

The Swindon Society



Newsletter January 2018



01793 976009

Welcome to the January Meeting

Wishing you all a very **Happy New Year** and extending a very warm welcome to our January meeting.

Our talk tonight, "*Fact or Fiction – How Old Swindon Inspired an Historical Novel*" is by international best selling author Nicola Cornick. Nicola will be talking mainly about her future book that is set in and around Old Swindon and Lydiard, a couple of our members have helped her with the historical content and have taken Nicola around Old Swindon.

Swindon Society Christmas Party 13th December 2017

Our last meeting of the year was our members' Christmas party. On arrival everyone received a complimentary raffle ticket for the draw that was taking place later in the evening.

The nibbles and mince pies were laid out at the back of the hall with the drinks all set up at the back but to the right of the food. Lots of tables were laid out with a bowl of nuts on each and chairs all around the tables all ready for our members to arrive and have a chat.



Andy welcomed everyone to the party and then, to kick off the festivities, Diane Everett and Paul Williams handed out laminated images from around the town for members on each table to guess the locations in a team effort. Answer sheets were provided for each table and the images were handed from table to table as the evening progressed. Meanwhile members were invited to help themselves to a plate of nibbles and a drink while they waited for the images to arrive at their table. Everyone was having a good natter and Christmas music was playing in the background, which helped to create a lovely festive atmosphere.

After a while, Diane announced that she was going to draw half of the raffle prizes, with the other half to be drawn a little later on. Everyone waited eagerly to hear if their number was going to be called out. Those who were lucky enough had the pleasure of choosing a mystery raffle prize from the many wrapped packages which were spread out on the tables at the front of the hall.

What your chosen prize would turn out to be was anyone's guess and this all added to the fun!

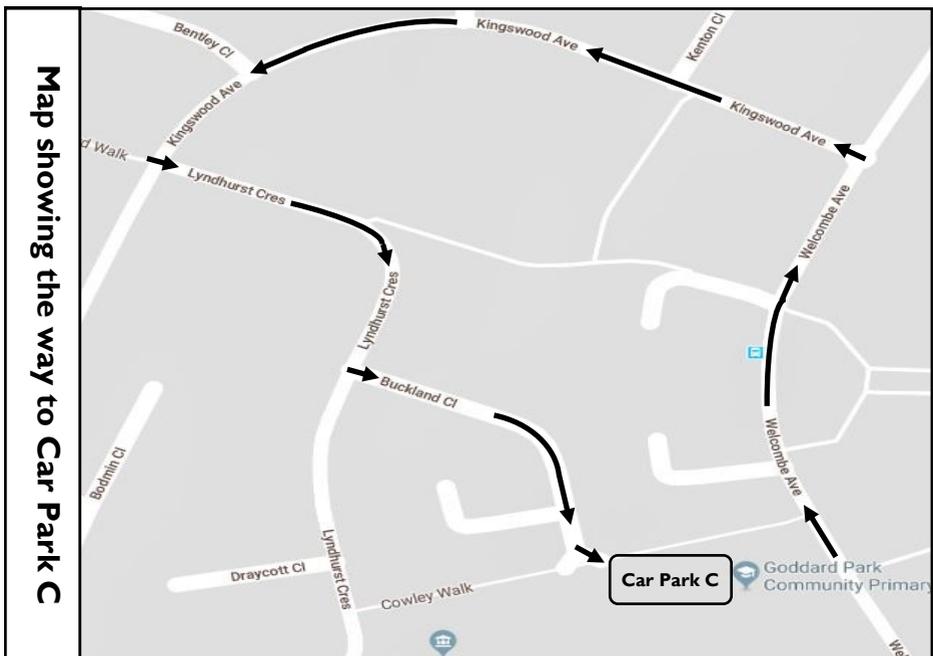
The evening carried on with the refilling of members' glasses and another mince pie for those who wanted one and the picture quiz eventually made its way round to the last table. When the last table had finished, each table swapped its answer sheet with its neighbour to mark while Diane and Paul told everyone the correct answers and where the locations in the pictures actually were. The sheets were then collected so that Diane could work out which table had the highest score.

