

The Swindon Society



Newsletter November 2017



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Welcome to the November Meeting

Hello everyone and a very warm welcome to our November meeting.

Tonight, we continue our programme of events with “**The Dixon-Attwell Collection**” - the complete documented history and memories of one family’s lifetime spent in just one house.

Presented by family member, Michael Attwell, this remarkable story is to be published in a forthcoming book. So ladies and gentlemen... see the show before the book! We very much hope you enjoy it.

STRATTON WORKHOUSE PAUL WILKINS - 11TH OCTOBER 2017

Tonight, we welcomed Paul Wilkins who came to talk to The Swindon Society about the Stratton Workhouse. Paul has been researching the Stratton Workhouse for a number of years and has amassed a lot of information which has been summarised below.

A parliamentary report of 1777 recorded that there were parish workhouses in operation at Highworth (up to 38 inmates) and at Stratton St Margaret (20 inmates). Later, a new Highworth parish workhouse was built in 1790 on Cricklade Road at a cost of £1,900.00. The Highworth and Swindon Poor Law Union officially came into existence on 23 November 1835 and its operation was overseen by an elected Board of Guardians representing its 16 constituent parishes. Initially, the Highworth and Swindon Union continued to make use of the existing Highworth parish workhouse but by 1845-6 the increase in demand for places in the workhouse led to the construction of a new building on the east side of Highworth Road in Stratton St Margaret.



Before 1834, poor people were looked after with money that was collected from land owners and other wealthy people which bought them food and clothing. However, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 ensured that an able-bodied person could only get poor relief if they went to live in special workhouses. The idea was that this would give them some help to support themselves, which meant working for their food and accommodation.

Workhouses were for people who had no home or job, but they were also inhabited by orphaned and abandoned children, the physically and mentally sick, the disabled, the elderly and the unmarried mothers. These institutions were often very large and were feared by the poor and the old. The government, terrified of encouraging ‘idlers’ (lazy people) endorsed these fears so that people would do anything to stay out.

The workhouse provided a place to live and a place to work and earn money. It provided free medical care, food, clothes, free education for children and training for a job. In reality it was not as glamorous as it sounded. Women, men and children had different living and working areas. Families were split up and could be punished if they tried to speak to each other. The education the children received did not include the two most important skills of reading and writing which were needed to get a good job. The inmates had to wear uniforms so everyone looked the same and everyone on the outside knew they were poor and lived in the workhouse.

On entering the workhouse, the poor were stripped and bathed (under supervision) and they were given the same tasteless food to eat day after day. The men and women, young and old, were made to work hard, often doing unpleasant jobs. The children could also find themselves 'hired out' (sold) to work in factories or mines.

Looking at the 1881 census for the Stratton Workhouse it is sad to see the types of people who had fallen on hard times. These include a musician formerly from the band of the Grenadier Guards and a Jockey who was the 1849 winner of The Derby on The Flying Dutchman. The latter died a year later in Roundway Insane Asylum in Devizes. There were a lot of children who had been born in the workhouse and sadly had never experienced what it was like to live outside. Workhouses were not the ideal situation for most people but with hard work and determination some people managed to leave and build a better life for themselves.

After 1930, the former Stratton Workhouse became a Public Assistance Institution and the infirmary became a general hospital. Unfortunately, some of the older generation who were admitted to the hospital were frightened because they could remember its original use.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Stratton Workhouse, The Alfred Williams Society has published a book called *In the Shadow of the Workhouse* by Caroline Ockwell and Graham Carter.

Nicky Shackell - October 2017

Christmas Party (Drinks & Nibbles) - Raffle Donations

A big thank you to everyone who has kindly brought in a donated prize for the Christmas Party raffle in December. It is our intention to wrap up all the raffle prizes so that the winners have a nice surprise to open up - just like when Father Christmas has been!

If you intended to bring in a raffle prize but have forgotten to bring it tonight, please don't worry - it's not too late! Simply bring your donation along to the Christmas Party in December... but please can you bring it with you pre-wrapped as we obviously will not have the chance to do this on the night.

As previously mentioned there is of course no requirement for anyone to feel they have to bring a prize but any donations would be very much appreciated.

Other Events Around Swindon

Eastcott Community Organisation present their book:

Legacy of a Rag and Bone Man

A century of community life in Eastcott, Swindon

Book Launch Saturday 25th November 2017 at 2pm.

Ground Floor, Swindon Central Library

Other Local Historical Societies

- Wiltshire Family History Society
Contact Margaret Neaves 01793 938169
www.wiltshirefhs.co.uk
- Highworth Historical Society
Contact Mrs Chris Suter 01793 764811
www.highworthhistoricalsociety.co.uk
- Central Library - Local Studies
Contact 01793 463238
www.swindon.gov.uk/localstudies
- Chiseldon Local History Group
Contact 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

Share Your Trip Down Memory Lane

If you would like to share your memories with everyone in our monthly newsletter, please feel free to write something down and give it to one of the committee members. Alternatively, you can send it directly by email to angie.phillips@ntlworld.com. Articles in the newsletter typically consist of around 300 - 400 words but don't worry if they are a bit longer or shorter we would still love to hear your stories.

