

The Swindon Society Newsletter.
February 2012

Wednesday 11th January 2012

It was a mild dry night for the first meeting of the New Year, and we had a very good attendance to hear Mark and Frances give their talk on Swindon's sons and daughters who fought in the First World War, which included some who survived and also served in World War 2.

Mark gave his part of the presentation first, he told of the men who served, including ARP wardens, AFS firemen and LDV and later called the Home Guard or Dad's Army, all under the collective name of Civil Defence. (I will give a full list of these wartime abbreviations at the end, for those of you who are still too young to know). Some of the men who helped establish these home defence units were veterans of World War 1 which ended 21 years before. So many perished in that conflict that the expertise of the few that survived in reasonable health was highly valued.

In World War 1 there was no conscription, all able bodied men were urged to volunteer and pressure to do so was very strong and men who didn't were often presented with a white feather, the symbol of cowardice. Men who volunteered, but were physically unfit to serve, were given an arm band to wear to show they had registered and been excused. Some very keen lads put their age on to join up, Mark spoke of one young man who had put his age on to join up and was killed before he was 18. Almost every man from all walks of life from the mayor, locomotive manager, teachers, and farmers left their homes and families and marched off.

Many photographs were taken of men in uniform individually or in groups. In some of the groups the men were smoking which was actually encouraged in both wars.

Mark remarked on the lack of names written on the photo's something historians find very regrettable. We are forever urging people to write dates and names, (and often we have not even done it ourselves!).

Wiltshire produced several proud, loyal regiments including Royal Engineers and Royal Wilts Yeomanry, the Horse Artillery was stationed at Prospect Drill Hall, they served in several war zones, building a bridge in Belgium in 104 hours believed to be still in use and maintaining a medical unit where conscientious objectors served in a non-combatant role.

Many Belgian refugees came to Britain, 30 families were here in Swindon for several years. In Bulgaria there is a hill called Swindon Hill to commemorate their stay there in 1917-18, Mark pointed it out on a map for us. Local men also served in the Royal Navy and the Royal Flying Corp.

Frances Bevan told us of the Swindon Women who served in the services or maintaining support on the home front. Those who actually served in the regular forces were mostly in medical roles or as cooks or clerks and later as drivers, they were resented at first, causing problems with dress and toilet facilities.

Women at home had a hard time, working in men's jobs, as bus drivers and conductors, in war factories also bringing up large families single handed while waiting for news from the front line and the dreaded telegram 'missing presumed killed'. They were warned that when the men came back they would lose their jobs as the men would be re-employed.

Sadly, so many never returned that women gained a place in industry and began to get away from the kitchen sink. Food parcels and comforts for the troops were organised too. My mum was only ten years old, but she was taught to knit 'socks for soldiers'. Food was very short but I don't think it was rationed as it was in World War 2. Margarine was a very crude replacement for butter. Frances mentioned several local ladies who were prominent in organising these services, Mary Slade is to have a street named after her, see the item on 'Street Names'.

The war left a population in depleted health, and during the early 1920s there was a Spanish Flu epidemic causing many more deaths from pneumonia, TB was also endemic through the 20s and 30s, Fresh air was the best treatment to be offered, well off people sent their patients to Sanatoria in Austria or Switzerland, less

well off families built a sturdy shed in the garden for their patient to sleep in.

The war widows received a meagre pension, which they lost if they remarried, so they took in 'lodgers'. With such a shortage of young men there were many unmarried women for many years. Our old photographs of crowd scenes show many more women than men in the 1920s.

The First World War left a legacy of so many harrowing stories, only recently being gleaned from records, The veterans who survived found their experiences too painful to relate but those of us old enough to have had grandparents who passed on their memories, told of old men who returned, sitting alone with their thoughts but never telling.....

With the deaths of the remaining veterans, in recent years, the repatriations through Royal Wootton Bassett and family history there seems to be a revival of interest in memorial services and wartime battles.

A.R.P. Air Raid Precautions.
A.F.S. Auxiliary Fire Service
L.D.V. Local Defence Volunteers
M.A.P. Ministry of Aircraft Production.
W.V.S. Womens Voluntary Service
later W.R.V.S. Womens Royal Voluntary Service.

Street Names.

Mary Slade is commemorated as Slade Street in the names chosen for streets of Nightingale Rise, the site off Moredon Road where Beaney View is to be, which I told you of in the December Newsletter. Another name chosen was Emily Hull, a local suffragette; Hull Road will bear her name. Frances Bevan has researched both these ladies and has given me this report of their achievements.

Mary Slade.

Mary headed the Swindon Committee for the Provision of Comforts for the Wiltshire Regiment formed in 1915 and worked with a team of women volunteers based at the Town Hall. The team co-ordinated supplies and materials with the support of local shopkeepers, schools and hard pressed Swindon families to send life saving parcels to Swindon servicemen in German prisoner of war camps. The women's work did not end with the armistice on November 11th 1918, Mary continued to fund raise for these families through to the end of the Second World War.

On July 25th 1919, Mary Slade and her assistant Kate Handley represented the Swindon Prisoners of War Committee at a Buckingham Palace Garden Party and in 1920 Mary was awarded the MBE. On July 25, 1919.

Emma Hull was a Swindon Suffragette, the daughter of George Richman Alley and his wife Emma from Carfax/Merton Streets. Emma moved away from Swindon when she married but returned later in life. Here's a little bit about her from my Radnor Street talks (her parents are buried there.)

