Back Then...

British Leyland

1976





The Swindon Society

Newsletter - October 2026



And More Recently

October 2026



WELCOME TO THE OCTOBER NEWSLETTER

At the time of writing, we can only hope that this evening runs to plan and without any issues.

As you probably know, last month the lift broke down just as everyone was arriving and this unfortunately meant that some members had to struggle up the stairs, while others were forced to go home.

We were mortified by what happened and we can only offer our sincere apologies for the inconvenience it caused.

Unfortunately, the issues we faced were all completely out of our control and not an ideal start to the new season. We have been investigating why the lift failed and we have also been reviewing the feedback we received from that evening and the comments that were made, both good and bad. We hope we never have to go through that again.

Incidentally, one of the comments we received related to the seats being a little uncomfortable. This was probably more keenly felt because everyone in the theatre had sat for longer than usual while waiting for the show to begin. We were waiting to see if the lift could be fixed, which unfortunately did not happen. Either way please feel free to bring in a favourite cushion or a blanket if you want to get really comfy - although not too comfy or you might nod off and miss the show... and we don't want any snoring!

Back to this evening though, and we welcome the phenomenon that is Andy Binks with his show entitled "Andy Binks Wears Pink Pyjamas"... Enjoy!

Finally, as ever, if you would like to contribute to the newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact us:

angie.phillips@ntlworld.com
Info@theswindonsociety.com



Another Dip Into The Collection

Presented by

David Bedford

9th September 2026

September's meeting brought several new beginnings - a new chair, some new committee members and a new venue. Despite a few initial hiccups, once underway David Bedford's talk was as entertaining as ever. David noted that Commonweal School was his fifth venue since joining the Society - I suspect he holds the record!

This dip into David's collection began twenty years ago, with panto posters from the Wyvern Theatre. The production had to be postponed for a year following the discovery of asbestos in the building. David then reminded us of prices in 2006 - a pint of milk cost just 35p - before taking us on a photographic tour of a changing Swindon.

Among the images was the former hothouse at Queen's Park, shown covered in ivy but only very recently demolished. We also saw the Destiny and Desire nightclub on East Street (locally known as "Desperate and Divorced") boarded up and awaiting demolition. Regent Street featured next, with the former Thomas Cook, Swiss Chalet and other shops being demolished and in the background was Aspen House, once home to Heath Lambert, which has itself also been demolished. Nearby were the former Tourist Information Centre (prior to its move into Central Library in the 2010s) and Prospect Hospice shop.

Further afield but in a similar state was Moredon Infants School on Akers Way, built in 1952, but awaiting demolition following its merger with the Junior School in a new building. In contrast, the Old Town Railway Path showed the still-standing Westlecot Farm cottages, with the white lines marking the future Wichelstowe development. We also saw the old Walker Jackson garage site on Marlborough Road completely cleared.



We then moved onto the redevelopment of Cavendish Square - beginning with a photo of Newsdesk, one of the few shops still in operation at the time. David told us that the square was opened in April 1964 by a government minister and we then had a quick run-down of what used to be available (with contributions from the audience!) - dentist, shoe shop, banks, etc. We then saw a photo of The Ring Coffee Bar (which was a later casualty of the redevelopment) and Park Library - one of my favourite childhood places. We also had a view of the Ken White mural which was lost to the demolition.

Moving on into 2007 we saw photos of the Swindon Half-Marathon - firstly the children's fun run, then the luggage lorries for the runners' personal items and lastly, the extraordinarily long line of Portaloos along Pipers Way. A few weeks later Ken White was pictured at the Wroughton Christmas Market - which took place on 26th October! A year on from our earlier photos of Cavendish Square and we have The Ring with notices in the window that "everything must go," the Post Office and Pop In shop closed and the square half-demolished. Moving into November and it was the first Remembrance event at Radnor Street Cemetery. Then back to Cavendish Square with the first shops opened there - King Balti, the chip shop and a newsagent. Then over to West Swindon for a photo of Fusion - a restaurant that has undergone many name changes over the years, including Pinkertons and TGI Friday. More new buildings were shown at Brunel Crescent - a block of flats that was on the site of



the old laundry, which initially belonged to GWR but then changed hands over the years. We then saw an image of the first Santa Run to take place in the town and in the background was the Town Hall, covered in blue sheeting - Central Library was being built. The final photo of 2007 was Winter Wonderland, a fairground and ice-rink on of the site of the former main Post Office and which is now the Fleming Way Boulevard.



