

## Wiltshire Family History Society, Swindon Branch, February 2023

### MEETINGS REMINDER – see below for further details

Thursday 9 February 2023 via Zoom – ‘My Ancestor was a Miller’ – Laurie Page

Thursday 23 February 2023 at The Central Community Centre, Emlyn Square  
‘Cellars, Tower and Tunnels’ – John Ratcliffe

### Steaming into February already!

See below for a couple of GWR memories.

As for this engine ...

No. 70000 Britannia is a preserved steam locomotive owned by the Royal Scot Locomotive and General Trust.

Built at Crewe in 1951, it was the first of 55 built of the Britannia Class, and retired in 1966. After her official retirement, there were a series of moves including steaming at the Severn Valley Railway and being owned by Pete Waterman.



This atmospheric photo was taken by Ken Mumford last November.

It pulled the funeral train of King George VI from Kings Lynn to London in February 1952 and was once featured in an episode of London's Burning.

For all you train enthusiasts, Ken has sent in the following information about his photo:

70000, built at Crewe in 1951, waits patiently on the UML (Up Main Line) at Swindon on 27th November 2022 to allow a London bound Intercity Express Train (an Hitachi train which some folk nickname FLYING CUCUMBERS!!) in platform 2 to get ahead. Soon after that IET had left, and with a green light, 70000 gives two blasts on its hooter, slips slightly, quickly brought under control, and makes a determined effort in accelerating away to Crewe via Oxford and Coventry.

### FROM CHAIRMAN JOHN

Another newsletter another flashback. I had forgotten about the GWR supplying house coal, see contribution submitted by Mervyn Hewlett (below). I don't recall whether it was delivered by horse and cart but I do remember some of the pieces of coal were massive. My dad would spend many "a happy hour" smashing up the coal with his "coal hammer". We too had wood deliveries which dad would split into sticks with his "wood axe". Sometimes the wood when lit would spit burning embers out mostly into the grate but sometimes onto the rug in front of the fire. Dad, Mum or me, if brave enough, would throw the embers back in the fire.

Memories came flooding back about that open fire. Putting a slice of white bread (delivered by the Co-op baker) on a toasting fork, toasting it until brown, sometimes black then spreading it thickly with dripping (saved from the joint of meat purchased from the Co-op mobile butchers) then smothered with salt (purchased from the Co-op mobile shop). What joy that was, even if the cardiologist who treated my heart attack some 50 odd years later may not agree. Followed by a cup of tea (the milk, of course, delivered by the Co-op milkman).

Ken Mumford's brilliant photograph of 70000 Britannia, also took me back to my childhood. Britannia was the second and last engine bought for my 00 railway, Princess Elizabeth being the first. Unfortunately Britannia is upstairs in bits thanks to a "friend" who decided to take a few bits from my engine to repair his. I am not BITTER, honest.

Thanks to the contributors and Yvonne for the memories. (My mum's divi number 649, one of those things you never forget.) **JOHN MILLS**

## **WHAT'S COMING UP**

### **9<sup>th</sup> February 2023 – Zoom meeting**

'My Ancestor was a Miller' – Laurie Page

Laurie has been a teacher of genealogy for 20 years. In this talk he will explain the history of milling and the life of a miller.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Glenys needs to re-do her list of invites for our Zoom meetings and would appreciate it if everyone who still wants to be on that list, would contact her to confirm please: [glenys.bettley@ntlworld.com](mailto:glenys.bettley@ntlworld.com) THANK YOU

### **23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023 – at Central Community Centre**

'Cellars Tower and Tunnels' – Jon Ratcliffe

Jon is a local professional photographer. He will share some of his unseen pictures of Swindon's recently demolished buildings and new developments. From hidden cellars to lost tunnels and rarely seen rooftop views. See familiar parts of Swindon as you have never seen them before.

