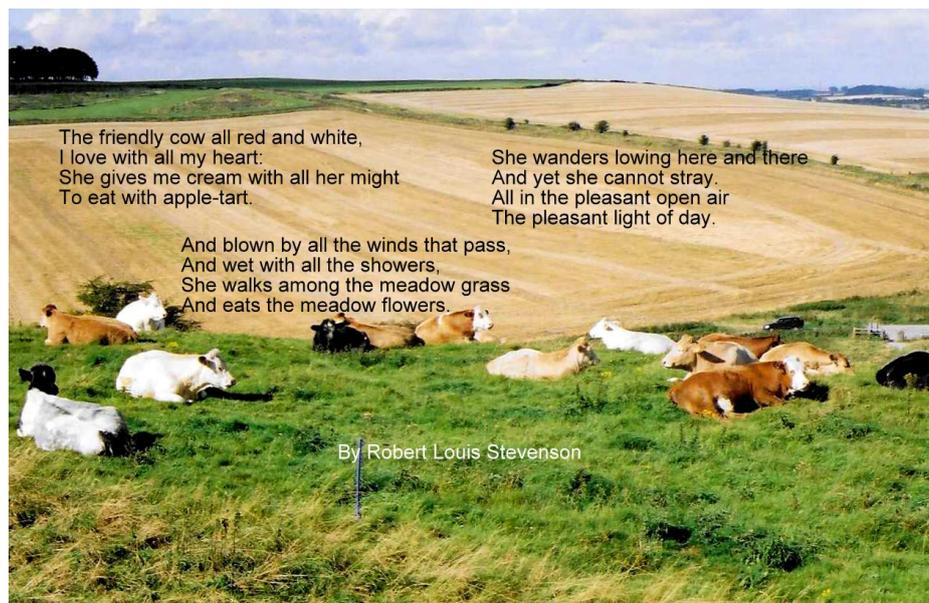


# Wiltshire Family History Society, Swindon Branch, September 2022

## JUST TO REMIND YOU ...

**22 September** for our next face-to-face meeting at the Central Community Centre when we start our series of three 'back to basics' events – see below for more details.  
(Our next Zoom meeting is on 8 September – again see below.)



WHAT DO YOU THINK ?

Does this photo indicate a  
'MOO' choir?

What are they 'mooing'?

Who is their conductor?

Can you think of a  
caption?

Over to YOU!

## JOHN'S THOUGHTS FOR SEPTEMBER

Welcome to the September newsletter and the new season. I am quite excited about our face-to-face meetings. I know it's back to basics but some of us have been doing research for many many years and sometimes we get into a comfortable routine in our research. By sharing our experiences, we will learn new approaches and ideas that will enhance our research and maybe crash through those brickwalls that still exist in our research.

Along with the new season a new project "A house through time ". As we are now based in the Railway Village it seems appropriate to collaborate with local community groups in trying to map the history of this fascinating area of Swindon. We also hope to recruit new members.

A big welcome to Harvey Groves, see below, he has some fascinating stories to share with us. Harvey is a former colleague of mine and despite having a John Mills in his tree I cannot see any links with mine (unlike another colleague Barry who I found a connection with during the first lockdown). Harvey's dad was, like me, (I may have mentioned this before) a member of the Swindon Male Voice Choir who is also preparing for a new season under its new musical Director, Kirstie Smith (Ten in the Bar). Any gents out there fancy singing? Monday evenings 7.30 @ St Johns, Whitbourne Avenue.

Thank you. Thank you to those who contribute to our newsletter, and as always to Yvonne for compiling it. **JOHN MILLS**

## YOUR HELP IS REQUESTED .... PLEASE



### A HOUSE THROUGH TIME ...

Okay perhaps a little more grand than our own Railway Village cottages and perhaps also a little older!

Nevertheless our local history is important to us and here's the chance to discover something exciting.

In our June Newsletter, we asked if anyone had memories, stories or information about the Railway Village. Unfortunately, and surprisingly, there was no response .. so perhaps we can try again?