We then moved on through a series of images from 2008 - the empty Swindon College building with a huge North Star campus banner on it; "Cotswold Gate" signage - the early name for the development on the old Walker Jackson site; Townsends on Cricklade Street with "new show apartments" being advertised; and Priory Road Medical Centre at the new Cavendish Square with the houses built on the site of the old surgery. Amusingly, there was signage up later in 2008 about the Regent Circus development that was on its way (we all know how well that went!). Then it was onto Buckhurst Park, where the familiar face of a society member was shown at the SBC Challenge roadshow as part of the Afro-Caribbean Festival. We then saw the Brampton Pie Company shop, which opened in the town centre in August 2007 but had closed by September 2008!



Onto the best bit (I am, of course, heavily biased!) and it was the new Central Library in September 2008. The building itself appeared to be finished but there was still work continuing outside ahead of the October opening. We later saw a photo of the temporary library which was located on the ground floor of the Paramount building whilst the building work took place. Other images from 2008 included the first building stages of the Jury's Inn (now Leonardo's) at Whalebridge; an Angel Ridge show home on Curie Avenue; and the Battle of Britain commemorative march outside Bath Road Methodist Church. Moving into 2009, we had a view of Woolworths taken from Edgeware Road, with only 3 days left before it closed for good (incidentally, there was also a branch in Cavendish Square for many years). Also, the signage for their distribution centre at Dorcan Industrial Estate which closed a few days before the store.

David then quoted founder member of the society Brian Bridgeman - "history begins yesterday" and then showed us a few changes that had happened this year. Briefly this

included - the graffiti tribute to Ken White on the corner of Swindon Road; Regent Circus in January before it was demolished; the building of a new swing-bridge over the canal; the pile of rubble that was the bus station; the Queens Park hothouse, now flattened; the McArthurGlen signage covered up at the Outlet Village before the Frasers Plus signs were installed; the Paraamount building without scaffolding - it having been in place since 2024; the Raging Bull statue outside Bravus Churrascaria on Westcott Place (formerly La Carbonara); the XTC monument in Queens Park; TG Jones closing signs; and the closure of the Kembrey Inn.





Many thanks as always to David for sharing his photos and knowledge with us last month and we look forward to another dip into his collection in the future.



Kelly Blake - September 2026

*** * * IMPORTANT INFORMATION * * ***

The Swindon Society is unable to manage or moderate individual interpretations of presentation content, and presentations cannot be reviewed or evaluated in advance.
Any views, opinions, or statements expressed during talks and presentations are solely those of the speaker and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Swindon Society or its committee.
Thank you for your understanding.



Moving Story

Well, we hope you like the new venue we have chosen for our monthly meetings. We are pleased with the facilities, especially the dedicated theatre area with the lovely big screen.

Nonetheless, we are not taking anything away from the enjoyment and satisfaction we got from our previous venue, and it is imperative that we must say one final thank you to Goddard Park Community Primary School for ten years of generously providing a home for The Swindon Society. We had many great evenings and Christmas parties there and a great relationship with the administrators there. And we must certainly thank them for accommodating as many as our requests as they possibly could.

However, Goddard Park's own commitments naturally changed over the years, and so we felt the time had come to move on. So, as a thank you, and to mark the occasion, last month, Andy Binks, presented the school with a fabulous framed aerial photograph with a commemorative plaque, which I understand will be displayed in the school reception.



Presented to Goddard Park Community Primary School
by Andy Binks on behalf of The Swindon Society
with grateful thanks and appreciation for ten years of generosity.
August 2026

The photo of Andy was taken on Wednesday 5th August and Andy took it and presented it to the school on Thursday 6th August. The aerial photo (in the frame) was taken on Saturday 18th July by Jason Spickett (Swindon from the Air) and we would also like to pass on our thanks to Jason for his help with this.