## **5 FEBRUARY – it's a Sunday Afternoon – looking for something to do?**

We may no longer have the Mechanics Institute for family recreation purposes but there is new theatre, 420 comfortable seat and loads of parking. It's The Deanery Theatre at Wichelstowe (SN1 7DA) and it's opposite the Hall and Woodhouse Canal pub. There are wheelchair spaces available with users admitted free, but book first with organisers.

So what's happening on 5th February – see the attached poster. An enjoyable afternoon out ... and it's to raise money for a new charity, 'The Kelly Foundation' which offers a free service providing listening, understanding, guidance and practical support for those suffering from chronic and acute anxiety, depression or poor mental health for whatever reason. Statistics show that one in four of us will experience a mental health issue at some time in our lives, whether it be bereavement, divorce, job loss etc. Poor mental health does not discriminate and can creep up on any of us.

So if you feel like celebrating on 5th February and, at the same time, supporting a new local and really worthwhile charity – take a peek at the programme attached with this newsletter.

**SWINDON HERITAGE TALKS – 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the series by Dr Michael Smith**  
at the Central Community Centre, Emlyn Square, Swindon

Dr Michael Smith - Author and enthusiast Former GWR Apprentice at the Swindon Locomotive Works teacher and lecturer at Bristol University and consultant to Railtrack now Network Rail.

**SATURDAY 18TH FEBRUARY 2023 7 – 9.30 pm**

New Swindon Mechanics' Institute Lord Methuen and the Freemasons

**SATURDAY 11TH MARCH 2023 7 – 9.30 pm**

1900s G J Churchward and the creation of the Borough Swindon's first Mayor

Tickets: from [info@mechanics-trust.org.uk](mailto:info@mechanics-trust.org.uk)

Members: £3

Non-members:£6

## REPORTS

**Thursday 12 January 2023 - Migration through the UK – Debbie Bradley**  
(or ...The Case of the Vanishing Ancestors)

No doubt we've all encountered ancestors that are quite easily discovered but there are others that seem to want to play 'hide and seek' with us.

With perseverance we may be able to trace them but others may remain consistently elusive.

Debbie shared with us her own experiences and suggested ways to discover more.



Debbie told us a little of the many problems she had keeping track of her relatives, as they moved around the country quite considerably. There were numerous reasons for this including:

Relocation to where work was, and people travelled surprisingly long distances, making tracking them difficult and sometimes impossible. For Debbie there was the added difficulty of place names being wrongly transcribed leading to researching in completely wrong areas. Then, of course, frequent relocations resulted in children being born in different places.

Without the ease of modern transport systems, people would move, even long distances, by whatever means they could - walking, horse/pony and cart and even steam ship.

Frustratingly for her, there were instances of names changes, both surname spellings and forenames. In addition, marriage break-ups and subsequent new partnerships (not always re-married) resulted in completely different surnames being used. Illegitimate children's surnames changed as their mothers later married. Random fathers' names sometimes entered onto birth certificates to 'save face'. Children may stay in an area whereas their parents moved on again or back to their routes. Another possibility is that families moved to find work for their children.

Some luck however came because of a most unusual middle name and the lady was eventually found with a different man and more children. So it pays to research on any unusual name.

Debbie suggested that clues may be found by looking at, for example, witnesses on marriage certificates and neighbours. Beware – she discovered on one census return that, although names and ages were correct, the actual birth place for each had been moved down a line, thus giving completely wrong information.

Other reasons for moving could be a family dispute, agricultural depression, industrial revolution, navy/army postings (eg the Boar War) and therefore not listed on census returns. Apprenticeships were often taken up quite far from home. Sometimes names of absconding apprentices appeared in local newspapers.

Police ancestors would often be moved around, also boatmen and fishermen. Fish girls would move to where they were required for large catches and even from overseas. Commercial travellers, as the occupation implies, could also be difficult to locate.

Sometimes land owners would move their staff around. Going into 'service' is another reason why some of our ancestors were difficult to find, moving perhaps from rural areas to big cities. London attracted many from all over the UK and the world.