Monthly Reminder

Don't forget - can everyone who has an email address please give it to Nicky Shackell. Thank you.

The Tabernacle Pigeon Cull in the Early 1950s

The Swindon and District Racing Pigeon Club, of which I was the secretary, was requested to reduce the number of pigeons roosting on the Tabernacle building in Regent Street, Swindon. This was because of the dangerous and unhygienic mess they were making.

A team comprising of Jim Griffiths (my father), Ted Griffiths (my uncle), Ken Hiscocks (my cousin), Mr Cook (a friend) and myself, Clive Griffiths arranged to meet late on Saturday evenings into the early hours of Sunday mornings in an attempt to reduce the numbers.

The first job was to cover up as many street sign lights as possible, to make it as dark as possible. Any shadows thrown would disturb the birds sleeping on the ledges and cause a mass flight.

If you could reach the ledges by means of ladders and the birds were not disturbed then you could just pick them up and place them in a pigeon basket.

The pigeons caught without rings on their legs were destroyed by Uncle Ted and would finish up in a pie... The ones with rings on their legs were traced back to their owners by means of the registration numbers on the rings and it was my job to contact the owners and either send them home in a cardboard box or request the owner's permission to destroy them. Birds were returned all over the British Isles.

Similar exercises were carried out on other buildings in the town such as the Empire Theatre and the Town Hall.

The most frightening night I can remember was watching my father crawl up the ridge on the Tabernacle roof and sit on the apex at the front of the building just for a dare! He must have been insane at the time but it was typical of him. Those were the days... or should I say nights?

Clive Griffiths



OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

Chairman

Andy Binks 07968 246792 (Mobile)

Vice Chairman

Not appointed

Treasurer

Tony Shackell 694344

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Swindon Society Programme 2017 - 2018

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| Nov 8th | The Dixon-Attwell Collection | <i>Michael Attwell</i> |
| Dec 13th | Members' Christmas Party | |
| Jan 10th | Fact or Fiction - How Old Swindon
Inspired an Historical Novel | <i>Nicola Cornick</i> |
| Feb 14th | Air War on the Western Front | <i>Steve Williams</i> |
| Mar 14th | Members' Interests Evening | |
| Apr 11th | Roving Around Rodbourne | <i>Gina Deyager</i> |
| May 9th | The Girls Go West - Preceded by
The AGM | <i>Diane Everett & Jennie Bridges</i> |
| 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).

My Recollections of Cavendish Square

Soon after we moved to Swindon in February 1964, Mum, Andy and I set off to find our nearest shops; I took my dolls pram. We got a bit lost and never actually found Cavendish Square, but arrived instead at Sussex Square. Not realising this, we did a bit of shopping and went back home. I remember Andrew had a bag of potatoes to carry and kept trying to put them into my dolls pram, but I wouldn't hear of it - I wasn't going to have a mucky old bag of spuds in my pram! I remember us arguing over that (and we did a lot of that for many years afterwards!).

Once we had established the correct way to get to "Cavvy", it was where all the shopping was done. It was where the Doctor, Dentist, hairdresser and everything else happened too. Mum would walk over to do the weekly shop at the Co-op and her shopping would be delivered by Bob the driver in the afternoon. Also, the bread was delivered to a wicker basket hung in the porch several times a week. Just think, the internet shopping and home delivery you get today was actually invented a long time before!



I remember the upstairs area of Cavvy that was accessed by a series of long ramps which I dreamed of roller skating down but never had the nerve to do. At the foot of this ramp was a very odd-looking fountain with concrete blocks.

Other shops at Cavvy were Stoddy's Toys (Peter Stoddart Conservative Counsellor for Abbey Meads ward), a haberdashery shop, a green grocer or two, a fish and chop shop, and besides the Co-op there was a Gateway supermarket and a Woolworths. There was also a shoe shop where mum bought me a pair of Derry Boots which were fur-lined posh wellies made of vinyl that looked like leather. I thought I was the bees- knees in those!

My pal Janice Thomas and I used to take our homework to do at the library where we sat in a room at the back. I think this was called the quiet room, and of course the library was a place of quite too.

My most lovely memory of Cavvy was going there with my wonderful Dad on a Saturday morning. These were precious times with my Dad. There was a brass band playing and we stood to watch them play. My dad told me that I should stop licking my ice lolly whilst we were watching because it might have the same effect on the brass band players as sucking a lemon would have. I can only imagine what he meant, but have always had a mischievous desire to suck a lemon in front of a brass band ever since – just to see what would happen!

Julie - Sister of Chairman, Andy Binks