In conjunction with the Mechanics Institute Trust and CARIG, Swindon Branch of the Wiltshire Family History Society will be

**at THE BAKER'S CAFÉ in the heart of the Railway Village  
Saturday 8 October 11.00am – 2.00pm**

This excellent café will be open to everyone and it's lovely. And, as for the home-made cakes - well come and see for yourself.

With the vicinity in mind, we'd like to include anything and everything (!!!) we can about the Railway Village, including Cambria Place.

### SO THIS IS WHY WE ARE ASKING FOR YOUR HELP

It would be great to list information on as many of the railway cottages as we can, so if you have any ancestors who lived there, at any time, could you please share with us whatever information you have – even if just an address, a name and a date. Any more detailed information would be a bonus and very welcome of course. Many thanks. [nealy1@virginmedia.com](mailto:nealy1@virginmedia.com) or [swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk)

(May we cheekily also ask if there is anyone who could help with typing, please let us know!)

**COMING UP ...**

**THURSDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 7.30 pm via Zoom**

**Tracing a House History by Gill Blanchard**

Gill is a full time historical researcher and has been conducting family, local and house history for many years. She will talk to us about tracing the history of our own home and where our ancestors lived. Find out what sources to use to place a building in time and place and uncover who lived in it, what else it was used for and when it was built.

Those already registered with Glenys Bettley for our Zoom meetings will be contacted direct but for anyone wishing to join in for the first time, please contact her on [glenys.bettley@ntlworld.com](mailto:glenys.bettley@ntlworld.com)

## **WILTSHIRE FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY – Swindon Branch**

**Meetings at the Central Community Centre, Emlyn  
Square, Swindon  
7.30 start (come a bit before for a cuppa!)**

**Are you just starting your family history research or do you  
need an update on how to get your family history  
information?**

**September 22:** we will be concentrating on birth, death and marriage certificates and parish records. We would welcome any examples of these documents which you may have particularly if they are a little out of the ordinary. Perhaps there is a mistake on them or some unexpected information.

**27 October:** we will have a look at the broad topic of census records and the amount of information which can be gained from them. For experienced researchers, please bring along any documents which include interesting or unusual information.

**24 November:** we are looking at ways of storing our research and other sources of information.

**We would particularly welcome anyone who is new to family history research as we will be able to guide you through the various sources of information in an informal way. For the more experienced, however, there is always more to be learned and tips we can pass on to each other.**

For further information: [swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk)  
or ring 01793 822310



## 10 SEPTEMBER – SWINDON HERITAGE FESTIVAL

Swindon Branch, WFHS, will be there at the Central Community Centre so please come along and support the event if you can. If you are available to help Swindon Branch on the day, please let us know. Also open and available to explore are:

- The Railway Village Museum and Village Tours
- The Baker's Café
- The Cricketers Arms
- The Gluepot Public House
- St Mark's Church
- The Carriage Works
- The Pattern Church
- The Health Hydro (Milton Road Baths)

In the Community Centre there will be live music and dance performances, stalls including local authors, crafts and inventive activities. Learn more about local history and inventions. News of progress for the Mechanics Institute and the Cricketers Arms. Meet Heritage Action Zone members. Refreshments served 10 – 4.00 at The Baker's Café and Central Community Centre.

### **MORE FUTURE DATES FOR YOUR DIARY at Central Community Centre**

09 November - 7.15 for 7.30pm: Dr Michael Smith is coming to CCC to do a talk on the beginnings of the Mechanics Building and how and by whom it was all started.

14 November – possibly 2pm – to be confirmed  
Cyber Crime workshop - concentrating on prevention of scams etc and maybe cyber bullying.

### **HAPPY 130th BIRTHDAY**

I'm sure that you would all like to join us in wishing the Swindon Health Hydro a HAPPY 130th BIRTHDAY!

This incredible Grade 2\* listed building has seen a great deal in its lifetime – from the early days when it served the hygiene, health and well-being needs of the local railway community, to playing its part in two world wars, and then serving as a template for the NHS – if only walls could talk!

The Friends of Swindon Health Hydro are a small group working hard to safeguard the future of this unique building that is at the heart of the town's important railway heritage. They would always welcome more help and are particularly lacking in social media and comms skills at present (no formal membership is required).