Then, of course, there were the railways and, as with Swindon Works, many workers with the necessary skills were attracted from other parts of the country. Those men may then have moved on again eg to Paddington. Railway staff magazines may be a good source of information here. But then ... many railway closures resulted once more in another move.

Settlement certificates can be useful. Prisons and institutions sometimes may show only initials.

Debbie encouraged us all to share information with others.

### **Thursday 26 January 2023 – 'Extra Ordinary Women in Wiltshire – Ruth Butler (Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre)**

Thanks to Kate Goodenough for this report.

Ruth explained how difficult it was to find many stories of everyday women. She started with some of the women of the Middle Ages. She showed a photo of a plaque to Agnes Bottenham, a Pub Landlady who founded the Trinity Hospital in Salisbury circa 1370.

Maud Heath was a benefactor who left money to build a causeway into Chippenham to save people getting muddy going to market in Chippenham.

Lady Ela 1187-1261 became a wealthy heiress aged 9 when her father, the Earl of Salisbury died. She married an illegitimate son of the King and they had 7 children. She was present at the laying of the foundation stone at Salisbury Cathedral and the only lady present which showed her status and importance. When her husband returned from a Crusade he had a celebratory meal but died 3 days later. She paid for him to be buried in Salisbury Cathedral; this was the first burial here. After the laws of Magna Carta came into force she refused all suitors and kept her wealth and status. She became one of only two women to be High Sheriff. She founded Lacock Abbey.

Mary Sidney 1561-1621 married Henry Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke. Although an arranged marriage, it appeared to be a meeting of minds as she was well educated being fluent in French, Italian and Latin. They lived at Wilton House.

Lady Blanche Arundell was a brave woman who at the age of 60 had 25 servants to defend Wardour Castle against the Parliamentarian army of 1300 men. They finally had to surrender after 5 days to Colonel Hungerford who promised safe passage for the women and "fair treatment " for the men but he reneged on his word. A very strong minded woman.

Arundell Penruddock of Compton who had 7 children had to plead poverty after her husband John declared for Charles Stewart. Oliver Cromwell signed his death warrant and gave him clemency and had him beheaded instead of being hung, drawn and quartered.

Lady Valerie Meux married into the Meux brewing family. She was in London at the Music Halls and when she was working as a "hostess" she met Henry the 3rd Baronet of Aylesbury and they secretly married in London before returning to Dauntsey Park. She was quite an eccentric and had zebras to drive her carriage. She also had a menagerie and the archway had to be raised to allow the elephants to pass underneath.

Edith Olivier was the daughter of the Rector of Wilton and in her late 40s she was against women getting the vote but the outbreak of WW1 changed her outlook and she was an excellent organiser and helped women in the Wiltshire Land Army grow food for the nation. She learnt to drive and started to write and publish her journals and was to be found in the artistic set of Siegfried Sassoon, Rex Whistler, Cecil Beaton and William Walton. She became Mayor of Wilton and financed the early excavations of the Royal Palace at Clarendon.

Mary Slade was a teacher at King William Street school in Old Town Swindon, where she was Head Teacher from 1899 to 1936. She went to Buckingham Palace and was awarded an MBE for her services in the War. Some letters about this are in the archives.

Matilda Talbot 1872-1958 inherited Lacock Abbey from her uncle. She was in the Wrens in the War and we were shown a photo of her in uniform in the grounds of Lacock Abbey.

Mildred Mary Bruce 1895-1990 originally from Chelmsford where she grew to love speed in any form, motorbikes and cars. After she married, this extended to speedboats and planes. She flew all over the continent but her plane couldn't cross the Atlantic or Pacific. The newspapers loved her glamorous lifestyle and wanted her to promote items such as motor oil. At the age of 79 she drove a Ford Capri and sped around a race track and was known as the Queen of Speed. She was a good business woman and took on a glove factory in Bradford on Avon.

