

**Croft
Road**

**Back
then
1930s...**



The Swindon Society Newsletter - March 2023



**...and
more
recently
2023**



Welcome to the March Newsletter

Hello and welcome to our March newsletter.

Well, here we are well into March already! Slightly longer evenings but as I sit here typing it still feels pretty cold... Brr!

Tonight we are visited by John Farrow, who will be giving us a presentation on the Wilts & Berks Canal, always a favourite topic. John has presented for us in the past so we know we are in for a very interesting evening.

Thanks to Liz and Nick Knell for responding to the picture quizzes in the February newsletter. Both agreed Andy's photo was taken in Bridge Street and Diane's was from the Richard Jefferies Museum... are they right? Have a look at page 11 and find out!

Thanks also to members John and Jim Harper for their contribution to this newsletter. Their shared memory, depicted by John, of working in Franklin's bakehouse is much appreciated. And, as I say every month, if there is anything you want to share with all of us nostalgia junkies, please don't hesitate to contact either:

- me - angie.phillips@ntlworld.com
- or - info@theswindonsociety.co.uk



The Swindon Society - recording the changing face of Swindon

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

Kelly does a great job, regularly posting selected photos from our archive.

Go on... have a look!

www.facebook.com/

Swindon Society Programme 2023

Apr 12th

Colehill House in World War Two

Liza Dibble

May 10th

Slide Selection - Preceded by the AGM

Your Committee

Jun 14th

Summer Outing (TBA)

Everyone

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).

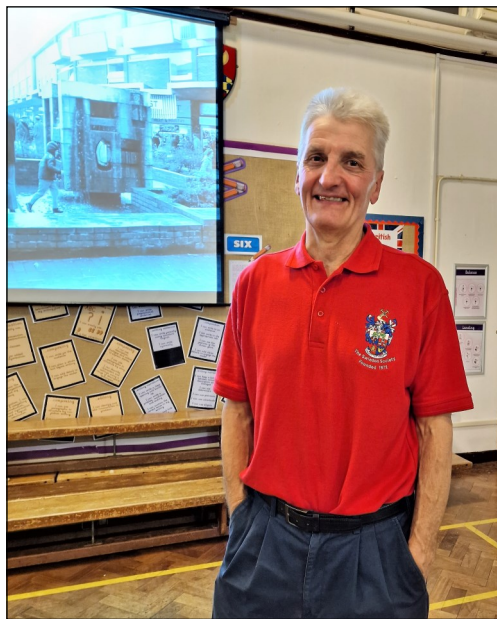
RAMBLING MAN (BINKS IS BACK)

ANDY BINKS

8TH FEBRUARY 2023

Well the Binks was definitely back for our February talk, and wasn't it a good one. It wasn't so much a ramble as a sprint through a whole range of photos from the Swindon Society and Andy's personal archive too... The photos largely focused on buildings in Swindon that have been knocked down over the years. So, there were some well-known favourites, as well as some that few people knew about. Even if all I did was list every photo that Andy shared, I'd run out of space – so this review will just feature some of the highlights (and none of the lowlights such as Andy's moustache or kipper tie!).

One of the early photos we saw was of Newburn House, which was home to George Jackson Churchward in the 1920s and was demolished in 1937. It stood at the end of Dean Street, where Newburn Crescent can now be found. We also saw photos of various houses and other buildings that were demolished to make way for the Police Headquarters in the town centre in



1967. This building was also later demolished as part of the Whale Bridge Roundabout to Gytratory works earlier this century.

One of the buildings that obviously had to be included in any talk about buildings we have lost is the Baptist Tabernacle. Andy showed us some photos of how beautiful the interior looked and then how it looked during demolition too. There was the obligatory photo on the lack of health and safety whilst the building was being demolished, which raised a



smile. Later in the talk, Andy shared that one of the many reasons that the building had to go was due to the foundations being washed away by natural springs. The springs still cause problems for some premises in Regent Street, with the former Helen & Douglas House charity shop having to pump water out of the cellar every morning, so it didn't flood!