More information available from [friendsofhealthhydro@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofhealthhydro@gmail.com)

### **GREAT CHOIR – GREAT CAUSE Thamesdown Ladies Choir**

Concert 24<sup>th</sup> September 7.30

**St. Andrew's Methodist Church Moredon Road.**

Proceeds to Swindon Food Operative (Foodbank)

Tickets: £7.50

<https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/St-Andrews-Methodist-Church-Swindon>

**REPORTS** - there are two reports this time, both quite long and so both attached for you to browse through:

Firstly, MY GREAT GREAT GRANDMOTHER THIRZA . This was the talk given to us by Doreen Jones on 28 July at the Central Community Centre in Swindon

Secondly, our visit to the Richard Jefferies Museum at Coate.

And you can learn more about Richard Jefferies with Mike Pringle's talk '**Message in a bottle**' on Wednesday 14 September 2022, 7.30 at the Goddard Park School. This is organised by the Swindon Society – which incidentally celebrates its half-century this year.

### **A FAMILY STORY submitted by Harvey Groves**

(We met Harvey at the Jubilee event at Central Community Centre in June. Both he and his wife have interesting connections and stories. Harvey was actually brought up IN the Faringdon Road Park as his father was the head gardener there. Hence his reference to 'Pop' going to live there with his family. He is writing three stories/memories for us and below is the first. So, many thanks Harvey – who is a volunteer showing visitors around the Railway Village cottage museum.)

### **POP AND FAMILY**

Pop, Fred Mills, was my grandfather, he and my gran lived at the far end of Dean Street 2 doors from Newburn Crescent and backing onto the railway. Both were faithful members of Butterworth street chapel.

My gran died when I was 4 but after her death Pop came to live with us in the park,



We were great friends and shared many happy times, in particular two things spring to mind.

He was, before his retirement, a printer based opposite the Co-op hall with 'Simpsons' and could fluently read anything even in the mirror or upside down, he was excellent at spelling and would quickly correct my mistakes.

Photo: Simpson's Printers - Pop is on the far right of the photo.

I also recall him taking me to a 'kitchen' in Faringdon Road to visit his friend Tommy King to watch the demonstration and tasting of boiled sweets, for some reason paregorics and pear drops still remain on my taste buds.

As far as I can ascertain Pop had 2 brothers and 2 sisters all of whom left Swindon in the twenties to seek their fortune elsewhere. His brothers Charlie and William (Billie) went to Denaby Main near Doncaster to become miners, his older sister Emily became PA to an eminent geologist and his younger sister Annie was for many years in a residential home in Marlborough, quite why I do not know.



I only ever met Charlie, Billie's daughters Emmy and Nan and Auntie Annie. The photo is of Annie taken in the back garden of 73 Dean Street

I visited Denaby when I was in the 6th form and was particularly struck by the living conditions. Emmy was married to a miner and had 3 sons all of whom lived in a two bed terrace backing onto the mine, I remember to this day that Sunday white shirts had to be changed twice to maintain any sense of good laundry.

Billie's daughter Nan became a close family friend and spent most of her annual holidays with us.



Nan is seated – in the middle of the photo.

When I was 14 Nan said it was time I went to stay with her, she lived in Bingely and worked in a mill replacing broken threads (a skilled job I believe). She arranged for me to be cared for by a family across the road while she was at work.

Her neighbours had a son a little older than me and for a few days we became friends. About 20 years later Nan phoned and told me that my boyhood friend was now very famous - Peter Sutcliffe!!!

Pop died before I left school but memories linger and it is only recently that I have realised how little of his family I really know. I guess I must do my research.

This photo purports to be Fred J Mills' grandmother but WHO IS SHE?

Could she possibly be Rachael Mills, nee Matthews, who was married to John Mills? The family were at Castle Eaton at the time of the 1861 census. Rachael may have been born c. 1810 at Shellingford, Berkshire.