Then, the lights dimmed, and David Bedford presented us with a few photos on the big screen and invited members to shout out the answers. As usual, it was sometimes tricky to tell where the locations were, but it was amusing to hear some of the various answers that were suggested before we found out for sure where they were.

For the final part of the evening, Diane proceeded to call the second half of the raffle and the rest of the mysterious prizes were collected by the various lucky winners. I think at least half of the party-goers went home with a prize there were so many!

Finally, Andy drew the evening to a close and wished everyone a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year. Then right at the end, someone asked "which table won the picture quiz?" After a quick check Diane congratulated the table with the highest score... they know who they are.

Angie Phillips



Other Local Historical Societies

- Wiltshire Family History Society *Yvonne Neal* *01793 822310*
www.wiltshirefhs.co.uk
- Highworth Historical Society *Mrs Chris Suter* *01793 764811*
www.highworthhistoricalsociety.co.uk
- Local Studies (Central Library) *localstudies@swindon.gov.uk*
www.swindon.gov.uk/localstudies
- Chiseldon Local History Group *Elaine Jones* *01793 740784*
www.chiseldonlhg.org.uk
- Shrivenham Heritage Society *info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk*
www.shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk
- Rodbourne Community History Group *secretary@rodbournehistory.org*
www.rodbournehistory.org

THE SWINDON SOCIETY

THE COMMITTEE ARE THINKING OF ORGANISING (BETWEEN THE JUNE AND SEPTEMBER MEETINGS) AN OUTING TO:

**THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM
JUST NORTH OF TAMWORTH**

IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THIS WOULD HAVE TO BE A WEEKEND VISIT. MY OWN THOUGHTS ARE THAT THIS COULD POSSIBLY BE A VERY BUSY TIME SO MAYBE IT WOULD HAVE TO BE A WEEKDAY

ANYWAY, THIS POINT TO BE DECIDED

AT THIS POINT ALL WE ARE ASKING FOR IS POSSIBLE INTEREST FROM OUR MEMBERS.

DEPENDING ON THE OUTCOME WE WILL THEN CONSIDER WHETHER TO GO AHEAD OR NOT

PLEASE URGENTLY GIVE YOUR NAME TO ONE OF THE COMMITTEE SHOULD YOU AT THIS STAGE BE INTERESTED

EXTRAS TO BE DECIDED AT A LATER DATE

PLEASE SPEAK TO DIANE OR ANY OF THE OTHER COMMITTEE MEMBERS – OR EMAIL info@theswindonsociety.co.uk FOR ANY CLAIFICATION YOU MIGHT NEED

**PS - YOU MAY WISH TO GOOGLE
“NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM”
TO OBTAIN FURTHER INFORMATION**

An Appeal from the Swindon Mail Voice Choir (SMVC)

The SMVC is heading towards a century and needs your help to complete its history.

In 1919 a number of railway workers called, Lovesay, Maberl(e)y and Alford approached their supervisor, Mr W Evans, with a view to starting a male voice choir. Mr Evans agreed, and a group of men started singing together in the Lecture Hall of the Mechanics Institute. In August of the same year they had their first concert in Maxwell Street School under the title of *Running Shed Male Voice Choir*. By December they were known as the *Swindon GWR Male Voice Choir*.

The original choir of around twenty members grew quickly to over sixty plus and performed regular concerts both locally and further afield, usually in the Great Western Railway geographical area. The choir also competed in music festivals and Eisteddfods winning many prizes.

In the mid-1930s the choir began making regular broadcasts on the BBC which continued throughout WW2. At this time, the choir became known as *Swindon GWR Male Voice Choir BBC*. At the end of the war, the “BBC” disappeared from the name and later in 1954 the GWR was also dropped.

Right now, the SMVC is fast approaching its centenary and unfortunately there are a few too many gaps in its history. So, if you have any relatives who were in the choir during the period 1919 to 1954, or have memorabilia (photos, programmes, newspaper articles) from that era, I would dearly love to hear from you.

There were at least two other male voice choirs around at that time one was *The Orpheus*, which started in 1887, and *The Gleemen*, which had its origins in the GWR Accounts Department. Information on either of these choirs would also be very welcome.

