. It only seems like a couple of weeks ago we were on our summer outing in Town Gardens... and yet here we are already, it's Christmas party time!

The Christmas party is always a time to have a good old natter and get to know each other better. We hope you enjoy the drinks and nibbles and, as usual we will be having a quiz. This year it has been put together by Emily King, so a big thank you to Emily for all her hard work.

Finally, don't forget, this is your newsletter. Please help me to fill it with lots of nostalgic stories and memories of the Swindon you knew when you were younger. It's not just pictures that are history, hearing about life as it was in Swindon's past is just as thrilling, so please pass on your thoughts and memories, they really are hidden treasure!

If you want to contribute too, just send your stories to me at:

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



Princes Street Revisited

Presented by

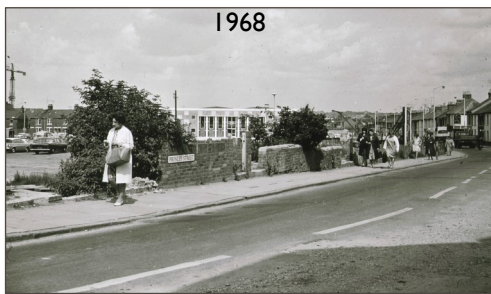
Gina Deyager

12th November 2025

At October's meeting, Gina Deyager (with technical support from Angie Phillips) took us on a photographic tour of Princes Street and its surroundings. We began at Regent Circus, once lined with phone boxes that drew lunchtime queues for calls home. Gina then shared an old map showing the area before redevelopment.



We saw the former Post Office in Theatre Square, which closed in the mid-2000s and later became the Post Modern Gallery; and the Wyvern Theatre in 1979, including the site of the Queen's 1971 official opening. We had a photo of some low brick walls with the court building in the background.



Row in Regent Place - it's hard to believe there were cottages in the centre of town!

Next came Regent Hall before and after demolition, the pedestrian walkway from Theatre Square to the multistorey car park (removed in 2015), snowy Wyvern scenes, and another one of the car park, with a Swindon & District Motorcycle Club sign, in partnership with the Borough of Thamesdown! It is actually still there, and is not the only one still around – keep your eyes peeled in the car parks of Swindon! Then it was on to Regent Place in 1960.



We viewed building society offices, British Telecom on Edgware Road, the Woolworths' rear entrance, Plaza 21, and Sanford Street with its school and tented



Then Gina expanded on the detail to say that the walls were what was left of the houses that originally stood there. The next photos revealed Cow Lane and Regent Place with the Red Cow pub - all long gone. The next images showed the police station under construction, the Wyvern foundations going in, and cottages on Providence



canopy – both still standing despite the widespread changes. Then it was Gordon Gardens and Islington Street looking towards the college. We then saw The



Magistrates' Court in Gordon Road, built in 1963 and now red brick. It once featured a landscaped entrance and at the rear, a secure walkway between it and the police station.

Further along, we saw the Rainbow Walk steps painted in 2018 in support of the LGBTQ+ community

in Swindon, the old Nationwide offices, and Princes Street in 1965 before commercial development and featuring houses. Photos captured rubble during redevelopment, the Walker Jackson garage,



Looking towards the college

Skurray's Mill (demolished in 1962), and the construction of Bon Marche in 1966. Commercial and office premises began to be built, springing

up around the Magistrates' Court. We saw the foundations of the police station going in, then one of the steel structure and another of the distinctive round room. An aerial shot showed



that same building, the police station and cleared lots



for the Nationwide offices. We noted the quirky detail of a door on Debenhams that once led to the subway but now leads nowhere (and is several storeys up!). Later images included the Bus Boulevard, the new Zurich building,

the Tricentre buildings and the old bus station ready for demolition. We revisited the Whalebridge subways, the nearby Golden Lion mural, and the infilling of the subways, ready for the gyratory. Jurys Inn (now Leonardo Hotel) replaced Walker Jackson on the corner of Fleming Way and Princes Street, and the former Nationwide building grew taller by several storeys.