We then had a run of photos of churches, all beautiful buildings that are no more, mainly in the centre of Swindon. First there was the Methodist Central Hall, which was located in Clarence Street, behind where MECA now stands in Regents Circus. It



Gospel Hall Regent Place

burned down in 1977, cause unknown. There was also a Catholic Church where Rudi's now stands, before they moved to the new Holy Rood Church on Groundwell Road in 1905. Further down from "the top of town" there was the Primitive Methodist Church opposite what is now the Savoy pub. We then abandoned churches for a while and had a ramble down Regent Street - we had photos of The Spot and Mclroys - before finding some more old churches in Sanford Street (the Congregational Church), Edgware Road (St. Paul's) and yet another one, which was located just behind where the Savoy is now.

Next up was a photo of the Isolation Hospital in Gorse Hill, the Austradius Brook which runs through Gorse Hill and Pinehurst (who knew?); and the Whispering Wall of Sheppard Street, which I will be trying out soon! We had a run of Ken White artworks; firstly, before and after he painted the mural at the Highworth Rec swimming pool; then the much-missed Prospect Place mural full of famous Swindon faces and finally it was his Regent Fish Shop painting. Still in that area, we had a photo of Lower Eastcott Farm, which was followed by its successor Corporation Street and on that road, the electricity company's original building. Andy then showed us what was left of the building – four panels of brickwork, which didn't include the impressive coat of arms that had stood just one panel further along. However, it emerged from members that the reason that part of the building is still standing is that it is a substation, still providing electricity to the town.



Further along our Swindon ramble, Andy showed us a few photos of the interior of the indoor market taken by Denis Bird. And this was swiftly followed by a photo of its demolition, literally the toppling of the pinnacle of market building frontage, taken by Janet French. This photo was later

used for the cover of the last issue of the Swindon Heritage Magazine. We then saw some pics of Burkhardt Hall, whilst in its former occupation as the Technical School and before its refurbishment. Andy told us about his involvement in getting the building listed and saving it from being demolished as part of the Regent Circus development. As the Adver had it on 1st March 2014 – “Safe and Sound” and all thanks to him. A very well-deserved round of applause was given to Mr. Binks at this point.



Regent Street Primitive Methodist Church 1950s
(Note the lower water damaged brickwork)

the later highlights of this epic talk by our beloved chairperson featured a vehicle stuck under the White House Bridge (not an unusual sight, but this one was an oldie and the vehicle was a wagon, rather than the usual lorry!); and the rather unusual and little-known Fyffes banana ripening room in Gorse Hill. But ladies and gentlemen we couldn't get Mr. Binks to stop! Whereas I will end my review here. We're looking forward to whatever talk Andy debuts for us in the future – they just keep getting better and better.

Kelly Blake - March - 2023



By no means rounding off the evening, but all I've got room for here, two of

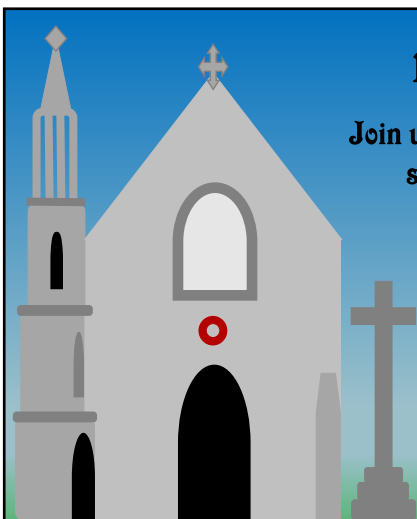
Radnor Street Cemetery Walks

Join us on our first meeting of 2023 and find out about some of the people who are remembered here

Meet outside the chapel at 2pm
Sunday 26th March 2023

The Radnor Street team, Fran, Noel and Andy, can be contacted on 07968 246792

Please also see the
Radnor Street Cemetery Facebook page





Swindon Society Meeting

Wednesday 12th April 2023

Coleshill House in World War Two

Liza Dibble

For our April presentation we are very happy to welcome Liza Dibble, who is going to give us a talk about Coleshill House. Requisitioned during World War Two, it was used as the training headquarters for Auxiliary Units and the secret British Resistance.

We are sure this evening will prove to be both interesting and surprising as the facts unfold. Do join us to find out more!

