

THE SWINDON SOCIETY

Newsletter

Meeting Wednesday 14th November 2012

A Soldiers Life in World War 1 Trenches - Steve Williams.

We are now getting some frosty nights, supermarkets are displaying stacks of de-icer, and the winter weight duvet has been brought out of the attic and the summer one has gone there to hibernate till late spring...while you are in the attic, please see Andy's request in his Christmas message on p.2.

We arrived to find a 'trench' set out in the hall and Steve fully dressed in uniform of a world war one soldier, those who arrived early had enjoyed extra entertainment by watching the scenery set up and the uniform being donned.

Kevin welcomed an audience of over 70, many were visitors, after the fire instruction, he mentioned that the maps offered last month had not been of sufficient interest to pursue the matter.

We were asked to enter names on a list to attend the Christmas party

He then introduced Steve Williams, who described himself as a 'story teller' he has given talks to about 22,000 people including schools, often where the curriculum included history of the World War 1 period.

In the first decade of the 20th Century there was much political unrest in Europe, and when Archduke Ferdinand was killed, Germany mobilised its very large army and began invading its neighbours. Britain had a strong Territorial army which was quickly recruited to active service and Lord Kitchener's famous poster 'Your Country needs YOU' was to call 100,000 more men to join up. There was no conscription, but such was public feeling that men from all walks of life marched off leaving their families. There was an age limit, but the youngest to die was only 14 and the oldest 58, so it was clear that men had been recruited well outside of the limits, due perhaps to the fact that recruiting sergeants were paid a premium for every recruit so didn't question age, health or size very much. The trench was deep, lined with boards and topped with sandbags, the bottom was waterlogged leading to trench foot, (foot rot) so slatted boards were used to walk on . The men were

expected to stay in these conditions seven days, fully dressed, with benches to sleep on, and basic rations. Toilet facilities were almost non-existent - 2 buckets for 100 men! Periscopes were used to see the enemy lines, to look over the top would have been fatal, for snipers on both sides were on constant watch.. Weapons were rifles, a Lewis machine gun, grenades, some made from food tins packed with gunpowder from bullets, hand weapons, bayonets clubs, shovels and knives. Uniform was heavy khaki serge, with heavy boots, tin helmet, putties to support legs and use as bandages if required.. Kit included a spoon scraper to remove the heavy mud from boots, a 2 pint water bottle, and tins of 'bully beef' - corned beef. The trenches became infested with rats, but the German trenches were plagued by red ants due to an ingredient in their uniform which attracted them..Steve's talk was very informative and interesting, and he managed to bring a touch of humour into some of the gruesome details to lighten a serious subject.

Red poppies are the symbols of war and battles, bloodshed,death and remembrance, due to the poppies which grew in abundance around the trenches in the battlefields. Poppy seed survives in deep subsoil for very long periods, so when excavated and brought to the surface it germinates and blooms, as the embankments of the motorways did within our living memory.

I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous new year. And please do not forget to check out that shoebox of old photos in the loft, when you get the trimmings and lights out, for their annual outing.

Andy Binks, and (of course) Herbert

Monday 18th March Australia Part 2: Edward Stansfield .

Saturday 13th April Great Central, Part 2: Chris Youett.

Details of May meeting will be advised in due course.

All meetings will take place in the Daniel Gooch Lecture Theatre at Steam.

Please Note, the Monday evening meetings will commence at 7.15pm and Saturday afternoon meetings this season will start at the earlier time of 2.0pm to comply with the new Museum opening hours.

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

2012

Friday December 7th Members Christmas Social.

Mrs. Helen Dixon ,Secretary 01793 770648

The Historical Society of Royal Wootton Bassett.

'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, Royal Wootton Bassett. SN4 7TZ First Floor, upstairs.

Annual membership £10.00. Visitors always welcome : £2.00

Further Information from Vivien Sumner 01666 511195

2012

Thursday 13th December The Olympic Games - Bob Townsend.

2013

Thursday 10th January Mesolithic and Neolithic Britain - Bob Clarke.

First in a series of six talks on a Prehistoric journey from 10,000 BC to 43 AD

Talk 1, Islands 10,000 - 4,500 BC

" 14th February The Romans in Swindon - Mike Stone.

Introduction to some Roman settlements uncovered around Swindon.

" 14th March Industrial Archaeology in your Garage Shed or Attic - Bill King.

"

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).

Wednesday 28th November Graham Mac, Radio Wiltshire. This talk was cancelled due to BBC re-organisation and replaced by a talk by Paul Jenkins Manager of Thamesdown Transport.

Highworth History Society

All lecture meetings are held in the United Reform Church, High Street, Highworth 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 December Open Forum, Bryan Lawton, Glenys Cox and Jo Clark,
Panel of questions. Display of some Archives. Wine.

2013

" 28th January Awakening the Blade, Dr. Robert Jones,
A practical approach to medieval

swordplay.

" 25th February The Life and Times of Swindon
Photographer, William Hooper,
Paul Williams.

" 25th March 18th Century Private Theatricals, Alan
Ledger.

" 29th April The Mechanics Institute, Swindon,
Daniel Rose.

Chiseldon Local History Group

Meet at Holy Cross Church Room, Butts Road, Chiseldon.
at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated.

Visitors Welcome. small charge.

2012

Wednesday December 5th Members Christmas Party.

2013

" January 16th Gallipoli 1915. John Winterburn, Independant Archaeologist.

" February 20th Nelson's Navy. Chris Scott, Writer and
Historian.

" March 20th The End of Roman Cirencester. Neil
Holbrook. CEO Cotswold Archaeology.

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.

Christmas reminder.

Please save your used Postage Stamps

Our Chairman, Kevin Bizley collects British and foreign used postage stamps, stamps should have a
margin of envelope surrounding them, he raises money by selling them for Local charities .

Swindon Society visit Lethbridge School

Lethbridge School are learning about The Victorians this year and they contacted The Swindon
Society to see if we could help them at all? As a Society we specialize in the history of Swindon in
photographs. The Victorian era ended in 1901 and though we do not have lots of images of that
period, we do have plenty of just afterwards. We went to the school and gave 4
photographic/PowerPoint presentations to four different classes. Each class has about 35 pupils so
we covered some 140 of the schools total of nearly 500 boys and girls. The plan was to then show
them around Old Town and include many of the places they saw on screen, and to tell them about
it as they were stood in front of the various buildings. The Old Town area tour, consists of Newport
Street, High Street, Wood Street and Devizes Road with a few small deviations to the Swindon
Town station which is now an industrial estate and into Lawn Woods to tell them about the
Goddard family, and a bit of history of that lovely area of our town.

We did two walks on Monday 19th November 2012, when the weather was dull and two walks on
the 20th when to say the least it was WET. Even though each walk was different, all the kids

