

The Swindon Society

Summer Newsletter.

Wednesday 9th May 2012.

Annual General Meeting and Early Olympics.

It had been an unsettled day in a wet week, so although we were able to arrive and leave without getting wet, umbrellas and raincoats were much in evidence. There was a very good attendance, the most for an A.G.M. for many years, but that is probably due to the larger membership we have now and the topical title of Bob's talk about the Olympics and how it originated from 776 BC in Ancient Greece to the 'modern' games within living memory.

Kevin welcomed us and Bob Johnson representing Swindon Borough Council to the meeting and presented his annual report, he then introduced each member of the committee individually, (most of us wearing the new polo shirts with the logo on) and asked for members appreciation for their years work which met with applause.. Bob explained that his job title had changed, the town has been divided into localities, and he is now a Community Facilitator, and admits he is still coming to terms with his new title and what it means. After the Treasurers Report and election of officers and committee, the Auditor and vote of thanks from David Lacey, we enjoyed our coffee and chat and re-assembled for Bob's show.

The games were established to honour the Gods and a 43ft figure of Zeus was featured and sacrifices made. Only men took part in these ancient games and they were completely naked, therefore women were not allowed to compete - or even watch. If they made a false start they were whipped, so there were few false starts! Boxing was very brutal the winner was sometimes the survivor. Ancient Games included the Pentathlon, Discus, Javelin, Jump, Running and Wrestling, and later Chariot racing, in which up to 47 chariots competed in one race and women were included in this event. For centuries Olympia lay buried and was only uncovered in the 19th century when Baron Pierre Cumbertin decided to revive the games as an international competition. but he did not consider it appropriate that women should compete. The first modern games were held in Athens in 1896 followed four years later in Paris when women were allowed to take part for the first time, then every four years since with the exception of the war years in 1916 1940 and 1944 co-incidentally in leap years. This year will be the third time London has hosted the games, more than any other city. Sport has always been the purpose of the Olympics, but various international disputes, boycotts, political and religious feeling, epidemics and accidents have featured to interrupt the the festival over the years. Before medals were awarded the winners were crowned with a laurel wreath, women competitors wore skirts or very large baggy knickers a distinct handicap competing in the long jump, it was 1984 before women took part in the marathon. In London, in the 1908 games, sensation was caused when the Italian competitor Dorando Pietri turned the wrong way in the marathon, and came into the stadium first but in a state of exhaustion, collapsing, and being assisted to his feet by spectators and getting instantly disqualified although actually crossing the line first. This caused so much sympathy for him that he was awarded a special Queens cup by Queen Alexandra.

1924 games in Paris featured Scotsman Eric Liddell, who became known as God's Athlete for his refusal to run the heats of the 100 metres on a Sunday, so he switched to the 400 metres and still won. He spent many years as a missionary in China and was held a prisoner of war by the Japanese and died of a brain tumour just before the end of World War 2. Harold Abrahams won the 100 metres in record time, These games later featured in the film 'Chariots of Fire'. Johnnie Weissmuller won three gold medals for swimming, he became better known as Tarzan in Hollywood films.

In 1936 prior to World War 2, the games were held in Berlin, there was strong Nazi feeling at this time and Hitler refused to shake hands or acknowledge Jesse Owens because he was black, and used the occasion to spread political propaganda.

No games were held in 1940 or 1944 because of the war so it was 12 years before the first post war games were held in **London in 1948**, food was still rationed and the scars of the wartime bombing still in evidence in the city. Existing sporting venues were used, Wembley Stadium with a new

cinder track and the Empire Pool were the main venues, Rowing took place at Henley, Shooting at Bisley, and Yachting at Cowes. The war had caused an imbalance of sporting strength with Germany, The Soviet Union and Japan absent from the competition, America won 38 Gold Medals. In the years since 1948 the games have been held at the following venues:-

1952 Helsinki
1956 Melbourne
1960 Rome
1964 Tokyo
1968 Mexico City
1972 Munich
1976 Montreal
1980 Moscow
1984 Los Angeles
1988 Seoul, South Korea
1992 Barcelona
1996 Atlanta
2000 Sydney
2004 Athens
2008 Beijing
2012 London

As I write this the games have not yet opened, but by the time you read it, it will be history. There is much concern about security, but I hope the only shocks and surprises are sporting ones .