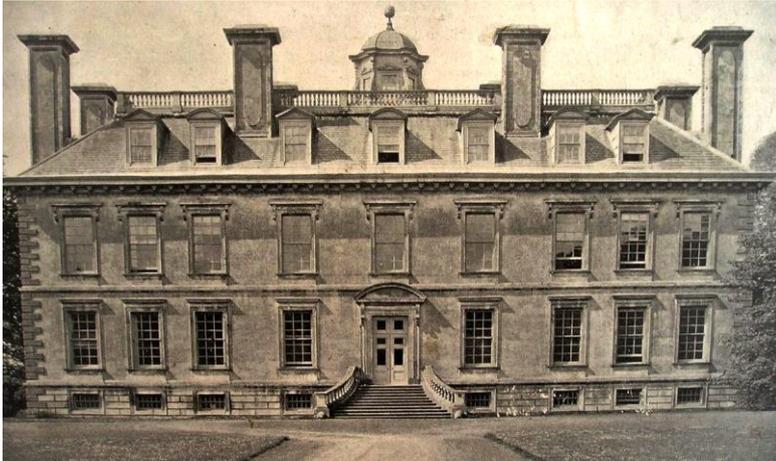


Can anyone help with further information please?

**HARVEY GROVES**

## DISASTROUS FIRE IN SEPTEMBER 1952 DESTROYED COLESHILL HOUSE

(With thanks to [www.faringdon.org](http://www.faringdon.org) for obtaining the photos for us. Check out the link.)



In our June 2021 Newsletter we spoke about Mabel Stranks, Postmistress at Highworth Post Office, and her secret association with the WW2 underground movement at Colehill House.

Such a beautiful building, said to be one of the finest examples of 17<sup>th</sup> century architecture in the country, but sadly destroyed by fire on **23 September 1952**. Seventy years ago.

Apparently the fire started because a painter had been using a blow-lamp to remove paint from a window. Fire seeped through the woodwork, away from the workers, who were not aware of it until too late.

Despite the efforts of 14 fire brigades from three counties, there was an inadequate water supply and, within about four hours, the historic building was reduced to a burned-out shell.

Locals left their work and together, fortunately, were able to save almost everything of value.

Within a short time, the fire had attracted many spectators as flames leapt more than 20 feet above the burning roof.



Two Swindon firemen were injured in the blaze. Fireman H G Hocking of Curtis Street, suffered shock when a turntable ladder he was on collapsed. Sub-officer N G Speight suffered a burning ember in his eye and was treated at St Margaret's Hospital.

Colehill House was completed in 1662 and had dominated the local landscape. During the last War it had a secret life as a training centre for Britain's Auxiliary Units – an unknown fact until just a few years ago.

### **RODBOURNE CHENEY – a Memory from Jean Allen**

Opening W.F.H.S. Newsletter for May, the picture and article about Lower Rodbourne Farm was very familiar to me for I was sitting in the field shown, as my home in Bessemer Close was built on the farm site in 1955.

In 1928 the borough boundaries were extended to include Rodbourne Cheney which until this time had been a separate village. Some streets were renamed and renumbered, some new ones named. Cheney Manor Road was planned to be from Bessemer Road to Northern

Road with numbered spaces for 35 homes to be built joining one end to the other, at £450 for a three bedroom semi, when a week's rent would be under £1. A mortgage would be a struggle but just affordable, but they could take in a paying guest maybe.... The arrival of evacuees in early in September 1939 may have helped, with the few shillings paid for their care.

Northern Road area was completed in 1938 and also houses in Bessemer Road East and West and Somerset Road. Then war was declared and all home building stopped. Men were called up for active service, others on defence work, building blast walls, air raid shelters, airfields and army camps.

In 1942 heavy bombs fell in Ferndale Road at the Northern Road junction killing many victims and damaging and destroying property nearby. With the end of the war in 1945 Bradley's prepared to complete the area as planned, but work was about to start to build St Mary's Primary School, so it was back to the drawing board to get all the houses fitted into the smaller space. Back in 1928 it was unthinkable that all homes would own cars and need garage and parking space, so it took careful planning to fit present needs into the space now available. But they did it, so now we have Bessemer Road East, Bessemer Road West and Bessemer Close, and despite post codes and sat navs people are still finding themselves "the wrong side of the playing field". **JEAN ALLEN**