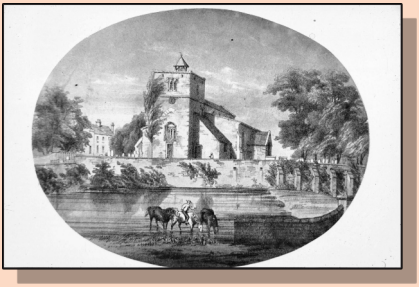
Autumnal Tales

I am proud to say that William Morris, often described as Swindon's first local historian and founder of *The Evening Swindon Advertiser*, is on my paternal family tree. His great-grandson, Desmond Morris, who sadly passed away in April this year, was my third cousin.

Having long been fascinated by William Morris's accounts of Swindon and its people, I have chosen a few passages from his book, Swindon: Reminiscences, Notes and Relics of Ye Old Wiltshire Towne, which seem fitting for the upcoming darker evenings of Autumn. I have also included an article from the Evening Advertiser and a tale from a book I had when young.

William Morris writes...The Old Mill and the Manor

Ghosts in the Old Passage There once was a pond near the church - it is filled in now, and can only be seen, by those who never saw it, in pictures - but I can readily bring that old pond within the vision of my mind's eye, and, looking on to it from the top of the steps leading to the 'dipping' place, can see along in the high wall on the left hand side an arched indentation, resembling a walled up doorway. And then I can recollect having been told that this marked the end of a passage which ran from the pond to the cellars of a neighbouring mansion, and which passage was in use for certain purposes, until the time when it was selected by certain ghosts as the place in which they preferred to be laid, when it was closed up at both ends and made secure against their escape.



I also recollect most distinctly having been told that on one occasion a very venturesome fellow, not having the fear of the ghosts before his eyes, made a small opening into the passage from the blocked up door-way in the pond, just large enough for him to peep through, and see what there was inside, and that he there and then saw several ghosts quietly seated and smoking long pipes, from which circumstance it would appear they were both happy and contented ghosts,

otherwise they would no doubt have availed themselves of the opportunity of escaping through the hole in the door-way in a cloud of blue smoke, for the natural tendency of a ghost always was to escape from the place where it has been laid, and as a rule they never missed a chance for exercising this propensity!

The Ghoul of Mill Lane Nearby, there was a character whose aversion to children was great and whom the children held in much dread. He was the ghoul of the old mill, in Mill Lane. He was rather above middle height, and rather stout and heavy built. He used to wear just about the same articles of dress as other people, but he wore them different from most people. For instance, he wore heavy hob-nailed boots, which were never laced up, and the tongues of which were always lopping about on the fronts; he wore thick worsted stockings, but they were always down about his ankles; he wore breeches without braces, open at the knees, and which were saved from dropping down by a regular and persistent 'hitching up'. His coat and waistcoat were never buttoned up, while his shirt was always unfastened and open, leaving in full view his hair-covered chest, which appeared to be a continuation of his grizzly beard, which was surmounted by such a shaggy head of hair as was but seldom to be seen. His favourite position and occupation was, after he had set his mill going, to rest his elbows on the bottom half of the mill door at the point where he could command a view of Mill Lane, and of any children who might venture to enter it from the road end. With his elbows resting on the door, and his chin resting on his clenched fist, he would be content to wait for many hours, like a cat watching for a mouse, in the hope of meeting with some children on whom he might scowl, and frighten out of their lives.



The Goddard Arms At the nearby Goddard Arms Hotel it claims to possess ghosts following a dark past. It is said one haunting is by a between-maid murdered by her jealous boyfriend in an out-house behind the hotel on 29th April 1914 and fully reported in The Evening Swindon Advertiser on 30th April 1914. Guests are also said to frequently complain about the sound of children running along the corridors during the early hours of the morning.



And in **Ghosts and Legends of the Wiltshire Countryside** by Kathleen Wiltshire it says...The Goddard family

THE EVENING SWINDON ADVERTISER, THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 1914.

SWINDON HOTEL TRAGEDY.

Young Woman Shot Dead.