Visit to Inigo House June 6 th 2012

The Society had 20 Members arrive for the visit to Inigo House, Highworth, and what a treat they were in for. For many years Inigo House was a Doctors Surgery, Claire Burke's Father was the last resident Doctor.

Welcomed at the front door by Claire and Peter Burke, the owners of this splendid Georgian House , and straight away given a potted

History of the house next door where a Lady called * Mabel Stranks, very well known local Post Mistress lived. Some of you may have heard of her and her connection to Coleshill, Highworth .

We entered Inigo House where we were split into two groups. The first group went off with Peter Burke to explore the house and the second group stayed with Claire Burke and received a short talk on the History of “Inigo House”, with some very amusing anecdotes along the way.

Claire's group had Coffee and home made cakes first and sat around having a lively chat whilst looking at the vast array of Local books, Maps and other Documentation. Peter and his group having finished their tour arrived back for coffee

and cakes, Claire and her group then went off on their explorations. The House is spread over 4 floors, we never did find out how many rooms there were, we do know however there were 8 Bedrooms. The old saying never judge a book by its cover was never more true, the house was lovely, originally dark wood panelling, this now gave way to light colours which actually in “my opinion” did the rooms justice. Many of the original Doctors surgical tools were still on display, including the “Birthing Bag” draw your own conclusions!!!! We all managed!! to climb to the Rooftop, the Highest point in Highworth and were treated to superb views of the High Street, Church and rooftops of surrounding houses. We made our way down to the cellars which had been kept in their original state, you could actually see the pavement up above, the coal came through the grill in the pavement into the cellar, now filled in with stones to stop any unwelcome visitors.

Thanks were given to our Hosts by our Chairman Kevin Bizley for a most enjoyable evening . Claire and Peter were presented with a Cheque towards one of their Charities “Horseback uk” which helps injured Soldiers, along with Flowers and a bottle of wine.

Diane Everett Bob Townsend

***Mabel Stranks** was a secret agent, a spy, and arranged for agents to be directed to Coleshill House where they were trained for espionage work. She was on 'Hitlers Hit List' for execution if they had invaded us! but she lived through the war and a Close in Highworth bears her name of which the new residents disapproved at first, but relented a bit when they learned that she was a wartime heroine.

40th Anniversary Celebration.
Southbrook Inn, Southbrook Street, Swindon.
on Sunday 16th September 2012.
11.30 am till 4.30pm.
Buffet Lunch available, with guest speakers.
Members £3.00.sponsored by Society.
Numbers to be booked by Sat 27th August Please.

The mayor, Councillor Mike Bray has agreed to come and open the proceedings, although he has a 'Battle of Britain' engagement shortly after.

If you have not yet booked your place please do so as soon as you receive this as the final numbers have to be in and paid for by the above date...

Ring Diane Everett 613981

50th Anniversary Re-union of Railway Apprenticeship School.

Were you one of the Apprentices attending The Railway Apprentices School in Dean Street or do you know anyone who was..?. Colin Finch is arranging a Re-union for the 50th Anniversary on Saturday 22nd September 11am to 5pm. at Steam his e.mail address is colinfinch1@btinternet.com or ring 01793 610465, or see

Andy Binks.

Apprentices from other local firms also attended the school, Plessey, Square D. Garrards, Old Town Engineering and Metal Box.

Please spread the message.

Annual General Meeting, Wednesday 9th May 2012.

Members present at the meeting were given the usual paperwork, Last A.G.M. minutes, Chairmans address, Agenda , Financial Summary etc. if you would like a copy of these items please let me know and I will see that they are forwarded to you.

Owing to Neil Lovers decision to stand down we have a vacancy in our Committee, and there were no nominations on the night, so if you consider joining us, you would be most welcome to visit one of our meetings to find out what is involved....please see a member of the Committee.

Membership Renewal..

Inside this newsletter you will find a membership form, also on the table at the first meeting. It would be most helpful if you could join before the first night to lighten the load a bit. If you joined since 1st January 2012, your membership covers you till September 2013.