If you do have any information I can be contacted on Swindon (01793) 706432 or by email at lisjohn@tesco.net. Incidentally, if there are any men out there who would like to join the choir, we practice at the New Century Club in Gorse Hill on Monday evenings at 7.30pm (term time only).

John Mills - Archivist, Swindon Male Voice Choir



OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

Chairman

Andy Binks 07968 246792 (Mobile)

Vice Chairman

Not appointed

Treasurer

Tony Shackell 694344

Secretary/Contacts

Jennie Bridges 873298

info@theswindonsociety.co.uk

Committee Members

David Bedford 643570

Kevin Bizley 07769 685931 (Mobile)

Kelly Blake 07786 391997 (Mobile)

Diane Everett 613981

Gina Deyager 695546

Angie Phillips 07759 240776 (Mobile)

Nicola Shackell 694344

Bob Townsend 845295

Paul Williams 542111

Newsletter Editor & Website Co-ordinator - Angie Phillips

Email angie.phillips@ntlworld.com

www.theswindonsociety.co.uk

Swindon Society Programme 2017 - 2018

- Jan 10th** Fact or Fiction - How Old Swindon
Inspired an Historical Novel *Nicola Cornick*
- Feb 14th** Air War on the Western Front *Steve Williams*
- Mar 14th** Members' Interests Evening
- Apr 11th** Roving Around Rodbourne *Gina Deyager*
- May 9th** The Girls Go West - Preceded by
The AGM *Diane Everett & Jennie Bridges*
- Jun 13th** Summer Outing (TBA)

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).

A POTTED HISTORY OF TOWN GARDENS

Amazingly its history started well over 200 million years ago when this part of the world was under the sea. Today, Old Swindon is 450 feet above sea level but at that time it was a huge hole in the ocean floor, probably caused by an extinct volcano. Untold millions of dead sea-life then filled it up, and when the ice age ended, the ground began to lift up like a coiled spring with the weight removed.

Through the millions of years that followed the ground around this hole got washed away leaving behind a hill made from the remains of the sea-life which had now turned into rock, then along came the Romans. What did the Romans ever do for Swindon? Well they started our first industry, quarrying. They cut the stone out of Old Town to make their roads and Villa's down at Durocornovium (today we call this area Dorcan and Covingham). Then, after they left in the 4th Century we entered the dark ages and the Quarries were forgotten for about 1200 years when they were re-discovered on Goddard land in 1642. At that time, Limestone, Purbeck stone, and Portland stone were found to be very good for building houses and roads and Swindon's first industrial business flourished once more. After the Great Fire of London in 1666, Swindon stone was sent to London to replace the streets as it was very hard wearing. So, Swindon paved the streets of London... but not with gold!

Later, in the early 1800s, the Canal Company used the stone for its wharfs, bridges, and houses as the canal came along this way. Then 40 years later it was the turn of the railways to use it, mainly to build the Railway Village.

By the late 1800s the Quarries had seen better days and in 1894 Swindon Council bought nine acres of the land from Mr Goddard for £700 and opened the gardens that we know today. The gardens were expanded in 1902 and again in 1905, doubling the size of the park.

Town Gardens, as it was known, had a maze (where the Rose garden is today), bowling green, putting green, tennis court, green houses, fountains, and free roaming peacocks. The aviary was built in 1920 and the replacement, which is still there today, was opened in 1994.

The refreshment kiosk was made by the railway men and was originally used as a portable trade stand and moved around the country. It was sold to the Council in 1942 and has never moved since.

The statue commonly known as "Peter Pan" was sited in about 1905. Sadly, nearly 100 years later in 2004 it was stolen and smashed up by vandals. A new replacement was erected in 2010, but this one was also destroyed by decapitation and was replaced yet again in 2010.

From the outset there has always been a bandstand, but the original was replaced by the one we know today in 1936 along with the music bowl which was designed by Mr J B L Thompson, Borough Surveyor, and built in an Art Deco Style. Incidentally, Mr Thompson also designed the familiar diving board at Coate Water in 1935, the fourth diving board to be erected there.

Roy Cartwright