Frances Baker was the secretary of the Queen Mary's Needlework Guild in Salisbury. She arranged for parcels of clothing to be sent to soldiers who had enlisted in Wiltshire Regiments and the archives holds many letters from grateful soldiers who received these parcels.

A varied talk from the aristocracy to more humble beginnings but each one was "Extraordinary"!

(PS – my mother, her siblings and cousins would have been at King William Street School when Mary Slade was Head Teacher – Yvonne)

Did you catch the **WFHS Virtual meeting** on Zoom by James Holden, talking about the development of **non-conformist chapels** from the 17-20<sup>th</sup> century? He described how religion was regarded in the mid-1600s, tolerance and (mostly) persecution of those wishing to break away from the established church. Early chapels were modest buildings not to draw attention to their usage, one even built by the men at night and guarded by their women folk during the daytime.



There were many photos showing the changes in styles over the centuries, from very modest, sometimes even tin, chapels through to the larger and more ornate. Highworth was mentioned and there were several Swindon photos, including in Fleet Street and the wonderful old Baptist Tabernacle.

James talked about symmetry, the lack of popery and imagery, showed several interiors often with galleries, and how, although many were demolished, some have been transformed into homes, some more in character with their original use than others.

### **FROM LAST TIME - IN THE DAYS BEFORE CENTRAL HEATING – a memory from Mervyn Hewlett**

My father worked in the GWR for 45 years. In the 1960s our coal always came from the GWR delivered by horse and cart and the delivery man used our side entrance. The employees' coal came from a yard directly opposite the Zurich building in Station Road, the other side of the long stone wall. If the front door was open passers-by could see the large shire horses inside often ready to pull a cart with the next delivery.

If Mum and Dad wanted a cheaper source of heat Dad would get a wood ticket for a few shillings. The same horse and cart would deliver a huge pile of offcuts from the carriage works, often long lengths, and the wood was just tossed over our front garden wall. The flowers often suffered but the delivery was always welcome.

Dad spent the next few nights sawing it all up. However a fellow work mate had a less strenuous idea - he lit the fire, put the end of the wood into the fire, and moved it forward as it was burnt away. Dad never tried this as the living room door would have to be kept open, which would have been counterproductive when trying to keep the room warm, to accommodate the longer lengths.

Mervyn added: Sometimes it was a coke ticket rather than coal. It was my job in the 1950s and 1960s to take my barrow (a box with old pram wheels) down through the Cheney Manor estate to the Iffley Road GWR coke works to get it filled up, and make the return journey home. My parents trusted me to do this alone from about the age of 10 or 11 and it would have been on Saturday mornings. Life was quite different then. **MERVYN HEWLETT**

Note: The coal delivery cart was a flat platform sometimes with removable metal railings round it to keep the sacks of cwt (hundred weight) coal in place. One cwt is equal to just over 50 kg.

Thanks to Ken Mumford for supplying this photo of what could be a GWR coal cart. (Is that the driver's seat on top?!)



Mervyn Hewlett has confirmed that it is just as he remembers it.

Some years back the Swindon Advertiser suggested that one of the reasons the GWR chose Swindon for its Works was its closeness to a canal for transporting coal from Somerset. Eventually, train power overtook the canals in this respect.

Apparently the GWR, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, acquired coalmines in Wales with in excess of 2,400 miners on its payroll.



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Thanks to Ken Mumford for organising the use of this photo for us.

**Up coal train from South Wales approaching Twyford on the ex-GWR main line to London**  
View westward, towards Reading etc. The Class E train has come up, probably from Severn Tunnel Junction, via Swindon and Reading and is headed by Churchward class 2800 2-8-0 No. 2837 (built 9/1912, withdrawn 5/60)

As with the Industrial Revolution, coal was of paramount importance to the Swindon Works in very many ways.

