

Good Evening

Thank you to Jan Flanagan for her talk on The Wilts and Berks Canal. I am sure that you enjoyed hearing about the work that they are doing to restore the canal and keep it alive. I found the stories interesting regarding the people who lived and worked on the canal. It was intriguing to hear about the boat that this is still in the canal. I wonder if we can get Time Team to come and investigate further!

Tonight Andy Binks is giving a talk on "An Album of Camp Photographs" – I wonder what gems he will have to share with us. No doubt it will be both interesting and informative as always.

Next month we have our Annual General Meeting and also an Evening of Views from the Archives. There is a vacancy on the Committee (please see article in the newsletter if you are interested in joining the Committee).

Bob Townsend is getting the 2014-15 programme prepared and there are still some spaces for speakers. If anybody has a programme subject they would like to hear about or know a speaker who could give a talk please contact Bob.

Look forward to seeing you all again next month.

Nicola Shackell April 2014

Deadline for the next newsletter 19<sup>th</sup> April 2014

Many thanks to The Property Shop, for their sponsorship of the printing of the Newsletter.

### **Meeting Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

We woke to a foggy morning, but it cleared by lunchtime to give one of the first dry days this year (remember an old gardeners' saying "Fog in March, Frost in May", so watch out around 12<sup>th</sup> May.

Andy told us that Joyce Murgatroyd (our oldest member) had returned home the day before after her stay in hospital and was feeling much better and hoped to be back with us next month. We wish her well.

Paul welcomed us all in Kevin's absence especially the visitors and gave the statutory fire precautions with Perry giving us his usual twirl in his yellow tabard. He then handed over to Jan who as one of our members really did not need much introduction to us.

### **Wilts and Berks Canal Trust – Jan Flanagan**

The Trust is holding an exhibition about the history of the Canal and Coate Water to celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, at the Holiday Inn on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> April.

It became clear at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that better transport routes were needed to serve industry which tended to flourish in South Wales and the north near the source of the raw materials.

At this time turnpike roads were poor and unsuitable for heavy goods such as coal and stone, where navigable rivers existed these waterways were used. By 1795 negotiations were underway to obtain land along the proposed route, find water sources and cope with undulating levels by building locks and tunnels. On 10<sup>th</sup> September 1810 the canal was opened at Abingdon, and in 1811 the total cost of the completed work was given as £255,262 10s 9 1/2d. This sum with negotiation may just about purchase a four bedroomed Victorian terrace house in Old Town, now on the market at £275,000. The coming of the railway in 1841 began the eventual demise of the canal system ironically because the transport of coal from Somerset mines fed the furnaces of the railway works and powered the very locomotives which took over the canal trade.

The collapse of the Stanley Aqueduct near Calne in 1901 meant the end of any through traffic and the last vessel to pass through Swindon in 1906 was called "The Dragonfly", which has become the badge of the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust.

Jan comes from Melksham and her interest in the Wilts and Berks Canal must have started from her childhood, I know she has spent many hours in libraries and record offices over the years researching the building of it, the purchase of land and the farms through which it passed, leading on to the mills, springs and water sources, the brickworks which sprung up to provide bricks for building wharves, buildings and locks along its route, leading on to the canal families who lived on and alongside it in the lock cottages manning the barges and locks. There are still descendants of canal families in Swindon. The Pope family of 11 children lived at No 1 Lock Cottage on the North Wilts canal, Eric has passed his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday now. Life on the canal was hard, the families were large and we heard of many deaths during childbirth and drowning accidents to young children.

It is still possible to walk along the route of the Wilts and Berks Canal through the town from east to west although many of the buildings and relics have gone and any remaining are disappearing bit by bit. We still have pictures in our collection, some of which were shown, of cottages occupied by canal families, premises in Westcott Place called the Kipper Loft which was used as a mission hall for canal folk and the Falcon Inn (now gone) with an entrance at the back from the towpath for easy access. Water to top up the locks was a problem from the start, but when the North Wilts branch was opened in 1814 the situation worsened and the solution was to form a reservoir and a feeder channel, Coate Water was formed and dammed, to store water from rivers and streams to be released into a channel to feed the canal below it.

Swindon Borough Council took over the land in 1914 a few days before the First World War started, it was drained along most of its route through the town and became derelict and neglected, it wasn't until after the Second World War that it was developed into a shopping precinct and "bus routes". There are plans to restore the Wilts and Berks Canal through the centre of the town, not along its original route but a short distance to the north. Sections have already been restored to the west of the town, also to the north along a route of the North Wilts Canal at Moredon. A replica waterway has been formed at Wichelstowe similar to the section resembling the cottages that were still there until the 1960s.