From the pedestrian bridge, we saw the evolution from huts to SBC's Wat Tyler House, and Nationwide's transformation into the Paramount building. Returning to the Wyvern's construction, we compared modern views from the footbridge, now without the police station. We saw a photo of the Red Cow and Regent Chip Shop in their glory days, later to be demolished for the Civic Campus. Clarence Street School survived and became a part of the SBC offices. However, the Central Methodist Hall burned down in 1977, and we saw a post-disaster photo.



Central Methodist Hall

Other highlights included a bus coming down on Rolleston Street (hard to believe), Swindon College's demolition in 2012, and the rare sight of the houses on Cross Street being visible from Princes Street. We ended at the



library, recalling the “temporary” library buildings, the beloved light-up map, and the line of phone boxes. Almost finally (but I missed the last few being on tea duty) it was the “new” (opened in 2008!) Central Library.

This fascinating journey showed how dramatically this key town-centre route has changed. Many thanks to Gina for an engaging talk with plenty of what we most enjoy – photographs!

Kelly Blake - November 2025

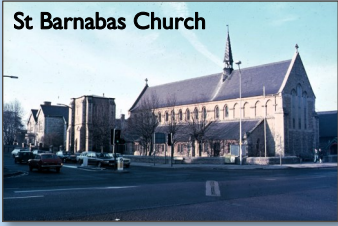
Programme 2025 - 2026

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).*

The Princes Street Getaway!

St Barnabas Church



Gina's fab presentation on the Princes Street area brought back happy memories of a 'family legend' story often repeated at our family gatherings over the years.



It's mid-1961 and my Mum and Dad are preparing to get married in August at St Barnabas Church, Gorse Hill. The reception is booked for the Co-Op Hall in East Street, and they have been scrimping & saving to ensure the wedding and reception is paid for.



Dad had been tipped off that he can buy some cheap drink from a house in Princes Street. Mum and Dad are supplying drink for the reception, so any money saved is very welcome.

It turns out that our friendly supplier 'obtains' bottles of spirits from the US base at Burderop Park. Dad's a law-abiding man but this is too good an opportunity to turn down.

Dad had visited two or three times previously but on this - last - occasion, after knocking on the door, being invited into the kitchen at the back of the property and agreeing to buy another bottle, there is a sudden yelling outside and a harsh knocking on the front door sending panic through the house - it's the police!



Dad's out the back door, sprints down the small back garden and manages to scramble over the wooden fence - quite impressive for a small chap, but when you've got the police after you, I guess you have extra power in your legs. He'd only parked around the corner so was able to make a clean getaway - minus any more bottles - but without being caught!



The wedding and reception are a success - with the toasts tasting extra special of course!



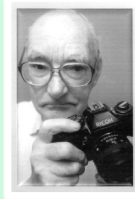
Rob Johnson - December 2025



BEANEY CORNER

Welcome again to Beaney Corner where each month we select a few photographs from the vast Beaney collection to share in the newsletter.

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



←
Tovey Road
c. 1960

Bessemer
Close
→



Omdurman
Street
1949
←

Westbrook
Road C. 1951
→





Ladybird Clothing



I received this lovely email from a reader of the October newsletter:

Thanks for such a great read. It was a lovely trip down memory lane. I get the newsletter courtesy of being a member of the Wiltshire Family History Society. I currently am working and don't have time to come to your events. However, I am starting to consider retirement and so will look to join when I am no longer working.

I think we may be about the same age! I know I remember having at least one duffle coat with the toggles, but I also wanted to say that my understanding is that Ladybird clothes weren't sold at Radnor Stores. I seem to remember that friends would tease you if you had clothes bought at Radnor Stores as they were seen as a bit cheap and cheerful.

My memory tells me that the Ladybird shop was in Commercial Road; on the left hand side of the road going up towards the library. It's likely to have been pulled down in readiness of the Brunel Centre in the early 1970s.

And when I started at Secondary School, I loved going to the schoolwear shop in Faringdon Road. I can remember my mum buying me a Westbourne Secondary School blazer and all the other things. Then a few years later, it was off to Commonweal.



Billett & Co. sold school wear (far left)

My elder brother had already gone there, so I had his rugby top! I can still remember the smell when you went into the schoolwear shop!



Inside Franklins - Cromwell Street

Also, I seem to remember that there was a shop called Franklins that my dad used to go to get paint and wallpaper when it was time for an update. They too were in Faringdon Road or close to the swimming pool. Anyway, I better stop reminiscing!