A terrible tragedy was enacted last evening at the well-known Swindon hostelry, the "Goddard Arms" Hotel, when **Francis Priscilla Hunter** (23), a between-maid at the Hotel, was shot dead by a young Swindon painter and decorator named **Walter James White**, 22, a single man, of 10, Dover Street, Swindon.

It appears that White called at the "Goddard Arms" about 5.45 in the evening, and enticing Miss Hunter into an out-house, suddenly drew a revolver and shot her dead, the bullet entering under the girl's chin.

White made no attempt to escape, and appeared quite dazed at the result of his rash act.

had been Lords of the Manor of Swindon since 1563, and that their Manor House, The Lawn, and the woodland around it was haunted by a 'White Lady'. When requisitioned by the Army during the Second World War, many soldiers were said to be very scared of this phantom, but some locals thought these very men were the cause of the haunting of the woodland.



Goddard and his wife had been great animal lovers, and when their pets died – dogs, cats, horses, or indeed any animal - they were buried in the parkland, along with headstones (giving their names, ages and dates) erected in their memory. It was rumoured the soldiers destroyed all the headstones, and the locals were sure that was the cause of the re-appearance of the 'White Lady' of the Goddard family; some even said she was Mrs Goddard herself!







Debra Melsom – October 2026



UNCOVERING SWINDON'S PAST AT THE LAWNS

The Lawns is a Swindon icon! It was home to the manor and grounds of the Lords of the Manor, the Goddard family. It was purchased by the Swindon Corporation in the 1940's under the administration of David Murray John and, as a park, it's packed full of history and wildlife, which means it is well worth a walk around its 53 acres to see!

In this spirit, I recently took a walk around the area with Andy Fraser, who has lived in the vicinity all his life, along with fellow local historians; Perry Barrett, Graham Carter and Jason Spickett.

Andy and I are keen to obtain some much-needed maintenance to bring the park back to its absolute best. This involves cutting and removing dead or diseased trees throughout the park, tackling the algae across both lakes, etc.

Roy, Jason, Perry and Graham were able to provide a comprehensive backstory of the Lawns, which was fascinating. They also want to draw some attention to the Lawns but for a different reason to Andy's. In their case, they might be on the verge of making an important (re)discovery! Not too dissimilar to the one at the Groundwell Roman Ridge in St Andrews.

The group are close to establishing the exact location of the Mill that once stood in the Lawns. It was first recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 but demolished and lost to time in the 1850's. Cataloguing this, and everything else that has been going on in the Lawns for the last 1000 years or so is a dedication to preserving local history I really admire. By tracing exposed lines caused by the recent drought they can cross-verify the locations of old buildings, such as the Holy Rood Chapel with the spring, to make an identification.

(On a separate occasion some of us also took a second visit to the area in the company of a Swindon Borough Council member who is looking into the cleaning up of the Lawn Woods.)

This will be a story to watch closely I think, as this interesting chapter of Swindon's history is uncovered. I just wanted to say thank you to all that joined, it was a brilliant experience. Although the mill buildings are long vanished, landscape archaeology reveals the dips and depressions in the ground via which one can trace the entire watercourse. Like so many of the villages along the Ridgeway, Swindon was on the spring line which facilitated a supply of water.


Group with Council Member

Today, the main evidence of the mill's existence is Old Mill Lane, the road that once linked the site to Marlborough Road.

The church well, spring and stream that powered the mill's water wheel still flow, but now run in an underground pipe before feeding into the Lawn lakes.

Royston Cartwright – October 2026



FACEBOOK

Don't forget to like and follow our Facebook page.



Next Month's Meeting - 11th November 7.30pm

Next month we welcome Mike Pringle with his talk entitled:

World War I

Mike's talks are always really interesting so don't miss it!

Commonweal School - 6th Form Block,
The Mall, Old Town, Swindon SN1 4JE

The Swindon Society Open Day

The Swindon Society are delighted to hold their open day at Commonweal School during the celebration of the school's centenary year - Saturday 17th October.

We will have on display many images from our vast archives of Swindon in the past. Plus a selection from the Albert Beaney collection to include the GPO and local weddings albums.

Plus.....special collections from our guest colleagues.

We look forward to seeing you there!

