

THE SWINDON SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2017



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Welcome to the February edition of the Swindon Society Newsletter.

Please look on page 3 for details of our Summer Outing in June 2017. I am sure there will be a lot of people interested in going so you will need to book early to avoid disappointment.

Our January meeting had to be rearranged at the last moment and we are very thankful to Mark Sutton for stepping into the breach for us. We will try and arrange for Steve Williams to come and give his talk at a later date.

For the February meeting we welcome Clive Ody, one of our members, who is going to show a cine film of Swindon in the 1970s. This will be very interesting seeing how Swindon has changed.

Joyce Murgatoyd

It is with deep regret that I have to inform you our long time member and friend Joyce passed away on January 28th 2017 at GWH
As you will all know she was a remarkable lady, and I am proud and privileged to have done so much with her over the years with The Swindon Society
Our November 2016 meeting to celebrate her 100th Birthday when Joyce was on such fine form will be long remembered by all in attendance
We have no further details at this time and when we know you will
RIP Joyce

Andy Binks

SWINDON SOCIETY SUMMER OUTING

WEDNESDAY 14 JUNE 2017

6.30 FOR 7.00 PM

Come and join your Committee and Friends for a trip on a steam train at the Swindon and Cricklade Railway, Blunsdon

Tickets will be £10.00 per person

Refreshments will be available

Easy access to the train

This outing is extended to your friends and family and not restricted to Society members

Tickets will be available at monthly meetings or by sending a sae with your cheque to Nicky Shackell, 7 Claremont Court, Whitworth Road, Swindon SN25 3AS



Alfred Williams, Swindon's Forgotten Hero

This month we celebrate the 140th birthday of Alfred Williams, the 'Hammerman Poet'. Alfred was



born on 7 February 1877 and was the fifth of eight children, born at Cambria Cottage, South Marston built by his father, a Welshman hence the name of the cottage, the marriage was not happy and after 10 years he left the family of eight children and Alfred's mother worked hard to support her family selling sweets and delivering newspapers. As soon as the children were old enough they worked on the land gleaning and potato picking. After only a basic education he began work full time at 11 years old in agriculture as did most country boys, but nearby railway works paying much higher wages lured them from the land and offered good prospects although the work was hard, boring and less satisfying. Alfred was 15 years old when he started work in the railway works walking seven miles daily. When he was 26 in October 1903 he married Mary Peck, a farmer's

daughter, who was a devoted wife to him supporting and encouraging him in his writing, often sitting with him as he wrote. They lived in Dryden Cottage for 15 years.

Alfred volunteered for army service in 1916 and served in India, where he taught himself Sanskrit. On returning from India he and Mary built 'Ranikhet' cleaning and wheeling old bricks from a disused old canal lock.

Alfred and Mary both died in 1930 and are buried together in South Marston Cemetery.

ON THIS DAY IN SWINDON AND DISTRICT

- 1 February 1901 The funeral of Queen Victoria and a day of general mourning, as ordered by King Edward VII
- 4 February 1941 *Pride and Prejudice*, starring Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson, showed at the Regent Cinema in Swindon
- 5 February 1944 Swindon Speedway champion Martin Ashby was born in Marlborough
- 7 February 1877 Alfred Williams, the 'Hammerman Poet', was born in Cambria Cottage, South Marston
- 8 February 1841 William Henry Fox Talbot patented his Calotype process of developing photographs
- 9 February 1944 Blakehill Farm Airfield opened, later becoming home to RAF Squadrons which played a major part in D-Day Landings
- 10 February 1912 England beat Ireland 6-1 at Dalymount Park, Dublin, with Swindon Town's Harold Fleming bagging a hat-trick
- 11 February 1800 Pioneering photographer William Henry Fox Talbot, who lived at Lacock Abbey, was born at Melbury House, Dorset
- 13 February 1964 Manfred Mann played at Alex Disco Salisbury
- 17 February 2011 The Help for Heroes charity took out a ninety-nine year lease on Tedworth House, for the personal recovery and assessment centre for wounded soldiers
- 22 February 1974 James Blunt, singer songwriter, was born in Tidworth
- 23 February 1971 Melinda Messenger, former Page 3 Girl turned TV presenter was born in Swindon
- 29 February 1824 Blondin, French tightrope walker and acrobatist who performed at Wilton Park in 1873, was born in St Omer

SWINDON SOCIETY MEETING 11 JANUARY 2017

Tonight we were expecting a talk from Steve Williams about the Air War on the Western Front. Unfortunately, Steve was unable to join us and at the 11th hour we asked Mark Sutton to step in. Mark came with his talk which he had presented last year at The Central Library in Swindon. This talk was based on devastation during World War 1 in the year 1916. The areas he covered were battles in Gallipoli, Jutland and The Somme.

