

Back Then...

Spittleborough
Roundabout
1971



The Swindon Society Newsletter - January 2026



And
Now...
More
Recently
June 2023



Happy New Year

Welcome to the January Newsletter

Hello, and a slightly belated Happy New Year to everyone!

I hope you all had great Christmas and New Year celebrations. Did you make any New Year resolutions?.. and if so, are you keeping them? I make one every year to be more organised... it'll never happen!

So, here we all are, at the first meeting of 2026 and tonight we have a presentation entitled "Health Hydro: The Past - The Future". I'm sure many of you still refer to this building as *the swimming baths*, and maybe you learned to swim there: I know I did as a child. And I am very keen to find out what is in store for this fabulous relic of Swindon's history, hopefully you are too. So, let's sit back and listen to the plans for its future.

Finally, don't forget to send me (or hand to me) your pieces for the newsletter. Let's fill the pages with your very own stories... Come on, don't be shy.

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

angie.phillips@ntlworld.com

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Swindon Society Christmas Party

10th December 2025



Christmas may come but once a year, but oh how quickly that year seems to speed by. It was our annual festive gathering once again and we had some of the usual suspects supplying festive cheer along with some newer additions to the festive roster of entertainment at our Christmas gatherings. This was the first time holding our Christmas party in the new meeting place so it took a minute to decide



what would go where (we had it down to a fine art in the previous meeting hall we had been using up to recently). It being slightly smaller gave the evening a more intimate feel, but the party was definitely none the worse for it.



As ever, our Christmas cheer was boosted by the drinks, kindly arranged by Gina who was sporting some fetching post-operative bruises and bandages following knee surgery (she was happy to share them with those who cared to see!). The food was arranged by the society's committee and featured the usual array of mince



pies, sausage rolls and other bits. Julie organised the raffle and whilst my table was not quite so lucky as last year, many were very pleased with their good fortune. Roy Cartwright appeared to be unofficial photographer for the evening, and indeed, all the photographs you see here are courtesy of Roy (thank you Roy), who is

pictured here with his raffle prize.





Our entertainment for the evening came in the form of two team quizzes. The first was some Christmas-themed anagrams, courtesy of Jennie. Our team (The Bonkers Bunch) were too busy chatting away and eating the chocolates on the table to

remember to fill this one in past the first few – whoops!



The second quiz was kindly written by Emily King and featured several rounds, such as Swindon Celebrities. Many of us were genuinely stumped by a few of these questions – who knew

that cricketer Lauren Bell was born in Swindon; or that Andy Binks was a celebrity (although he's definitely Swindon-famous)! Despite that, The Bonkers Bunch had a good showing, ending up just one point short of the winning team.



Huge thanks to Emily for putting that together and then marking all the papers on the evening too.





Such a good time was had by all that we had to do some hasty clearing up, as time got away from us a little in a way it never has before at the Christmas party. But as usual everyone pitched in, clearing tables and binning rubbish so that we were all done in double-quick time.



We can't have a Christmas party for our members without our members though, so thanks for coming along and hopefully having a wonderful time. We look forward to seeing you all in the New Year and wish you a very happy and healthy 2026.



Kelly Blake - December 2025

Memories of Old Town

Back in August 2025 we were contacted by Derek Hearl, who now lives in Tiverton. His email related to a framed picture he owns of the old mill and Holy Rood church at The Lawns, similar to that shown below. When exchanging emails with Membership Secretary Debra, Derek shared some of his memories of Old Town and gave permission for us to share them with you.

Derek wrote... *I have known this picture practically all my life. It was in the living room in my grandparents' house at 8 Cricklade Street in Old Town (now demolished).*

My grandfather was Thomas Hazell and, in the photo below, you can just make out the start of his name on the advertisement painted on the side of the building in the distance on the right beneath The Lord Raglan pub sign. He subsequently bought The Lord Raglan, together with a cottage and smithy



shop/workshops at the rear for his and his sons' car body repair/coach builder business. It meant that when I was growing up, Thomas Hazell owned all of numbers 8 through to 11 Cricklade Street. In other words, either side of the access road from Cricklade Street to the rear entrance to the Kings Arms Hotel.