The first central electrical generating power station began to appear in the 1880s and it was not long before the GWR was generating its own electricity fired by coal.

Thanks to Middleton Press via Ken Mumford for this photo which was taken just prior to WW2.



**4288 heads east between Challow and Steventon**

## COAL – CONTINUED

In 1862 Richard Tarrant, wholesaler and retailer mainly in coal, coke, salt, slate and straw, bought Apsley House, Old Town – you will remember that it was the Museum for many years. The Tarrant brothers also had a depot at the GWR station in New Swindon.

A rival coal company was run by John Toomer at about the same time and they were suppliers to the GWR. Their business grew with the expansion of the railway. In 1870 John Toomer bought Apsley House from Richard Tarrant. By 1879 John Toomer had retail depots at four local railway stations as well as his yard at Apsley House. MORE ABOUT APSLEY HOUSE IN A FUTURE NEWSLETTER – with particular reference to the Axford Family.

### **That's not my job!**

Mervyn has told us about his 'job' as a child – here is a rather different slant

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody.

There was an important job to do and Everybody was asked to do it.  
Everybody was sure Somebody would do it.  
Anybody could have done it but Nobody did it.  
Somebody got angry because it was Everybody's job.  
Everybody thought Anybody would do it but  
Nobody realised that Everybody wouldn't do it.  
It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when  
Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

## FROM LAST TIME – McILROYS

It was pleasing to hear that the report on McIlroys in the last Newsletter brought back memories for some of you. One of our readers wrote in as follows:

I was Swindon Wheelers cycling Club, Junior Champion, 1954. The prize presentation`s took place at McIlroys.

The same person also asks 'Does anyone remember Wally Lewis of the Swindon Wheelers? He was the starter/time keeper in the 1950s. In 1953, from Kanes Cycles in Bridge Street, I had ordered a Viking Tour of Britain frame with three sets of wheels, one for training, one set of Tubs for time trials, fixed gear. One set of Tubs, with Deraileur Gears, and two sprocket crank set with gear changers. The total cost came to £109.00.

Then in 1954, for the first time that I turned up to ride a time trial, Wally Lewis, a stickler for abiding by the RTTC rules, would not let me start. The reason .... because I could not put the ball of my foot on the road. I had to lower my saddle before he allowed me to go. Yes, I am ancient – will be 86 next month! **Member No. 07186.**

## SWINDON MAN WITH GEORGE STEPHENSON CONNECTION

John Hall of 1 Faringdon Street, New Swindon, had commenced work in about 1826 as a fireman on one of the 'old-fashioned George Stephenson engines in Durham. He would have been about sixteen at the time. Promoted to the position of driver in 1832, aged just 22, he went to Scotland where he lived for about thirteen years. He married in about 1840, was living in Ashley, Box, at the time of the 1851 census, but by 1861 he was in Swindon working for the GWR and living at 1 Faringdon Street. It is his cottage, now re-numbered as No. 34 Faringdon Road, that has been turned into the GWR Museum Cottage.



He was described as being peculiarly fortunate in that the various engines of which he had been in charge never had a broken crank axle. He'd had several break-downs but, with one exception at Bath, had reached the intended destination. It was reported that 'strange as it may appear, he never had a passenger killed behind him, having always been a most steady and cautious man'.

He and his family continued to live at 1 Faringdon Street. John, still an engine driver, died aged 65 as a result of an 'accident on the line' at Swindon Station on 29 February 1876 (must have been a leap year!) and was interred at St Mark's churchyard.

His funeral 'proved to be of a very imposing character. As well as family and locals attending, there were many engine drivers and stokers from various parts of the GWR. Free passes had been issued to them to attend the funeral. Thus over 90 of his fellow workers were there. In fact, in consequence of the crowd outside his home 'some little difficulty was experienced in marshalling the procession of about 200 mourners'. The streets were lined along the route to St Mark's cemetery and some attendees had to stand for the ceremony.