'Emma was a member of the Women's Freedom League founded by Charlotte Despard and Teresa Billington-Grieg. Following her husband's death in 1947 Emma returned to live in Swindon. Then in her 80s she became a member of the Swindon Business and Professional Women's Club and was active in many other organisations in the town, including the Richard Jefferies Society and the WEA.

In 1954 Emma gave a talk to the Women's Club about her involvement with the suffrage campaign. She was said to have worn a badge carrying an engraving of Holloway prison

pinned to her dress. Other suffragette souvenirs she had were a cocoa mug and a salt pot smuggled out of Holloway and a Votes for Women banner.'

Our Member - Mr Shiny Shoes
also known as Fred Ferris.

On Thursday 12th January, Fred, our Swindon Town Crier, was close to tears when he was presented with a Loyal Company of Town Criers Badge of Honour by the Secretary John Robinson, only six of these badges have been presented in 20 years. He wears a replica of a Great Western senior stationmaster's ceremonial uniform in green black and gold, the colours of the GWR locomotives and is meticulous in his preparation, he doesn't just clean his shoes he polishes them to a high shine, earning the nickname Mr. Shiny Shoes.

This honour comes after two and a half difficult years and eleven operations for cancer in his right hip, which we reported in this newsletter, which hampered him marching in parades, but didn't stop him shouting. John Robinson said "There are too many words to be said about Fred, but he is a true gentleman".

Award of a grant for The Swindon Society , Andy Binks

In the summer of 2011, the scanner Bob Townsend has used, for about 2 million image and slide scans was admitted to the electrical equipment hospital, with what appeared a terminal condition. Bob was so upset, as he had single handedly put the Swindon Society into the digital age and feared we would not be able to continue the great service we offer to many people. I could see this was causing the old kid a bit of grief and thought "how can we help to put Mr T. out of his misery".

I mentioned this to a few people, stating that a new one would cost over £700 to acquire. My little sister, Julie, said why not apply for a grant, and got me the forms to fill. She quickly realised that instead of telling me/us what to do, the easy option would be apply herself. This may sound easy, but to get given a lump sum, a good deal of spadework is required. This she did single handed and got backing from a few notable sources, including the leader of SBC council, who had spoken to us quite recently and was impressed with the work we do.

Eventually the "Grass roots" grant was given the green light and a cheque for £1000 was given to the Society in mid December. A fine and much welcome Christmas present indeed. Your Committee decided that a new scanner was much needed to continue with our missions, and discussed other tools that would assist us. Lightweight portable display boards, portable speaker/amp with microphone, and a projector were among the items on our wish list. Bob and I have been on a few shopping trips and also decided not to go down the internet buying route and do some good old fashioned local shopping. We have not as yet got the new toys, but would really like to thank the "grass roots" grant folk for their generosity. But without the driving force of one Julie Allen, we would be holding raffles a plenty and begging from each and every one of you for money.

Thank you Julie, your efforts are appreciated by all at the Swindon Society

During the January meeting Julie was presented with flowers in appreciation of her efforts to obtain the Grass Roots grant.

Date for your Leap Year Diary:-

Wednesday 14th March. Members! Bring a Friend Free, to "A Herbert Around Town" by Andy Binks.

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:-

Monday Programme not available at the moment.

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,

Archivists Research Talks.

I don't have details of the Monday talks, this year's future details in next Newsletter.

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

Tickets £2.00 or £1.50 concessions, Available from the Swindon Collection Help Point on the Second Floor of the Central Library, or ring 01793 463838 from 2 weeks before.

Watch out for an evening talk in the New Year by Frances Bevan and Mark Sutton, Friends of Radnor Street Cemetery. Date to be arranged.

Friends of Swindon Railway Museum

The dates of future meetings have been arranged, but only two of the speakers have been confirmed so far.

Monday meetings will commence at 7.15pm Saturday meetings at 2.30pm.

2012

18th February South Africa David Walker.

Monday 19th March Annual General Meeting

As soon as further details become available I will let you know here.

Meet at the Steam Museum, Kemble Drive, Swindon.

If you would like to attend these meetings, take your Swindon Society Membership card with you.

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 February 23rd Mabel- Victorian Governess.

March 15th A.G.M. Another look at the Titanic,
Paul Booy.

Thursday April 19th The Early History of Wiltshire Constabulary,
Inspector Steve Bridge.

" May 17th God for Harry England and St George,

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

" 9th February The Quiet Engineer, Thomas Richard Guppy, Gordon Shaw.

" 8th March Living in the Shadow of a Shadow Factory, Bob Browning.

" 12th April Glimmer in the Dark Part III, Martin Way.

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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 29th February The History of the Co-op Movement in Rochdale, Alan Kirton.

" 28th March The Cold War in Wiltshire, Bob Clarke.

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 27th February Fromelles, The finding, naming and burial of Australian soldiers in Northern France, Kate Brady and Helen Webb, Oxford Archaeology Dept.

" 26th March Kelmscot and the Arts and Crafts Movement. David Walton.

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

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Swindon Society Programme 2012

February

Wednesday 8th A Wiltshire Journey, Neil Lover.

March

Wednesday 14th A Herbert about Town, Andy Binks.
Members ! Bring a Friend Free to this Meeting

April

Wednesday 11th Why Guppy Street? Gordon Shaw.

May

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

June

Wednesday 13th Evening Outing. To be arranged. 2011

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.