Instead of a busy transport route of two centuries ago the vision is for water buses, leisure gardens with seats, open air cafes etc ...

Encourage your grandchildren to look forward. My Grandmother who had memories of the original canal wouldn't have believed plans for the Murray John Tower.  
While verifying dates and information for this report, I found this Epilogue to the canal:

The old canal, from bank to bank,  
Is filled with reeds and rushes rank;  
And down this lane of living green  
March memories of what has been.

The painted barges came from town,  
And busy life flowed up and down,  
But there is nothing left to show  
Where those old barges used to go.

Progress is always marching on,  
The old canal is dead and gone,  
But still we seem to hear it say,  
"I too was progress – yesterday".  
Reginald Arkell

Jean Allen March 2014

Visit the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust website if you would like more information about the Trust and what they do [www.wbct.org.uk](http://www.wbct.org.uk).

Dragon Fly boat trips start from 12<sup>th</sup> April 2014 from 10.30 am to 3.00 pm. They operate from Kingshill and cost is £5.00 for adults, children are free.  
For more information contact [boats@wbct.org.uk](mailto:boats@wbct.org.uk).

### SCOUT LEADERS' EVENING 11<sup>th</sup> March 2014

Milton Road was the venue to have a social evening of local images on my laptop, and a chat about them. These folks do so much good in our town, and we should be proud of them. All I did was turn up, set up my kit and show a few photographs and the rest as they say was easy. We had so much fun as I pressed a few buttons, and learnt so much more about Swindon in that hour and a half than I had done in ages. I could hardly get a word in, as the images flashed up, without learning more and more.

Some would say that events like this are hard work. Yes you do have to put yourself out on a cold dark night, but once there, they are very rewarding indeed. These good folk are the salt of the earth, and without them the fabric of society as we know it would be lost. If you would like to join me when I next venture out on such a mission, please do ask. If this evening is anything to go by you would not be disappointed.

I am humbled by the dedication of these people, and soon they will have their big event, The Gang Show and I wish them every success.

This was a 9 out of 10 night.

Andy Binks March 2014

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

On 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014 the Swindon Society will be holding its Annual General Meeting. We have a vacancy on the Committee and would like this to be filled. If you are interested in joining the Committee please talk to one of the Committee members at the meeting or contact them (telephone numbers are shown on the back of the newsletter). It is not onerous task, we have one committee meeting a month and help out at events and presentations as and when they happen.

## GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN FRIDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2014 7.30 PM

Andy Binks is giving a talk at the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery, Bath Road, Swindon. He will be showing a selection of photographs of Swindon's past from the archives of the Swindon Society.

It will be an opportunity to see Swindon as it was and delve into the stories and history of Swindon's adolescence.

Ticket prices £4.50, Friends of SM&AG £3.50

To book contact the Swindon Museum on 01793 466556 or email [nwestern@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:nwestern@swindon.gov.uk).

Opening hours are Wednesday to Saturday 11.00 am to 3.00 pm.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

April

- 5<sup>th</sup> **Chiseldon Museum** opens for their 2014 season
- 5<sup>th</sup> **Friends of Steam Railway Museum – 2.00 pm**  
Titans of the Tracks – Dr George Hargreaves, Railway Historian
- 10<sup>th</sup> **Wiltshire Family History Society – 7.30 pm**  
In Shadow and Fear of the Workhouse – Richard Giles
- 16<sup>th</sup> **Central Library – 1.00 pm to 4.00 pm**  
Drop in session by Wiltshire Family History Society
- 16<sup>th</sup> **Chiseldon Local History Group – 7.30 pm**  
The Life and Times of William Hooper and his Photographs of Chiseldon – Paul Williams
- 24<sup>th</sup> **Purton Historical Society – 7.30 pm**  
The History of the Wiltshire Constabulary – Steve Bridge
- 24<sup>th</sup> **Wiltshire Family History Society – 7.30 pm**  
AGM and Members' Evening
- 25<sup>th</sup> **Swindon Museum and Art Gallery – 7.30 pm**  
Gone but not Forgotten – Andy Binks

