

**Back Then...  
Lawn  
Medical  
Centre  
2003**



# The Swindon Society Newsletter - February 2024



**... And  
More  
Recently  
January  
2024**



# Welcome to the February Newsletter

Hello and welcome to the February newsletter.

Happy Valentine's Day! We certainly hope you are all feeling the love tonight.

This evening, Philip Garrahan will be introducing us to the lives of two Swindon artists: Leslie Cole and Hubert Cook. These two men were among the many adults working at the GWR, who took adult educational classes. As a result, they prospered as painters and tonight Phil will show us some of their work, focussing mainly on their depictions of industrial life in 1920s and 1930s. It sounds great!

Once again, here is your monthly reminder:

If you have any memories, stories or just thoughts in your head that you would like to share with other members, please get in touch. We would all like to read them. They can be yours or someone else's, we really don't mind.

You can reach us on either of these:

- me - [angie.phillips@ntlworld.com](mailto:angie.phillips@ntlworld.com)
- or - [info@theswindonsociety.co.uk](mailto:info@theswindonsociety.co.uk)



## Wiltshire Follies by Jonathan Holt

10th January 2024

Our first meeting of the year was great; something completely different from our usual fare. We had a visit from the extremely knowledgeable Jonathan Holt of The Folly Fellowship. There are so many follies to see in

Wiltshire and we were taken on a tour of quite a few.

First of all, Jonathan asked "what is a folly?". They are very hard to define and sometimes it's easier to say what they are not, rather than what they are. Some are very small, some are huge. Some people think follies are useless, but this apparently is a controversial definition because some do have uses. We were told that one definition is that they are "an ornament for a gentleman's garden and a mirror to his mind" (unfortunately I missed exactly who came up with that particular description though).

Many follies are from the Georgian period; during that period many sons of notable families would go on a "Grand Tour" of Europe and come back wanting to build temples and the like, such as they had seen whilst away.

The first Wiltshire folly we were shown was the Fonthill Arch built c1751-54 which can still be driven through. It is now a gateway to nowhere, but Jonathan explained that it used to lead to the grand house at Fonthill. It was built for William Beckford who also had Fonthill Abbey built, which was called “the most prodigious romantic folly in England” by the architectural historian Pevsner. Jonathan told us all about the abbey, which was never actually consecrated; it housed William Beckford’s art collection and was designed by the architect James Wyatt. However, Wyatt was apparently never on site to supervise the building works and Beckford drove on the workers with fire (for warmth and light as it got dark) and beer. They also used an experimental form of cement in the building of the abbey. However, it started to crumble and (after being sold to a gunpowder manufacturer in 1822) the tower blew down and damaged the west wing of the building in strong winds in 1825. These days there is just a small part of the abbey left. Also in Fonthill are the Cromlech, Caves of the Sleepers and the Upper Grotto. They were built by the father and son team of Joseph and Josiah Lane, master grotto builders, probably for William Beckford’s son.



The next folly Jonathan showed us was the Belcombe Court Rotunda, built for Francis Yerbury in 1730. There is also a grotto in the same grounds, built for John Yerbury by Josiah Lane. A more recent addition to the follies at Belcombe Court is the Shell House. Renowned shell artist Blott Kerr-Wilson was commissioned to transform a 19th century building into a shell house with spectacular results.

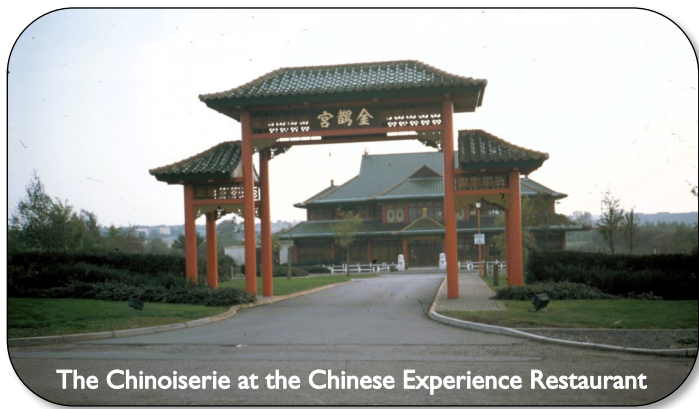
We moved to Corsham for the next folly - the Corsham Court Folly Wall. Jonathan described how this particular folly is a bit mysterious - it’s not known whether it was built for Thomas Broadwood or for the Methuen family (Corsham Court being the family seat) in 1875. It’s made of bits and pieces, such as pieces of chimney pots and old church buildings, etc. Broadwood had bought a house on the same road and it is thought that one didn’t want to overlook the other - but it’s not known which way round it is and therefore who had the folly built.