Diamond Jubilee Celebrations etc.

What a hectic summer it has been, the football, followed by the Jubilee, then the Olympics, not to mention all the regulars, Chelsea Flower Show, Fairford Air Tattoo and Wimbledon. What happened to cricket this year?

After the Regatta on the Thames and the pop concert, I wondered how the opening ceremony of the games could possibly surpass it, but it did....and...we still await the closing of the games to look forward to..

Lydiard Park has been awarded a VAQAS (Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme) which entitles them to display the Tudor Rose symbol signifying that stringent quality standards have been met. Steam also has this award to its credit.

Library News.

The Library has recently undergone some changes, called *restructuring*, Darryl Moody and Katherine Cole will be staffing the Local Studies. There were no Monday lunchtime talks in July or August, but the Archivist still visits for individual research enquiries between 10 -12 noon, his next visit will be on Monday 20th August.

The next Monday lunchtime talk will be on 24th September but no title is known yet.

Andy Binks

"A Man with a Stick"

Wilts Family History Society
Gorse Hill Community Centre,
Thursday 13th September at 7.30pm

" Herbert About Town"

at the Central Library on
Thursday 11th October at 7.30.

Andy has given both these shows for us, but if you missed them they are well worth seeing.

Friends of Swindon Railway Museum

I have received my Summer 2012 North Star Newsletter as a member of the above, and there does not appear to be any programme of meetings and talks arranged, however the back page bears a photo of Michael Stubbs who is one of our members too, bearing an Olympic torch through Southwick near Trowbridge on 22nd May. Some time ago we asked Mike to consider joining our committee, but Friends of Steam had got him first.

I was very interested in the editors article about a picture of the GWR Athletic Association in front of the Eiffel Tower in 1923, one of the men Seth Bruton, a coach finisher who was able to 'sprint down the tunnel' ahead of much younger men even in his later years.

Back in September 2007, Bob Townsend gave us a presentation called 'Swindon's most Famous Victorian Athlete' a story of James Kibblewhite of Purton, who worked in the R shop for 50 years, returning to Purton on the workmens train and training in the evenings. Sometimes he ran beside the train cheered on by his workmates, he never competed in any Olympic games as he lived in the the 1880s before the modern games began...

Friends of Radnor Street Cemetery.

Walks.

There has been some progress with the necessary insurance cover being obtained, but so far no further walks have been arranged, however there is light at the end of the tunnel and as soon as there is some news we will let you know.

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 September 20th A Treasure Chest of Words and Sayings.
Lynda Warren.
- " October 18th Drinking glasses and Decanters of
Georgian and Regency Period.
Martin Collisson.
- " November 15th The Great Eastern (Brunel's Ship) Alan Kirton.
- Friday December 7th Members Christmas Social.

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

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 September Heavenly Lights, Richard Cann.
The glories of Church stained glass

windows.

" 11th October Glimmer in the Dark, Part 1V, Martin Way.
Final instalment of the journey through Saxon
and Viking cultures.

8th November Savernake at War, Roger Day.
Preparation for D Day.

" 13th December The Olympic Games - Bob Townsend.

2013

" 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

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 August Highworth Oddities, Dr. Bryan Lawton.
26th September A History of Lydiard House, Mike Stubbs.
" 31st October A Herbert About Town. Andy Binks.
" 28th November Graham Mac, Radio Wiltshire.
(To be confirmed)

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 24th September Ticket to Ryde, Colin Brading, A History of the Isle of Wight Steam Railway.

Monday 29th October To be held in St. Michaels Church
A Lost Highworth Painting from St. Michaels Church, Dr. Ellie Pridgeon, University of Leicester and Roger Rosewell author of Medieval wall paintings in English and Welsh Churches, c.1250 - c.1500.

" 26th November Courts Martial World War 1, Steve Williams.

" 27th December Open Forum, Bryan Lawton, Glenys Cox and Jo Clark, Panel of questions. Display of some Archives. Wine.

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

Wednesday 15th August Visit TBA - Alan Morton

" 19th September Making the Cauldron - Hector Cole

" 17th October AGM Swindon's Empire Theatre -
Roger Trayhurn

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.