- 28<sup>th</sup> **Central Library – Archivist Talk - 1.00 pm**  
Swindon before the Railway – Steve Hobbs
- 28<sup>th</sup> **Highworth Historical Society – 7.30 pm**  
Memories of an Evacuee – Martin Vandervelde
- 30<sup>th</sup> **Rodbourne History Group – 7.00 pm**  
Bomber Harris – Peter Donovan
- May
- 8<sup>th</sup> **Historical Society of Royal Wootton Bassett – 7.30 pm**  
God for Harry, England and St George – Martin Way
- 8<sup>th</sup> **Wiltshire Family History Society – 7.30 pm**  
Finding a Missing Person – Records of Adoption – Claire Skinner
- 15<sup>th</sup> **Fairford History Society – 7.30 pm**  
Swinedown to Swindon: a town on a hill – Robert Townsend
- 15<sup>th</sup> **Purton Historical Society – 7.30 pm**  
Lights for Learning – Roger Mugridge
- 16<sup>th</sup> **Friends of Steam Railway Museum – 7.15 pm**  
The Harry R Roberts Memorial Lecture
- 21<sup>st</sup> **Central Library – 1.00 pm to 4.00 pm**  
Drop in session by Wiltshire Family History Society
- 21<sup>st</sup> **Chiseldon Local History Group – 7.30 pm**  
Avebury between the monuments – Dr Nick Smashall
- 22<sup>nd</sup> **Wiltshire Family History Society – 7.30 pm**  
The Fair Sex – Women and the GWR
- 28<sup>th</sup> **Rodbourne History Group – 7.00 pm**  
Industrial Archaeology in your Garage, Shed or Attic – Bill King

### **CHANGES IN OPENING TIMES LOCAL STUDIES CENTRAL LIBRARY SWINDON**

Monday to Wednesday 10.00 am to 4.00 pm  
Thursday and Friday by appointment only  
Saturday 10.00 am to 1.30 pm

### **LOCAL EVENTS – if you fancy getting out and about**

#### **29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> April 2014 – Secret Salisbury Cathedral**

Salisbury Cathedral is giving extended behind the scene tours of the Cathedral from 10.00 am to 4.30 pm. You need to pre book; tickets are £14.00 per person. Call 01722 555120  
Email Hannah Paye at [groups@salcath.co.uk](mailto:groups@salcath.co.uk).

#### **9<sup>th</sup> May 2014 – Old Woods, New Woods – 6.00 pm to 8.00 pm**

Discover and explore two of Swindon's lesser known woods. This two mile evening stroll will take you around an ancient bluebell wood and then as a comparison one in its infancy. Please wear stout footwear. Meet at Croft Sports Centre car park. Book in advance on 01793 490150 or [swindonrangers@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:swindonrangers@swindon.gov.uk).

### **11<sup>th</sup> May 2014 – Up on the Hill – 11.30 am to 3.00 pm**

A look around the many parks clustered around the hill in Old Town, history and beauty, all linked with green routes which connect them. Return to the Town Gardens in time to catch the Big Brunch Band to end the day with some music. Please wear stout footwear, bring a drink and a snack. Meet at Old Town Gardens Bandstand. Book in advance on 01793 490150 or [swindonrangers@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:swindonrangers@swindon.gov.uk).

## **Programme 2013 -2014**

### **2014**

April 9 <sup>th</sup>	An Album of Camp Photographs – Andy Binks
May 14 <sup>th</sup>	AGM plus an Evening of Views from the Archives
June 11 <sup>th</sup>	Evening outing or visit. To Be Arranged

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.

## **SAM ALLEN SWINDON TOWN'S SECRETARY MANAGER**

The Society has been approached by Dick Mattick regarding the restoration of the grave of Sam Allen in Radnor Street Cemetery.

Sam's involvement with Swindon began after employment opportunities in the railway saw him move from West Bromwich to Swindon but it was with the "Railway Men" as Swindon Town was then nicknamed rather than on the Railways that Sam was to find his life's work.

Beginning as a Committee member in the Club's amateur days to being a director and then Secretary Manager. During his period in charge Swindon twice reached the FA Cup semi-final (they are still the last club to do so while outside the League) and twice won the Southern League. He also served on the management Committee of the Southern League and was recognised by the Football League with a Long Service Award in 1941. Although he finished running the playing side of the club he remained as the Secretary dealing with administrative matters until his death on New Year's Day in 1946. His house was for many years the club's registered office. Although the War Office had commandeered the County Ground Sam continued to walk down the hill from Old Town to check things were being properly treated and it may well be that doing this in all weathers brought on the illness that killed him.

If you would like to donate then donations should be made by cheque payable to The Sam Allen Appeal and sent to The Sam Allen Appeal c/o 12 Coate, Marlborough Road, Swindon, SN3 6AA.

Any monies left over will go towards a plaque to commemorate the Swindon Town players who died in the First World War.