Jonathan then took us to Larmer Tree Gardens in south Wiltshire. The gardens were created in the 1880s as a private garden for the public to enjoy by General Augustus Pitt Rivers. There are several follies in the gardens of varying design and age. There is a building called Lower India House, as well as the Indian Room. The latter was purchased from the Earls Court Exhibition in the 1890s, but is actually Nepalese in origin. In addition, there is the Temple, which was built in the classical style, and the Quarters - eight thatched huts, each in it’s own picnic area.

Whilst people enjoyed their picnic there would be dogs and yaks roaming the grounds! In the 1990s the gardens were owned by Michael Pitt Rivers and Jonathan recounted how Michael had been advised to have an “eyecatcher” folly built within the gardens. Following his death, his partner William Gronow-Davies followed up on this plan with the Indian Mughal Arch, built in 2008.

Oare House near Marlborough was our next stop with Jonathan. He showed us the modern folly of the Oare Tea House, which was built in 2003 for Tessa Keswick. It was designed by renowned architect I.M. Pei, who also designed the Louvre Pyramid.

We then moved around the county a little more; first to the Amesbury Abbey Chinese Summerhouse, which was built for Kitty Queensbury and designed by William Chambers, who also did the Pagoda at Kew Gardens. Then it was on to the Marlborough Grotto, built for Frances Seymour, Countess of Hertford in 1735. It’s in the grounds of the school so can only be viewed in the school holidays. We moved to Biddesden House near Ludgershall, where Bryan Walter Guinness had a Pool House built in 1933. It was decorated with mosaics of Greek gods and muses by Boris Anrep a renowned artist whose work also decorates the National Gallery. We briefly visited Swindon for the next follies - the Chinoiserie (entrance gateway)



The Chinoiserie at the Chinese Experience Restaurant

and pagoda, both built in 1990 at the Chinese Experience restaurant. The pagoda cannot be reached on foot - which must have made building it a very interesting experience. Next up was the Pumpkin Tower in Bythesea Road, Trowbridge built in 1999 as an elaborate

piece of artwork. We were told that locals in Trowbridge were rather ambiguous about it and it had been described as a millennium project. It was built from a hotchpotch of materials and features some gargoyles, including a dragon. At one point the dragon began to breathe smoke in the style of “Puff the Magic Dragon, lived Bythesea...”

Further on to Chedglow near Malmesbury is another modern folly called Colin’s Barn but also known as the Hobbit House. Colin Stokes built the barn over many years from 1989 using Cotswold stone he found in his field. He did all the work himself, from carting the stone from the field to creating the stained glass. It had many uses, especially as the building grew - it was initially a lambing shed but grew to encompass other activities, including housing a dovecote.



The building was abandoned, unfinished, in 2000 when Colin moved away. Jonathan then showed us some follies created by Francis Dineley, a dissimulator who tried to make his follies appear old when they were in fact modern. One of them appeared to be a ruin, covered in ivy and with a staircase exposed to the elements. It was actually built from reclaimed stonework in the 1960s. Another folly nearby called the Banqueting Temple was built in the 1970s, again from re-used stone. The local authority have used these buildings in their local publicity, even though Francis Dineley never had any planning permission to build them! Our last folly of the evening was another modern one, built in 1999 for Elizabeth Cartwright at Iford Manor near Bradford-on-Avon. It was another shell house, this one decorated using lots of green glazed ceramics and featuring the motif of the Green Man.