## **AND ANOTHER OF SWINDON'S OLDEST EMPLOYEES**

When George House/Howse died on 5 January 1903 he was described in a newspaper article as possibly being the oldest railway employee living, having worked for the GWR for over 64 years. He'd had his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday the previous June.

He had joined the GWR at Maidenhead in 1835, assisting in the construction of the line, under Brunel. When he went to Swindon in 1838 there were no railway works. He and others, now all deceased, built the first shop and erected the first piece of machinery.

He was the oldest Oddfellow in the Swindon district and had joined the local 'Mackie's Good Intent Lodge' over 60 years previously. Also founder of the annual treats for inmates of two local workhouses. He had received several presentations which included a 'Tit-Bits' medal for being the oldest railway employee.

No clue found as to who his first wife was, but he married Elizabeth Eustace of Swindon on 8 October 1848 at Christ Church. At the time of the 1861 census they were living in shared accommodation at 4 Taunton Street, at which time George Howse was a 42 year old Engine Fitter. George and Elizabeth were shown as having the following children: George Gabriel, James, Charles, Elizabeth, Rebecca and Emma Jane.

There was only one George House listed in the 1841 census at Swindon but he was a 20 year old Ag. Lab. born Wiltshire. Could this have been him? His address is quite interesting, shown as Brake Hill. The next dwelling was a Lodging House, then Canal House and then The Lawn, occupied by Ambrose Goddard. The two previous dwellings were in Little London.

Brake Hill was listed on two pages of the 1841 census and then mysteriously was Brock Hill before that! Brock Hill was Drove Road – so it seems that Brake and Brock were actually one road. Does anyone have any thoughts about this please? – [nealy1@virginmedia.com](mailto:nealy1@virginmedia.com) or [swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk)

## **CALLING ALL AMATEUR SLEUTHS**

Fancy using your detective skills – a modern day Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot or even perhaps The Railway Detective (more in line with our GWR projects)?

From time to time we receive information that needs that little bit more information .... something more to discover.

Ancestry or Find my Past come in very useful.

Is there anyone who would like to do some detective work and become a 'Family History Buddy'?

Not too strenuous (from your arm chair really) but interesting and it's surprising what is uncovered and the coincidences that arise.



Please ask for further information [nealy1@virginmedia.com](mailto:nealy1@virginmedia.com) or [swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk)  
Look forward to hearing from you.

Similarly, if anyone has time to do a little typing up – census information etc. – any help gratefully received. THANK YOU

## A FEW FEB FACTS

**01.02.1901** The funeral of Queen Victoria and a day of general mourning – as ordered by King Edward VII.

**04.02.1941 Swindon:** 'Pride & Prejudice', starring Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson, showed at the Regent Cinema.

**06.02.1958** Seven Manchester United footballers – the Busby Babes – were killed when their plane crashed in thick snow at Munich airport. An eighth, Duncan Edwards, died 15 days later in hospital.

**08.02.1841** William Henry Fox Talbot patented his Calotype process of developing photographs.

**11.02.1990** South Africa's black nationalist leader Nelson Mandela was freed from prison after 27 years.

**13.02.1953 Swindon:** Work started on Penhill Junior School. The building project was projected to cost £79,057, a large sum for the time. It was said 'Ultimately the school will provide education for 480 children between 7 – 11. Until the neighbouring infant school is built, children between 5 -7 will be admitted.

**20.02.1547** Coronation of 9 year old Edward VI, only son of Henry and Jane Seymour.

**20.02.1962** Astronaut John Glenn became the first American in orbit when he circled the earth three times in the Mercury capsule Friendship 7. He went on to become an Ohio senator and successful businessman, and in 1998 was given a place on a Space Shuttle flight with the aim of assessing the medical effects of space travel on elderly people. At 77 he was the oldest person to fly in space.

