

## **THE SWINDON SOCIETY**

### **NEWSLETTER**

**May 2012**

#### **Report of Meeting**

##### **Wednesday 11th April 2012.**

It was a fine evening for our April meeting, but it had been a wet day, the first moderate rain for some time, so the gardeners were pleased.

Kevin opened the meeting and welcomed us reminding us that the next meeting in May is our Annual General Meeting and inviting nominations to serve on the Committee. He then welcomed Gordon Shaw, and David Lewis from Rodbourne Community Local History Group, to give the talk entitled 'The Quiet Engineer' to explain "why Guppy Street?"

Rodbourne History Group was formed from a project called Rodbourne Living History Project in 2003 sponsored by the National Monuments Record Commission, whose headquarters were in the nearby heritage centre in the ex. railway works. First they encouraged Rodbourne residents to record their memories and transferred photographs to a database, then to look at the past history of the district from the farms to the residential area it is now. The group then became self supporting and produced two books of the area. When researching the names of the streets the name Guppy was vague as was Jennings, on early plans the two names were switched, Guppy was the longest street and Jennings was the smaller one. Most of the street names were Christian and surnames of local developers, but Guppy as far as we knew was just a small tropical fish, it soon transpired that Thomas Richard Guppy was a very 'big fish', he and his wife Sarah, formerly Jennings (hence Jennings Street) were close friends of Isambard Kingdom Brunel no less.

Thomas was the son of Samuel and Sarah Beach (pronounced Bash) a Bristol Merchant they were shipping merchants in the days of wooden sailing ships, Sarah was a remarkable woman and besides having four children including 'our' Thomas, she was a very intelligent woman, and discovered that to cover the hull of the ships with thin copper, prevented barnacles sticking and considerably increased the life of the ship. It seems her daughter-in-law, Sarah Jennings was also a very inventive lady and was involved with Brunel's design for Clifton Suspension Bridge. "Behind every great man, there is a woman," goes the old adage, apparently not always his wife. The family was deeply involved with many business projects, including the Avery family business famous for scales and weighing equipment, and the development of the Floating Harbour and the Cumberland Basin when the river was diverted to improve traffic flow and docking at Bristol.

By 1832 trade was poor, roads were bad and Brunel was about to embark on building a railway network, Thomas Guppy invested £14,000 in the Great Western Railway which was formed in 1833. In 1838 Maidenhead Bridge was opened and ever the showman Brunel invited Thomas Guppy to drive the first train across, he did, at 30 m.p.h. which was exceedingly faster than planned.

When Northlaines Farm land was sold, it was bought by Thomas Guppy, he was also the one who stood by I.K.B when most shareholders were against his railway project. My personal feeling about this is that he miscalculated where that proverbial sandwich would fall, and it fell the other side of Rodbourne Lane where Brunel and Dan Gooch chose to build the Railway Works, even so he was able to re-sell the land in several lots at a huge profit. In 1846 the Great Britain ran aground, Henry Maudsley, a main supporter of the shipbuilding venture, had pulled out, and his wife Sarah Guppy died so he decided to go to Naples to recuperate, he never returned to this country but continued to prosper in business for several more years.

#### **Swindon People on the Titanic**

The recent Centenary of the sinking of the Titanic was most interesting if a little overdone, attracting more news coverage than the original event.

There is an interesting account on our Swindon Society website of Swindon people who were aboard the vessel by Kevin Bizley. Our website is on [www.theswindonsociety.co.uk](http://www.theswindonsociety.co.uk). Kevin would like to trace any descendants of this family, their name was Benjamin and Ellen Howard and they

lived in Cheltenham Street at No 84 and 85. If you are able to access the website there is a very detailed record of the family's history. They had three sons two of whom emigrated to America, the parents were on their way to visit them on the fateful voyage....their daughter Ethel married someone named Small or Smith. Other names mentioned are Arman and Schofield...if you know of any possible connections in your family history studies, please let Kevin know.

**Joyce Murgatroyd**, our oldest member has broadcast on Radio Wiltshire with Mark O'Donnell, telling of her life in Rodbourne Cheney. He was asking if she had published any of her local poems and memories, she said she hadn't, she was happy to share her memories, but didn't want to appear a 'know all', a sentiment I would share with her. You will see in our new programme that Joyce will be talking to us at our September meeting, in the form of a conversation. We look forward to hearing her.

### **Martin Vandervelde Achieves his goal.**

A reception was held at the Prospect Hospice, Wroughton where our Martin was able to present the cheque to fulfil his promise to raise £100,000 made 24 years ago, he actually raised £102,000 in sponsorships for cycling extensively in Britain from Lands End to John O'Groats, France, Spain the Czech Republic and the Canary Islands.

### **Annual General Meeting**

Wednesday 9th May 2012.

No nominations have been received for candidates for the committee, but they can be made at any time before or during the A.G.M. All the present committee are willing to continue to serve another year, with the exception of Debra Edmunds who resigned early this year as she had been unable to attend meetings due to pressure of other work. Paul Williams wishes to remain a committee member if elected but to stand down as vice- chairman.

Neil Lover has just tendered his resignation, as his work is taking him away from town a lot and he is unable to attend many of our meetings, we hope he will still be a member and visit us as often as he can.

The Society has achieved our record membership in the past year, and held many exhibitions and events, forming valuable links with other local history groups, the library and museums, and look forward to being able to continue to do so with support from you all...

### **Polo Shirts.**

We have arranged to obtain polo shirts bearing the Swindon coat of arms and our Society logo from Michael's Workwear at around £10.00 each. The committee has purchased them to wear when representing the society at events or meetings. Members are welcome to purchase their own, details available and samples will be on view (worn) at this meeting.