It was a real change of pace to go on a tour of Wiltshire to see some beautiful and unusual buildings, so we thank Jonathan for visiting us all the way from Bath for such an interesting talk.

*Kelly Blake - January 2024*

## A Change of Scene

I'm the kind of person who hates change - even if it is a change for the better. Although I love technology, rarely do I readily accept the physical changes implemented by an advancing way of life in a technological world, and I even lament the disappearance of everyday familiar objects. Consequently, on occasion, I take odd photos... just in case I forget these everyday things that are slowly disappearing from my world; things I once saw everywhere but took little notice of... until now.

My starter for ten is the obvious removal of many telephone boxes. This has been slowly progressing over the last twenty years or so. Obviously, the mobile phone revolution has rendered these once abundant features of every street more or less obsolete and no doubt I am not alone in noticing this happen.

What struck me a few weeks ago though was this telegraph pole (see next page). I was amazed that it no longer had any wires attached, I have never seen this before and it made me think. The whole country's telephone system is gradually being switched over to a broadband connection – even for those who don't currently have broadband.



So, how long before these familiar features that are currently standing in almost every street in the country start to slowly disappear from our neighbourhoods, and will we even notice their demise?

Not long after this whizzed round my head, I was in my car waiting at a junction to turn right and looked at the bollard at the side of me. It was one of those new reflective types that need no lighting up from underneath. Of course, this must help with the town's finances, as must the



Hayman Crescent

new streetlights that have been erected across the whole borough, and this is obviously a good thing. But later that day when I drove past an old-style bollard, lit up in all its glory, I again felt saddened that these too will soon be street furniture of the past, only to be remembered when seen in photos (that have been taken by weirdos like me) and it seems that they are gradually being replaced in a stealth-like fashion and no one has noticed. Did we even realise that some of these old bollards had already been superseded in places with light up lollipop-shaped versions? It seems things seem to change around us, and we just don't see it happen.

As a postie, I have become aware that the grey boxes that were dotted around most neighbourhoods are slowly being removed. This isn't necessarily a bad thing as they are pretty ugly, but they served a purpose in a time when the volume of mail and parcels increased to a point where a whole shift's worth of



Hanbury Road

mail would not all fit on a postie's pushbike. In case you didn't already know, these boxes were filled by a Royal Mail van driver at the beginning of a working day with bags of mail and parcels for that particular round. The postie delivering in that area on their pushbike could then refill their pouch by going back and forth to the grey boxes enabling them to complete the whole delivery in that

White Edge Moor



Light up lollipop-shaped one in Windsor Road

area without having to return to the delivery office each time. When the switch was made to deliveries by two people in one van, the boxes became obsolete.

And I've discovered something else surprising since working for Royal Mail. A strange absurdity that beggars belief. Did you know that you will rarely find more recently built houses or flats with a number 13. For many years now odd numbered rows of dwellings simply skip over the number 13 and go from 11 to 15. Similarly, consecutively numbered houses and flats either skip the number 13 or go 11, 12, 12a 14 etc. Isn't it a bit extreme that simple superstition is held in such high regard when planning a new development? Why is that? The mind boggles.

Changing the focus a little, I also acknowledge that our familiar surroundings are also altered by the addition of new things, such as all the new electric charging stations that are appearing in nearly every supermarket car park and even on the corners of streets in the town centre. These are now part of the new world we live in and, not only are they here to stay, but they will probably become more prevalent as time goes by and electric vehicles become the norm.



The alleyway between Grantley Close and Queens Drive in Park South.



Mill Lane

Also, the erection of sculptures and artistic landscaping seem to be on the increase in newly built areas and that is lovely, although time will tell if they will stand the test of time.

However... don't get me started on the relatively new addition of recycling bins! We all have about a million each now, don't we? It is almost impossible to hide them all. And if you ever wondered why the old photos of our streets looked so lovely back in the day, it is probably for two reasons; the lack of parked cars in the street... and no unsightly wheelie bins!

*Angie Phillips - February 2024*





# Swindon Society Meeting

## 13th March 2024

### Markets, Masons & Music

by

## John Stooke

The presenter of our March meeting is our very own committee member John Stooke.