**21.02.1910** Sir Douglas Bader, Second World War fighter pilot, was born. Despite losing both legs, he continued to fly, and is regarded as a hero of the Battle of Britain.

**22.02.1797** French soldiers landed at Fishguard, but were soon captured. No other foreign force has managed to invade Britain since.

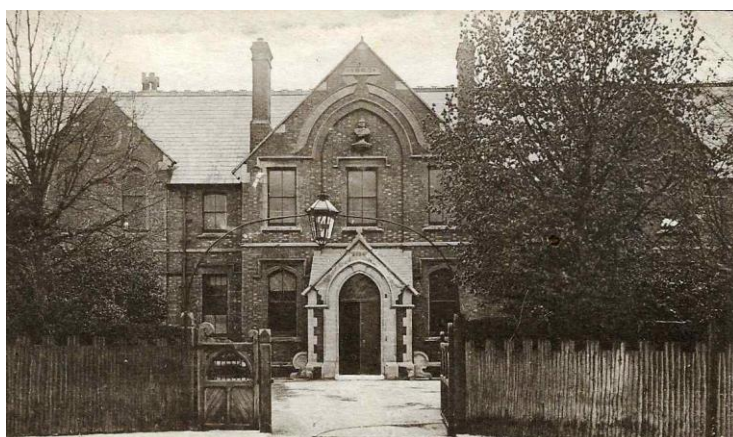
### **STRATTON ST MARGARET – William Bramwell HILL – died 6 February 1963**

Lower Stratton Methodist Church was filled when representatives of almost every Methodist Church in Swindon attended the funeral of William Bramwell Hill, a lay preacher for 48 years. At the time, when a noted local person died it was customary for the name of every mourner to be listed in the local newspaper. The Adver's list of mourners at Mr Hill's funeral ran to six long paragraphs.

### **SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART OF SWINDON LIFE (AND DEATH) and extended 100 years ago in 1923.**

Did anyone guess correctly what this old Swindon building is – it appeared in our September newsletter?

It is, of course, the Victoria Hospital, or the Swindon and North Wiltshire Victoria Hospital as it was originally known, at Okus Road/The Mall. One striking feature was perhaps the huge rounded window in the ward looking over The Mall.



The hospital (Swindon's first general hospital) dates from 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's golden jubilee. It opened its doors on 29 September 1888 and had been built on land donated by A L Goddard, whose family had been associated with Swindon since 1593. The initial cost of the building was raised by local donations, perhaps spurred on in order to combat infectious diseases. Further donations enabled expansion from six to ten beds with two emergency accident beds to follow.

One of the most successful fundraisers in Edwardian Swindon was BRUCE the dog, who with owner Arthur Beale (a GWR Machine Shop worker) raised vast amounts for charities across the south west. Additional wards, operating theatre, admin block and other facilities were added over the years and the hospital became recognised for training staff and treatment of infectious diseases and gynaecology.



Hooper "BRUCE," THE HOSPITAL'S FRIEND Hooper, Photographer

**BRUCE** was an English Shepherd Collie.

With owner Arthur Beale, he travelled over 10,000 miles by rail.

Bruce was presented with a solid silver collar with sixteen gold and silver medals and appointed a Member of the Brotherhood of Hero Dogs in London.

Does anyone know who Arthur Beale was please?

Thanks for Paul Williams for sharing these photos with us.



THE HOSPITAL'S FRIEND AND HIS MASTER Hooper, Photographer Swindon.

One hundred years ago, in **1923**, the Victoria Hospital was substantially expanded – again from considerable voluntary contributions. However, with the building of the 'new' Princess Margaret Hospital at the far end of Okus Road, focus at the Victoria changed and it was finally closed in December 2007.

We should perhaps also mention the Gorse Hill Isolation Hospital which replaced the old Pest House in Okus Road for infectious diseases eg diphtheria and typhoid. Such diseases could easily erupt into an epidemic because of existing problems like poor living conditions and contaminated water.