Julian White - October 2025

Happy Christmas From The 1960s

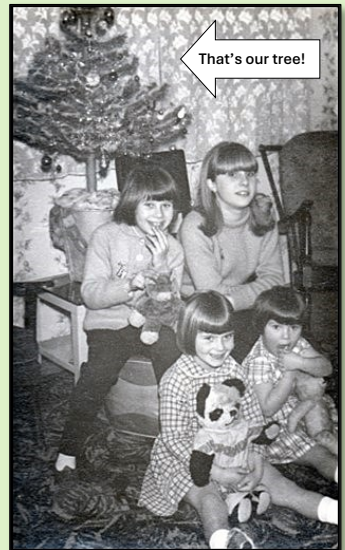
I first published this article in our December 2018 newsletter... seven years ago! However, I wanted something Christmassy to put into the 2025 December issue, so have decided to use it again. I have updated and added to the original article as our newsletter these days has a very different feel to 2018.

My dad worked for the Cleansing Department at the Council which had its advantages. Mum and dad didn't have much money so dad used to "rescue" stuff from the tip and do it up for us kids. Today they would call it up-cycling but back then it was called "make do and mend" and it was a necessity. Anyway, we had some great bikes and scooters for our Christmas and birthday presents, mostly "up-cycled" but still much-loved.

One thing that I fondly remember about this time of year, when I was little, is our home-made decorations. Dad made our Christmas tree out of a broom handle and wire coat hangers and mum wrapped it with green crepe paper that was snipped at the edges to give it a fringe, which was supposed to resemble pine needles. It was certainly like no other Christmas tree you have ever seen in your life... but we adored it! Our paper chains were also made of crepe paper; two strips of colour back to back, machine stitched together down the middle and fringed at the edges. These were then twisted so that you could see both colours and pinned accurately in loops to the ceiling. They were then draped with lametta for a bit of sparkle.

I remember, the Christmas tree always had to go in front of the window - not because it was the preferred position, but because that was where the ceiling light was situated. It's hard to believe now but the Christmas tree lights used to be plugged into the lightbulb socket in the ceiling light. We were lucky, we had an adaptor which meant we could alternate between the two light sources without all the plugging and unplugging. It seems so primitive now, but it was only forty-odd years ago. Incidentally, mum had to do the same thing with her iron back then... that too plugged into the light socket!

It was mum's brilliant tradition at Christmas to wrap lots of little presents and hide them in the tree. Then throughout Christmas Day and Boxing Day, about three or four times a day, we would be allowed to choose a present with our name on and open it. I can remember we were always at the tree feeling and shaking those little presents trying to guess what was inside. I remember one year, when I was about five, I had the oddest shaped present ever. I spent ages prodding this present and was absolutely desperate to open it! It turned out to be a bunny shaped toothbrush holder with a toothbrush sticking out of it. I can still see it in my mind's eye, even now. I think those little gifts filled us with as much joy and excitement as the ones from Father Christmas!



Another treasured memory, courtesy of my mum, is the Christmas lollipop tree. Unique I'd say, as no one else had one... just us! It stood about five feet high and was placed in the hallway next to the front door. Mum used to collect some twigs from the Lawn Woods that looked a bit like the branches of a tree and spray them silver. Then she would attach them to a metal stand (which I think must have been the bottom half of a bird cage and probably came from the tip) et voila! a silver tree!

Mum would then attach cotton thread to lots of lollies and hang them on the branches. Not the type of lollies you get today, back then they were those big round flat ones that used to come in a few different colours. I loved those lollies; my favourite was the one that was half red and half fizzy white... heaven! The clear wrapper used to only cover the actual lolly part so that the stick was still exposed, and you could hold onto the top of the wrapper and quickly whip out the lolly from the bottom - all in one go! Happy days!

Something that I think you may still see on a very rare occasion at Christmas, but that I remember occurring every single year, is Father Christmas on his sleigh with his reindeer coming down our street (on the back of a truck) playing really loud Christmas carols as he went past. Men would knock on the door with buckets of toffees, and you could take one in exchange for some spare change. Exciting times for us little kids!