I was born, brought up, and lived in Old Town until my late 20s when I went to university. The Lawns area was very important to me. As I've mentioned, my grandparents lived in Cricklade Street and after my grandfather died when I was about 14, my grandmother continued to live in the house with her youngest son, Clifford. Clifford had two dogs, both Chows, father and son. They were both very beautiful with red golden fluffy hair, jaunty tails curled over their backs and had lovely gentle dispositions.

For several years, during my teens and early 20s, it often fell to me to take the dogs for walks at least once a week and I invariably took them to The Lawns.



The route was always the same - along Cricklade Street, then High Street, across The Square, and down The Planks.



sit on a stone just outside her door where she would greet passers-by and was very well known throughout Old Town. I never saw the lodge on the left open and I always supposed it to be some sort of store.

On the way I would usually stop to talk to a lady named Mrs Cullinan, an Irish widow who lived in the right-hand gate lodge at the entrance to the driveway which led to the old Lawn mansion. Mrs Cullinan would



By now the dogs would be getting frustrated, pulling on their leads anxious to get on with their walk. So, I would take my leave of Mrs Cullinan and continue along High Street, across The Square, and down The Planks to more or less the point where the old mill pond shown in my picture had been, although I could never quite work out its exact location myself.

We would then turn right, cross over in front of where the mansion had been and return home by the avenue of trees and Mrs Cullinan's little house.



On other occasions when I was without the dogs, I would sometimes walk down through the woods from where the old Lawn mansion had been to the lakes.

About halfway, on the left-hand side of the path, there was a pets'



graveyard with engraved stones for several cats, dogs and other pets - and if I remember correctly, a horse. In later years though this was cleared away leaving no trace.

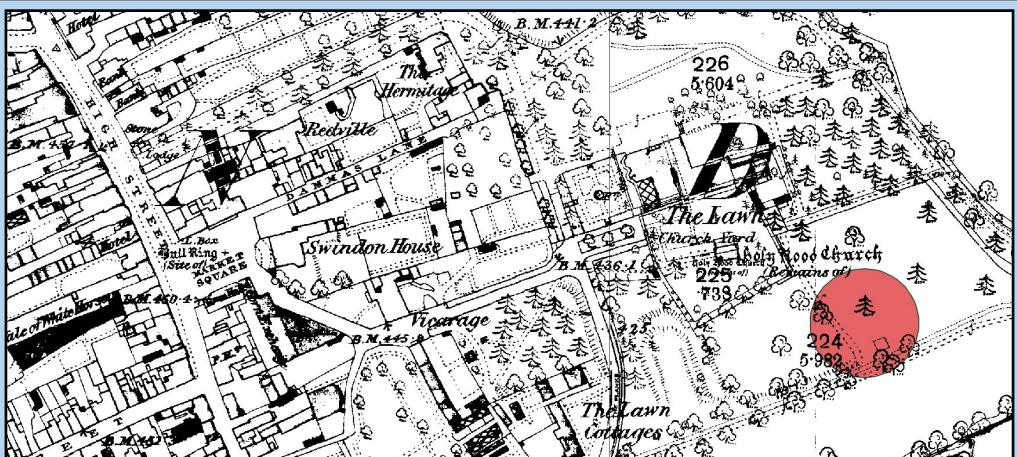
Some four years ago for my 80th birthday when I was still pretty much mobile, my wife and I spent a couple of nights at The Goddard Arms for me to revisit my old haunts, and to show my wife parts of Swindon that she had never seen before and didn't know existed.



Apart from the fact that Wood Street is no longer the shopping street that it used to be, almost everything else was as I remember it.

Derek Hearf - January 2026

Continuing on from this information, I have some additional thoughts on some research I have carried out.