As usual please bear in mind the following:

- If you have any concerns for your health, please continue to wear a mask, at least until you are seated.
- If you haven't been vaccinated, we respectfully suggest you wear a mask at all times for your own safety.
- Hand sanitiser will be available - please feel free to use it.
- Outside doors and windows may be open to allow air to circulate so please bring warm clothing in case it gets chilly.
- Please do not attend if you have any Covid symptoms.

SEE YOU AGAIN SOON!

The Bakehouse Lament

On a recent weekend away I just happened to pop into a proper bakery for a loaf and was instantly hit by a blast from the past, that straight from the oven smell of fresh and hot crusty bread.

That took me back over 50 years to a time when any decent bread came from the independent family bakers who were everywhere back then, and the memories came flooding back.

It's 5.30am on a dark cold Monday morning in November 1971. I'm rudely awakened by my dad with the customary removal of the bed covers.

Time for the start of my 6-8am shift at the bakehouse. I did this Monday to Friday before school, and every Saturday! Dad had secured the job for my brother Jim back in 1967, but now it is all mine to take on!

We lived at the Penhill School on Cricklade Road where Dad was the caretaker. S.J. Franklin's was the bakehouse on Beechcroft Road opposite the church, one of three bakers back then in Upper Stratton. Franklin's,

Skinner's on St. Phillip's Road and Godwin's on Hyde Road, all long gone now of course.

As always it was a quick wash and brush up and down the stairs to where Dad had the bike ready at the back door. Sometimes a cuppa before I left, sometimes not.

The mode of transport was an old black vintage Hercules sit up and beg bike with cable brakes, dynamo lights and original sprung saddle.

Another miserable, dark, wet and windy morning. Then it was on with Dad's old army greatcoat and no sooner was I in the saddle the door was closed behind me, lights out and Dad was back up to his warm bed. I, on the other hand, was on my own and the race was on.

Down the path, over the car park at the front of the school, past the boiler house to the back and into the blackness of the school field to start the terrifying dash. Never looking back with the heavy coat flapping behind at least two sizes too big for my bony shoulders, I was certain every morning, someone or something would take up the chase and pounce before the Merton Fields School gates were reached. Beyond the short path past the church lay the sanctuary and warm glow of the lights over the bakehouse stable door.



Down the yard, into the back door (bike and all), get my breath back from the dash for life, coat off, apron on, up the passage and into the already hot bakery for 6.00am on the dot.

A quick greeting from the owner, "Mr" Stuart Franklin and the baker, Chris Whirl. Chris had already loaded the sacks of flour down the loft chute above into the 5 foot mixing bowl below, along with the yeast mix and water.

My first job was to get the baking tins moved from the passageway, then stack 20 upside down inside each other on the wooden bread bins next to the ovens, for later. 100 - 150 in all on a normal day - no easy feat as these tins were generations old, battered, black and bruised, so ill-fitting at best.

Once the mix was done it was covered and left for its first prove, and the

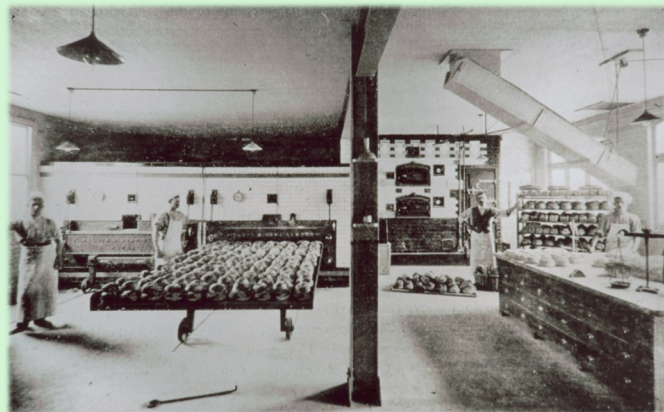
first floor-mopping of my shift was started. A never-ending job that seemed to carry on throughout my two hours shift.

Once proved, the dough was cut and lifted onto the second wooden bin next to the bump scales.

Chris Whirl and "Mr" Stuart were ready, and I had to get the dough roller, a monster of a machine, into position equidistant from them, with the dough and me at the end where I could reach the stacked loaf tins.