And who can forget the many times the string of lights failed on the Christmas tree, and you would have to spend ages unscrewing every little bulb and test it by replacing with a new bulb to see if the string came alight. If it did then you knew that was the dodgy bulb (no bulb testers in those days) and if not... on you went following the string around the tree until you found the culprit. Heaven help you if there were two bulbs out! And as nostalgic as I am for the old days... LED lights are far easier!

On Christmas Eve in our house, we laid out empty pillowcases at the end of our beds for Father Christmas to fill with presents because we didn't have stockings. We didn't care though because you can get much more in a pillowcase than a stocking! I distinctly remember one year, Gina and I (in our bunk beds) decided to take it in shifts to stay awake and wait for Father Christmas. Gina took the first shift then woke me up to take over. I put the watch we were using under my pillow, and promptly fell asleep. I don't remember exactly when we both woke up, but I know it was still very early; we always got up about 6am on Christmas Day as we were too excited to stay in bed.

What I do remember is that this particular year, we did not have a sack full of presents at the end of our beds, which was horrifying! We stayed in bed until we decided it was a reasonable time to go and wake up everyone else, and as soon as we stepped out onto the landing, there were two pillowcases full of presents and a note from Father Christmas on top. The note said something like because we

weren't asleep, he had to leave the sacks on the landing. I remember how odd it was that his handwriting looked just like my mum's... strange that!

And I also remember that when we opened those presents in the sacks, we each had a Spiro-Matic!





Mum and dad didn't drink anything alcoholic for most of the year, only at Christmas really, and even then, the same bottle of whisky and port would seem to last forever and would go in and out of the pantry at Christmas, year after year. I remember that one year, mum got some draught Armadillo Sherry from the Co-op. They had barrels of it and you had to take an empty bottle to put it in; there were different types to choose from - sweet, dry, pale, etc.

Mum used to let us have a little drink at Christmas. We were allowed to have a weak sherry and lemonade shandy. Delicious! And it felt so naughty too... but still delicious! And, apart from the Father Christmas, the one thing that we looked forward to more than anything each Christmas was the Raisin Wine. It wasn't alcoholic, that's just what it was called. That also came from the Co-op, but was only available at Christmas. It was pure nectar! I dearly wish it was still available. We were only allowed a small glass a few times a day but we would have swigged it all day long if we could; we couldn't get enough of it!

My childhood Christmases were so memorable for so many reasons. Another cherished memory is from school. Every Christmas, at Lawn Infants, we would paint all the classroom windows with massive pictures and snowy scenes. snowmen, Christmas puddings, holly, crackers, churches, Christmas trees, Santa and reindeer... you name it we had painted it at one time or another. It was so much fun to be allowed to stand on the tables and paint on the windows; even the cleaning it off in January was fun too! My memories are still vivid... so I know I had wonderful childhood Christmases!



Angie Phillips - December 2025



**The Swindon Society - recording
the changing face of Swindon**

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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

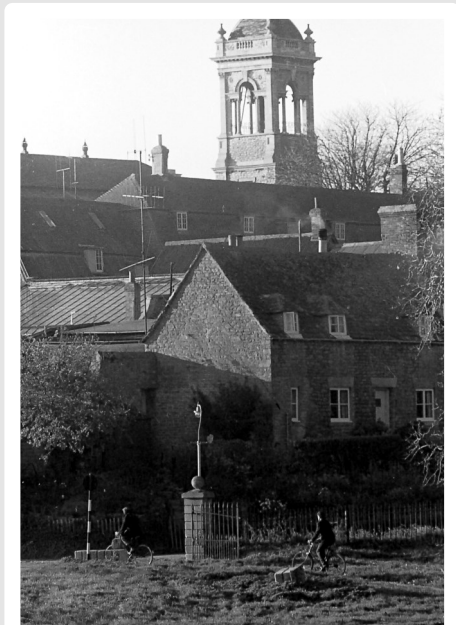
Mon: By appointment only

Tues: 10am to 4.00pm

Wed: 10am to 4.00pm

Sat: 10am to 1.00pm

**The Corn Exchange
- Date Unknown**



**The Sportsman Pub
- Date Unknown**



Penhill Post Office in Forbuoy's - Date Unknown