Could the small square on this old map indicate the location of the pets' cemetery, to the left of the footpath, as Derek describes? Does anyone remember?

More information linked to Derek's memories of Mrs Cullinan will be in our next Newsletter.

Debra Melsom - January 2026

Ken White - Swindon Artist



It is with much sadness that we learned about the passing of our valued member, and good friend to many - Ken White. Ken passed away on Christmas Eve at the age of 82.

Most people know Ken as the artist who painted various murals around the town, but there was very much more to his repertoire.

He moved to London where he shared a house with Gilbert O'Sullivan and Rick Davies (from Supertramp). He took up a post with the British Council and later went to work for Richard Branson's various Virgin companies on a retainer.

Whilst working for Virgin, he painted the exterior of Richard's Town House recording studio in Shepherd's Bush, London and was responsible for many pieces of art associated with Virgin Records' output, including the album cover for XTC's album, Black Sea. It is also Ken's artwork "The Scarlet Lady" that graces the fleet of Virgin Atlantic planes.

Probably Ken's best known work in Swindon is the Golden Lion Bridge mural, which adorns the side of a house at Whale Bridge Roundabout; it is so iconic that it has recently been restored.

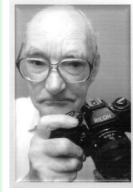
A tribute to Ken has appeared on a wall at the junction of Eastcott Road and Swindon Road. Ken was much loved and will be much missed. RIP Ken White.



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.

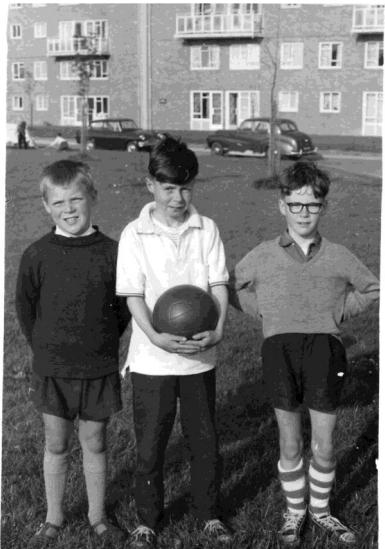
Here's another mixed selection. Let us know if you recognise anyone. More to come next month!



Elborough
Road



Liddington
Street



Pembroke
Gardens



Staverton
Way

Snippets of Swindon History

A reader of our newsletter (who wishes to remain anonymous) recently sent me some old correspondence he'd found. It was regarding MG3010, an old MG motor car that he had worked on belonging to his friend, John Pidgeon.

The current owner had traced our reader through the MG register and was seeking information about the car's history and asking why the car had been fitted with a replacement Ford engine. The reply from our reader was quite interesting. He wrote:

The person who owned MG3010 when it was in my sights was John Pidgeon, and the reason it had a Ford engine was due to the fact that the original motor threw a leg out of bed, this taking most of the nearside engine block with it. It made a heck of a mess as oil and engine parts were scattered over the A346 road between Chiseldon and Ogbourne St. George.

Our reader provides further information that I have edited slightly for ease of reading:

John was a brilliant design engineer, and whilst I was working at VASM (Vickers-Armstrongs Supermarine), I had a contact who did some Jig-boring on new engine parts designed by John, which he fitted into an old, but valuable motor car; the motor fired up and revved very well.

John worked for Plessey, but they didn't want to know about his new design part, so he left Plessey to develop his idea himself. Unfortunately, Felix Wankel beat him to the Patent Office by a few days and (as our reader puts it) "*John cracked and did not leave the nut house for many a day*". (Not very PC now, but the correspondence was from nearly 20 years ago).

The interesting part of our reader's story is that the first motion shaft that John produced was in his own workshop in Cambria Bridge Road.

Poor John, it seems that he very nearly made the history books!



Anonymous - January 2026

Alexander Road Mural



The Central Club
Discotheque c.1970s



The Brunel Centre - 1970s