There was also a hospital at Stratton St Margaret, where the original Highworth & Swindon Poor Law Union opened on 23 November 1835. The early infirmary there was replaced in 1900 at the east side of the workhouse.

Our Swindon Branch family history group now meet monthly in the original GWR hospital, in what would have been a ward in those days. If only we could turn back the clock and witness how hospital life was back then. Initially in 1871 the small cottage hospital, built in Swindon's Railway Village, had two surgeons, two qualified assistants, and nurses. Thus 'From Cradle to the Grave' – the GWR Medical Fund catered for its employees and their families.

We have already had a couple of reminiscences about the old GWR Hospital. Perhaps YOU have a story to share? And what about the other hospital buildings in Swindon? We'd love to hear from you – please contact [nealy1@virginmedia.com](mailto:nealy1@virginmedia.com) or [swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk)

Below is a (very) brief timeline of surgery and surgical procedures. If anyone wants the full list that I have, please let me know. Yvonne

- c 5000 BCE\* - first-known practice of trepanation (skull surgery) in France
- c 1550 BCE – the Eberts Papyrus from Egypt listed over 800 drugs and prescriptions
- 1308 – the Worshipful Company of Barbers in London was first mentioned
- 1721 – Lady Mary Wortley Montagu brought the Ottoman practice of inoculation to England using live smallpox virus.
- 1796 – Edward Jenner pioneered smallpox inoculation with cowpox virus
- 1800 the Royal College of Surgeons of England was founded
- Between 1842 – 1848 various forms of anaesthesia tried – ether, Nitrous Oxide and chloroform. Then in 1884 cocaine.

- 1861 – Louis Pasteur discovered that diseases were caused by germs.
- 1865 – Lister's carbolic acid spray killed germs before and during surgery, thereby reducing infection
- 1890 - Pioneer surgery for knee replacement, using ivory
- 1901 – the basic blood types discovered
- 1914 – blood transfusions pioneered
- 1940 – first successful metallic hip replacement
- 1948 – first successful open heart surgery – since 1925
- 1963 – first liver transplant
- 1967 – first heart transplant
- 1972 – the CT scan perfected

BCE (before common era) seems to be the term used now instead of BC (before Christ) as it removes any religious (Christian) connotations. The change was made to mask the Christian basis for the dating system, in a bid to accommodate non-Christians and maintain political correctness.

Note: In Victorian times going to the hospital was seen by many as the ultimate last resort. That's because, far from making you better, going under the surgeon's knife might just have ended up killing you. Indeed, the fatality rates for Victorian-era surgery were truly terrifying. According to some estimates, around 1 in 10 surgery patients died. And that was in the cleanest operating theatres. In some hospitals, an incredible 1 in 4 patients died, if not on the operating table, then within 24 hours of their operation. Of course, the correlation between cleanliness and death rates went unnoticed for many years!

Some patients died of shock due to the sheer agony of surgery, suffering fatal heart attacks on the operating table. Others bled out, even though Victorian-era surgeons employed a variety of brutal, often effective methods, to stop bleeding. But in most cases, patients died of infection.

By the 1890s, surgeons were wearing clean white robes rather than simply covering their everyday clothes with blood-stained aprons. And surgical instruments had become better, too. Wooden-handled saws had been replaced with saws made out of a single piece of steel, significantly reducing the risk of germs. In operating theatres, watching audiences were out and smooth, easily-cleaned surfaces were in.

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**and FINALLY – a request for help please**

Does anyone have a copy of Gerald Dancer's 'Stratton Revisited'? I have been speaking with his wife Marcia and would like some information. Please email me on [nealy1@virginmedia.com](mailto:nealy1@virginmedia.com) or [swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk) Thank you – Yvonne

### **STILL ON THE THEME OF COAL – two more memories of coal mining days**

(Taken at the Black Country Living Museum, Dudley)



Winding machinery for the pit shaft cages.

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