One of the features of the organisation of British forces in the First World War as it was largely done on a local basis. Men who worked together and lived in the same town unusually enrolled together, fought together and often died together. Northern towns formed 'Pals' battalions which meant whole communities could suffer big loses or even obliteration. Swindon was slight different because of its link with the regular army in Wiltshire and a strong tradition of part time or reserve soldiers. This meant that the effects of the war weren't quite as localised as in other towns, but the overwhelming majority of Swindon men fought in one of only five different units and they would have mostly remained with the same companies throughout the war. In all there were some 5,383 Swindon men who fought in the war.

The Somme in 5 months just 7 miles of German defence were taken at a cost of 600,000 casualties – 57,470 on the first day alone



One of the areas where Swindon men saw action was in The Somme and in particular at a place called Bois des Fourcaux (Wood of Pitchforks) more commonly called High Wood. This wood was not large but was of tremendous significance during the Battle of the Somme. It was attacked

on 14 July 1916 but the British were unable to take it. The Germans held out until 15 September 1916. The wood was never fully cleared after the war and it is estimated that the remains of around 8,000 soldiers British and German still lie today in High Wood.

High Wood Today

One of the tanks used on 15 September 1916, '*Clan Ruthven*', remained rusting in High Wood until the 1960s.

High Wood today



High Wood probably looks very similar in appearance today as it did before the Great War. It is possible to walk all the way around the edge of High Wood. Today, the area is sometimes used for shooting, and the bang of shotguns sometimes echoes as you walk around it. From the eastern corner of the Wood, a sunken track leads south-east in the direction of Longueval. This is Wood Lane, in front of which so many men died, under enfilade fire from the machine guns in High Wood. Today, the main danger comes from occasional off-road vehicles negotiating this track.

But mainly, walking around High Wood today is a peaceful and pleasant experience, and in season the bluebells grow in a thick carpet within. It is almost impossible to imagine the human suffering, fighting and death that occurred here over a two-month period over one hundred years ago, whilst the British struggled desperately to advance their offensive on the Somme, and to take High Wood. However, the area around the wood constantly shows reminders of the conflict - the 'iron harvest' of shrapnel and unexploded ordnance is common here - and is still dangerous even one hundred years later.

THE UNVEILING OF DIANA DORS' BLUE PLAQUE
SATURDAY 14 JANUARY 2017, 62 KENT ROAD, OLD TOWN SWINDON



A Man with a Pic

Where is this and what did it signify?



Written, Verbal, Text answers please to Andy on 07968246792 or email ambamwas@yahoo.com

Last month's answer



This was the Mortuary in Radnor Street Cemetery

EVENTS JANUARY TO APRIL 2017

Rodbourne Community History Group 7.00 pm

22 February *The Cravens and Ashdown House* presented by John Farrow

29 March 'A Job for Life' a BBC film about Swindon Works and 'Swindon through the Years Part 6' a film using excerpts from Swindon Cable presentations

26 April TBA

Chiseldon Local History Group – 7.30 pm

The Memorial Hall, Draycott Road, Chiseldon SN4 0LT

15 February *From War to Wildlife – a Remembrance of Blakenhill Farm* by Vince Povey

15 March TBA

19 April *Lawrence of Arabia 'The Man behind the myth'* by John Winterburn

Highworth Historical Society – 7.30 pm

- 27 February *The Working Life of the Railway Navvy* by Chris & Judy Rouse
27 March *Edward Loveden Loveden* by Nick Shippobotham and Judy Craddock – The story of the life of the founder of Buscot Park
24 April *The Mat Factory in Highworth* by Dr Bryan Lawton

Wiltshire Family History Society – 7.15 pm

- 9 February *Historic England Archives* – a General Overview
23 February *The Story of Murphy's Stores* by Gillian Pitter
9 March Members' Evening – Bring an old photograph
23 March *The Great Western Railway Village and Cottage* by Michael Stubbs
13 April TBA

SWINDON SOCIETY

PROGRAMME FOR 2016-2017

2017

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|--------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| 8 Mar | A Stroll around the Town in Time | David Bedford |
| 12 Apr | Denis Bird's Swindon Archive | Graham Carter |
| 10 May | AGM followed by Swindon's Finest? | Your Committee |
| 14 Jun | Summer Outing | TBA |

We meet at 19.30 on the second Wednesday of the month at Goddard Park School, Welcombe Avenue, Swindon, SN3 2QN (except June, July and August).

The Swindon Society would like to extend a big thank you to The Property Shop for the printing of this newsletter and their continued help and support



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