As you probably know, John is a successful local author who has an abundance of knowledge relating to Swindon as it was in years gone by.

The title of John's talk suggests that he will be sharing interesting nuggets of information on a variety of interests pertinent to Swindon scenes of the past.

We are very much looking forward to this one!

**HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!**

## Programme - 2024

<b>February 14th</b>	Swindon's Interwar Railway Artists	<b>Phil Garrahan</b>
<b>March 14th</b>	Markets, Masons & Music	<b>John Stooke</b>
<b>April 10th</b>	Rodbourne - Out and About	<b>Gordon Shaw</b>
<b>May 8th</b>	Themed Selection of Swindon Slides - Preceded by the AGM	<b>Committee's Selection</b>
<b>June 12th</b>	Summer Outing (TBA)	<b>Everyone</b>

*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).*



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## Opening Hours

Mon: By appointment only  
Tues: 10am to 4.00pm  
Wed: 10am to 4.00pm  
Sat: 10am to 1.00pm



## Swindon from Above - 1960s

Who doesn't love an aerial photo of their local area from days gone by? Personally, I can while away hours trying to get my bearings by pinpointing specific buildings in the area and trying to identify streets that I have heard about but have long since gone; before I was even old enough to remember them.

Have a little gander at this one. To me it looks like it is the pre-Brunel Centre and police station era. So much has changed since this was taken.

Don't forget, if we have your email address you will receive the digital version of this newsletter shortly after our members' evening and then you can zoom in and have a better look. Have fun!



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

Selected photos from our archive are posted for you to enjoy.

[www.facebook.com/thewindonsociety](http://www.facebook.com/thewindonsociety)

Swindon Soc.



**The Swindon Society - recording the changing face of Swindon**

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## THE SWINDON SOCIETY - OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

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### **Vice Chairman**

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## Other Local Historical Societies

- **Wiltshire Family History Society**  
[www.wiltshirefhs.co.uk](http://www.wiltshirefhs.co.uk)  
*Yvonne Neal 01793 822310*
- **Highworth Historical Society**  
[www.highworthhistoricalsociety.co.uk](http://www.highworthhistoricalsociety.co.uk)  
*Mrs Chris Suter 01793 764811*
- **Chiseldon Local History Group**  
[www.chiseldonlhg.org.uk](http://www.chiseldonlhg.org.uk)  
*Elaine Jones 01793 740784*
- **Rodbourne Community History Group**  
[www.rodbournehistory.org](http://www.rodbournehistory.org)  
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- **Shrivenham Heritage Society**  
*info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk*  
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- **Local Studies (Central Library)**  
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## Feedback from our Newsletter



Once again we have had some lovely comments from readers of the newsletter. Some are via Yvonne Neal from the Wiltshire Family History Society and some via our own email link. Here are a couple of comments we had back in November 2023 - sent anonymously:

- *“Just had a memory. Having read the PDF news letter. Den White, Swindon Wheelers Cycling Club, was the FIRST man to Average, over 20 Miles per hour, on a cycle. Verified by the Road Time Trials Council, and the U.C.”*
- *“When I read your latest news letter, I was surprised to read in Mr Beaney's article about Mr Townsend, who I knew from a few years ago. I went to school with Barry Nash, he lived in the next block down, on the other side of Cricklade Road, and Ann Challenger, I went to school with her, she also helped to organise a reunion when our year at Ferndale Road were 50 years old. - Real names and a blast from the past.”*

Also more recently regarding the December Issue:

From Caroline Hunt who kindly provided us with the images and information of the council's play parks:

- *“Thank you so much for sending this through, I loved reading it! I have forwarded to my old boss at SBC to see if he can answer the Lordsmith's Green question. Kind regards Caroline.”*

## Swindon Quiz - Just for Fun !



Okay, hands up who knows where this is?

Andy took this photo on 14th January 2024. Does it look familiar to you? If you think you know where it is, let us know. No prizes, just the satisfaction of getting your name in the newsletter if you contact us. What could be better... fame at last!





## Regent Street/Edgware Road 1950s



## Queens Park 1950s