## RODBOURNE CHENEY NOSTALGIA

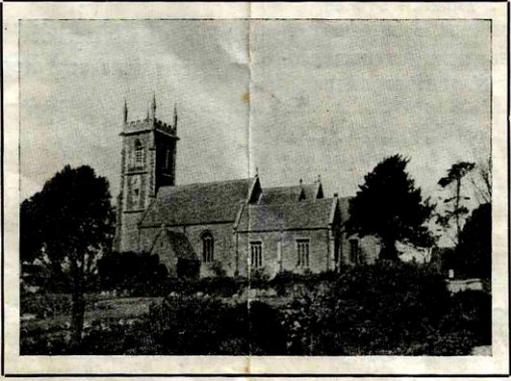
Do these names in connection with St Mary's Church, Rodbourne Cheney, ring any bells with you? Perhaps the old church itself evokes some memories?

Do let us know – [nealy1@virginmedia.com](mailto:nealy1@virginmedia.com) or [swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk)

You may also like to see some of the advertisements that appeared in that September issue.

SEPTEMBER, 1940. PRICE 2d.

# RODBOURNE CHENEY Parish Magazine



*Vicar*—The REV. S. F. ALLISON, M.A.  
*Curate*—The REV. G. J. KNOTT, M.A., 9 Harvey Grove.  
*Churchwardens*—Mr. H. ROBINS, The Manorette, Rodbourne Cheney.  
 Mr. T. H. BLACKWELL, The Broadway, Rodbourne Cheney  
*Sidesmen*—Messrs. A. CUSS, R. H. DADGE, J. ENSTONE, M. FOREST, E. FOYLE, A. FRICKER,  
 K. GORE, R. H. GOSLING, W. GREENAWAY, A. J. HEDGES, K. N. KNAPP, P. OSBORNE,  
 E. J. PALMER, C. T. PAUL, J. REEVES, S. ROBERTS, E. M. TURTLE.  
*Organist*—Mr. A. BUTTON, 284, Marlborough Road, Swindon.  
*Sexton*—Mr. BOUNDS, 2 Church Walk South.  
*Secretary of Church Council*—Mr. T. I. HOLBOROW, 2a Churchward Avenue.  
*Magazine Secretary*—Mrs. REEVES, 228 Cheney Manor Road.  
*Weekly Offering Secretary*—Mr. J. C. SMITH, 2b Churchward Avenue.

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<b>Maison Harbour</b> - Ladies' and Children's Hairdresser. Beauty Specialist. Registered Eugène Waver. Park House, Church Walk, Rodbourne Cheney.	Phone, Swindon 2822 <b>O. F. JONES</b> BUNGALOW STORES. WHITWORTH ROAD. The Little Shop with the Large Stock. Groceries, Confectionery, Tobacco, Hosiery, Patent Medicines, Corn, etc. Noted for our Service and Prompt Attention.
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<b>FREDERICK J. LOVELL</b> A.T.C.L., L.L.C.M., A.L.C.M. 340, Cheney Manor Road. TEACHER OF PIANOFORTE. ORGAN AND THEORY OF MUSIC. (Two Manual Organ available for Lessons and Practices). Pupils prepared for Examinations if desired. TERMS MODERATE.	<b>B. &amp; F. LANE</b> General Stores and Post Office, 84, Cheney Manor Road. BEST VARIETY OF CAKES. DELICIOUS ICES IN SEASON.

## SWINDON ADVERTISER

**11 September 1895:** The FA cup was stolen from football outfitters William Shillock in Birmingham – 68 years later and 83 year old man confessed that he had melted it down to make counterfeit half-crown coins.

**11 September 1971:** A group of 86 women who worked at the Garrard hi-fi plant in Swindon's Newcastle Street, petitioned Mary Wilson, wife of Labour leader and former Prime Minister Harold, to prevent ITV from rescheduling Crossroads from 6.35 pm to 4.30 pm. The women, all staunch fans of the motel-based soap opera, said their shift patterns meant an earlier broadcast time would mean they were unable to watch the show.

Note: When we were holidaying at St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, one year, we were exploring the grave yard (full of interesting stories – shipwrecks etc) and looked for the last resting place of Harold Wilson.