Then it was switched on and the main job of the morning ensued with the machine set at a pace they were happy with; and me trying to keep up amidst the roar and noise.

They each cut a 2lb lump of dough, alternately bouncing it off the mechanical bump scales with great accuracy (?) and threw them into the machine. There they were rolled to length and shape through two levels of roller and thrown out for me to grease both ends and the bottom with one hand, then into a waiting tin from the stack in my other hand.



Not Franklin's - Co-op Bakery, Kingshill 1905

Obviously, with the operation outnumbered 2 to 1 in their favour, a good morning for me was one where very few lumps of rolled dough hit the floor. These had to be recovered by me, dusted off and put in the tin before the next barrage came through! A bad morning was more than a few on

the floor and tins being spilled and crashing. This resulted in the other end stopping and tutting whilst I caught up. As the time for completion of this exercise was to meet the 7am Hooter from the GWR, it was stressful every day at my end.

Chris would then say "That's the Hooter", and "Mr" Stuart would lift the little wooden clock from the wall and correct its time by about 10 minutes. He did that every day I worked there.

Then it was last of the dough hand rolled for the small and large cobs and cottage loaves, along with the tins of sandwich and open top full loaves, already proved.

At this point, "Mr" Stuart would bid all farewell and set off home for his breakfast.

By now the delivery girls had arrived, Chrissie, Elsie & Rene to set about the mixing of the small number of Hovis and Allinson brown loaves and the white concertina bread all done in the floor standing mixer behind the stable door.

Once done, onto the mixing and rolling out of the fabled Franklin's Wiltshire Lardy cakes to be tinned up and left to prove.

The *setting in* of the stacks of tinned loaves was left for Chris and me. So, oven doors open when dough ready, then Chris would present the long handled wooden peel to my stack of tins. I would present two tins on said peel and he would present to back of oven, then work back to front until full.

When all done, yet another mop around the floors and, with luck, back on the bike and home before 8.00am to get ready for school and the hurried walk to Headlands, to be on time.

And all for 30 shillings a week, in old money. (20 shillings of which was given to my mum for 'safe keeping').

John Harper - March 2023



SPRING HEELED JACK

Spring Heeled Jack was a Victorian bogeyman. Parents would warn their children that if they did not behave themselves, Spring Heeled Jack would take them away. I don't think you could say that today, with political correctness being prevalent.

The first claimed sighting of Spring Heeled Jack was in 1837. Later, sightings of Jack came from all over the country, but were mainly in suburban London, the Midlands and Scotland. The last sighting of Jack was in Liverpool in 1904. There are many theories about the nature and identity of Jack and due to

the tales of his bizarre appearance and his ability to make extraordinary leaps, he became the subject of several works of fiction.

Spring Heeled Jack, according to the people that claimed to have seen him, had a terrifying and frightening look, with clawed hands and eyes that looked like red balls of fire. Many stories of Jack also mentioned that he could breathe out blue and red flames.

According to accounts in October 1837, Mary Stevens was walking through Clapham Common when a strange figure leapt out of a dark alley. He indecently assaulted Mary, who screamed in panic. The commotion brought several residents out of their houses and these people immediately launched a search for the aggressor, but he could not be found. Mary stated that his hands, or claws, felt as cold and clammy as a corpse. But how would she know this, if she had never been handled by a corpse? The following day, Jack was reported jumping in front of a carriage, which crashed and severely injured the coachman.

Several witnesses claim that Jack then jumped a nine-foot wall and escaped.

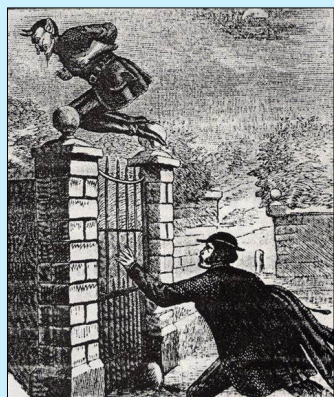
Perhaps these are the two best known attacks by Jack. One was on 19th February 1838. Jane Alsop opened the door of her father's house to someone who claimed to be a police officer and told her to bring a light as they had captured Spring Heeled Jack. She bought the person a candle and he then threw off his cloak to reveal a most horrendous and frightful sight, vomiting blue and white flames from his mouth, while his eyes resembled red balls of fire. Jane screamed and ran back to her house, where she was rescued by her sister. Her attacker then ran off.