### **40th Anniversary Celebration.**

Southbrook Inn, Southbrook Street, Swindon.

on Sunday 16th September 2012.

12noon till 4.30pm.

Buffet Lunch available, with guest speakers.

Members £3.00.sponsored by Society.

### **Numbers to be booked by Sat 27th August Please.**

Our June evening outing will be to Inigo House, Highworth on Wednesday 6th June which is the **first** Wednesday in June at **7.00pm**. Numbers are limited, Diane reports that the list is already full, but we may get cancellations, so it is worth enquiring, from Diane Everett, her telephone number is on the back of this Newsletter.

### **Swindon Museum and Art Gallery**

Dear Swindon Society Members,

We have recently received some Heritage Lottery Funding to pay for some development work here at Swindon Museum & Art Gallery. As part of this project we will be developing a local history outreach box to be loaned to schools. I plan for this to include both material from local archives (e.g. maps and census records) and objects from the Museum collection. The box will be interactive and I would like to give pupils a broad idea of how Swindon has changed since the Victorian period whilst focussing in on the lives of people who have lived in the town over the last century.

I am looking for a volunteer with an interest in local history to help me with research for the resources. This would involve some work at the library locating archive materials and possibly some work with the Museum collections. If you're interested please email me your name and contact details and I will be in touch.

Zoe Dennington Telephone 01793 466560

### **Library News**

#### **Dates for Archivist visits.**

An Archivist from the record office will be at the Reference Library in the Central Library Regent Circus 10am till 12 noon to give advice to researchers on Mondays, dates as follows:-

21st May

25th June .

If you have special research or require a particular document a telephone call to the Library would ensure whether it is available when you visit.

Telephone. (01793) 463238 which is the number for both the lending and the reference library.

Also on these dates, the Archivist will be giving talks on research, as follows :-

#### **Archivists Research Talks.**

21st May Wiltshire Militia and Yeomanry - Robert Pearson.

**All talks at 1.00 pm. On these dates. unless stated**

Tickets £2.50 or £1.50 for Library members. Available from the Swindon Collection Help Point on the Second Floor of the Central Library, or ring 01793 463838 from 2 weeks before.

### **Friends of Swindon Railway Museum**

No further dates are available yet, as soon as further details become available I will let you know here..

### **Friends of Radnor Street Cemetery.**

#### **Spring Walks.**

Sadly ALL these events have been cancelled owing to insurance cover required and proving difficult to obtain, there is a possibility that the event in the chapel on 19th May could take place. **See below...**

**Last minute information- No meeting has taken place yet to resolve this problem.**

### **Purton Historical Society.**

Please note, meeting dates vary from month to month.

Meet monthly **back at St Mary's Primary School, Purton** at 7.30pm.

2012

Thursday May 17th God for Harry England and St George,  
Martin Way.

" September 20th A Treasure Chest of Words and Sayings.  
Lynda Warren.

No details of cost was included, Ring Mrs. Eve Booy for more details on 01793 770755

### **Royal Wootton Bassett Historical Society.**

'Looking forward to the Past'

Visitors are most welcome, (£2.00); refreshments served before our main event which begins at 7.30. Do come along and join us in an entertaining and informative evening.- Vivien Sumner.  
Thursdays 7.30 pm. Civic Centre, Station Road, Wootton Bassett. First Floor, upstairs.

Visitors always welcome : £2.00

Further Information from Vivien Sumner 01666 511195

**2012**

Thursday 10th May      Castles I      Bob Clarke.  
"      14th June      Castles II      Bob Clarke.

**Rodbourne Community History Group**

Meets monthly at 7pm at Even Swindon Community Centre, Jennings Street on the last Wednesday of the month. Admission Members £1 Guests £2 (including refreshment).

2012.

Wednesday 30th May      ?  
"      27th June      ?  
"      25th July      A History of Canals, Martin Buckland.

**Highworth History Society**

All lecture meetings are held in the Community Room, Highworth Town Council Offices, Gilberts Lane just off the High Street, unless otherwise stated.

Meetings are held at 7.30pm on the last Monday of the month. Membership £10.00 (Renewable in September each year) Visitors £3.00

**2012**

Monday 30th April      Village Country Ways, Customs and traditions of 18th and 19th Centuries,  
"      Chris Viveash, Accompanied by a "country maid".  
"

**Chiseldon Local History Group**

Meet at at Holy Cross Church Room, Butts Road, Chiseldon.

at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated.

Visitors Welcome. small charge.

**2012**

February

Wednesday 16th May      Silbury Hill and the Marlborough Mound - Jim Leary  
"      20th June      A Load of Cobblers (a family history) - Mary Bedells  
"      18th July      Chiseldon, Street by Street - Elaine      and Sheila

Chiseldon Museum, The Old Chapel, Butts Road, is open from 11am to 3pm on the first and third Saturday each month from April to October.

**Programme 2011-2012**

**2012**

May

Wednesday 9th A.G.M. and presentation on Early Olympics. Bob Townsend.

June

**Wednesday 6th**      Evening Outing will be to **Inigo House, Highworth.**

## **Preview of Programme 2012 -2013**

### **2012**

September

Wednesday 12th An evening with Joyce Murgatroyd.

October

Wednesday 10th Swindon Borough Council Heritage,  
Peter Garitsis & Liz Gibbons.

November

Wednesday 14th The Trench Man

December

Wednesday 12th Christmas Party

### **2013**

January

Wednesday 9th

February

Wednesday 13th We have speakers outlined for these dates, awaiting confirmation.

March

Wednesday 13th

April

Wednesday 11th

May

Wednesday 9th AGM

June

Wednesday 13th Evening outing or visit.

All meetings begin at 7.30 on the second Wednesday of the month from September through to May.

We meet at Broadgreen Centre, Salisbury Street, Swindon.