A lady spotted us and said 'he's over there. – she had guessed who we were looking for. She came across and chatted. It seems that she used to play golf with the ex-PM.



Another little story about Harold Wilson when PM and St Mary's, although nothing whatsoever to do with family history ...

Bad weather led to very limited supplies of newspapers to St Mary's one day. One very pompous and disagreeable visitor complained bitterly that priority was given to local regular customers and said he was going to take the matter up with his MP. The shopkeeper had spied a regular customer coming into the shop wearing raincoat and smoking his pipe. So he said to the visitor 'let's take it to the top shall we?'. Whereupon the chap scarpered, realising that Harold Wilson had entered the shop. Yvonne

**11 September 2001:** 2,977 people, 67 of them British, were killed when passenger jets hijacked by al-Quida terrorists struck the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon outside Washington. A fourth hijacked plane crashed into a field in Pennsylvania.

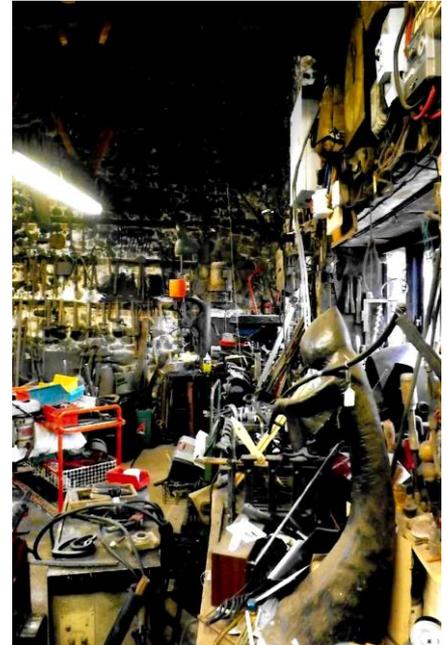
## OLD OCCUPATIONS – THE BLACKSMITH

The village could be a very insular place in days gone by and possibly quite isolated. Poorer villagers would, by necessity, have to grow, mend, buy locally or trudge by foot or pony to the nearest market, which could be some way away. Roads may have been fraught with danger because of poor condition, or even highwaymen, especially until the arrival of the turnpikes. There was perhaps an occasional visit from an itinerant hawker, tinker or chapman.



There was one person the village could not possibly do without – the blacksmith.

Most of the local population would have worked on the land, relying on the local blacksmith to make their tools, for example scythes, sickles, axes, knives, household irons, gate and even wheel rims.



The sound of the blacksmith's hammer on anvil would echo throughout the village, although the forge was often sited at crossroads, thus attracting any passing trade as well.

Although it probably fell to the farrier to make horseshoes, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the blacksmith would have adapted his expertise and experience to include working on the boneshaker bicycle and horseless carriage. Moreover, he may then have turned his hand to mechanics and maintenance.



Father and Son  
Marc Hart and Noah  
at Aldbourne Forge



and 40 -50 years earlier when Marc's  
Uncle Alan Liddiard  
was the Aldbourne Blacksmith

Old Town, Swindon, had five blacksmiths listed in 1844, two in Wood Street, one in Short Hedge (now Devizes Road) and two in the High Street. Eleven years later it seems that only

two survived in the area. However, by 1867 Old and New Swindon combined again had five blacksmiths.

Please do share your stories – about the blacksmith, or some other occupation that has changed over the years or perhaps no longer exists. [nealy1@virginmedia.com](mailto:nealy1@virginmedia.com) or [swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk](mailto:swindon@wiltshirefhs.co.uk)

**And another question to end with – do you recognise this building?**

It would have very many stories to tell if only we could turn back the clock! Many of YOU may also have stories, even memories, connected to this place. Any ideas?



Our Autumn meetings could just give you ...

*'The clue that cracks the case'*



(You are receiving this email from Yvonne Neal, Secretary of the Swindon Branch of Wiltshire Family History Society, as a member, or interested party, living in or near Swindon. Your email details are held securely and not divulged to any other persons or organisations. Please let me know if you want to be removed from the list by emailing [nealy1@virginmedia.com](mailto:nealy1@virginmedia.com))