Nine days later, eighteen-year-old Lucy Stokes and her sister were returning home to a respectable part of Limehouse in London. As the couple were passing along Green Dragon Alley, they came upon a person standing at an angle in the alleyway. This person then spurted a blue flame, which deprived Lucy of her sight for hours. She dropped to the ground and suffered severe fits that lasted for several hours. The attacker walked away and the police could not find him.

The Times reported on the attack of Jane Alsop, under the heading of "Outrage at Old Ford" The article also mentioned that immediately after the attack on Jane, Thomas Millbank boasted that he was Spring Heeled Jack when he was in the Morgan's Arms. He was arrested, but not charged as he stated he could not breathe a blue flame.

After these events, Spring Heeled Jack became one of the most popular characters of the period. His alleged assaults were reported in the newspapers and became the subject of many "penny dreadfuls" and plays performed in cheap theatres that abounded at the time. The devil's name was even changed to Spring Heeled Jack.

At the beginning of the 1870's sightings of Spring Heeled Jack were again reported. In Lincoln in 1870, it was said that angry townsfolk shot him, but he just laughed and bounded away leaping over fences and even small buildings.



In November 1872, the *News of the World* reported that Peckham in London was in a state of commotion owing to what they called, the Peckham Ghost or Spring Heeled Jack. In August 1877 a sentry at North Camp in Aldershot had his attention taken, by a peculiar figure who was approaching him. The sentry issued a challenge for the strange figure to halt but the challenge went unheeded. This strange figure drew closer to the sentry and then slapped the sentry across the face several times. Another guard fired multiple shots at the peculiar, with no effect. The army then set up elaborate traps to catch Spring Heeled Jack as he was frightening sentries on duty but despite his long career of sixty-odd years, no one was ever caught and charged with being Spring Heeled Jack.

Sceptical investigators have dismissed these stories as hysteria, or as being derived from exaggerated claims by a man who said he was chased over rooftops by the devil! They argued that stories of Spring Heeled Jack were exaggerated and altered by mass hysteria; tales of unsupported rumours, superstitions, oral traditions and sensationalist publications.

There were even reports of a similar figure being seen in Prague, he was known as Perak.

A possible suspect for Spring Heeled Jack was the Marquess of Waterford, who had suffered bad experiences from women and police officers. The Marquess was mentioned frequently in the press in the late 1830's for drunken brawling, brutal jokes and vandalism and it was said that he would do anything for a bet.

Years later, and I am sure that we have all heard of the Whitechapel murders that occurred in 1888. The culprit was never caught, but was known as Jack the Ripper. He obtained his name from a letter written by someone, claiming to be the murderer and the letter was disseminated in the media. Just a thought, why was the murderer called Jack the Ripper and not Sid or Fred the Ripper? Was the Whitechapel murderer called Jack after Spring Heeled Jack? We know that more recently, the police were misled by a hoaxer claiming to be the Yorkshire Ripper. History repeats itself and it makes you think....

Please remember, what you have just read may have all been hoaxes, so please, do not have nightmares!

David Parks - March 2022



Swindon Quiz - Just for fun!

Whereabouts is this?



Here is the sixth of Andy's mystery images - I think many will know this one, but let's see... If you think you know, give us a shout. Our contact details are:

info@theswindonsociety.co.uk



Last
Month's
Answer

Last month Andy asked us - where is Edith Stevens House? Well, Liz and Nick were correct as it is located at 77 Bridge Street.

And last month's answer to Diane's teaser from last month was indeed the Richard Jefferies Museum. If you looked closely you could see the M&S sign from the garage on the other side of the duel carriageway.



North Wilts Motor Cycle Club Reliability Trial
25th March 1921 (location not noted)



This photo is not named in our archive. Looks like the Wootton Bassett Road railway bridge, now demolished. Date unknown

