



# Corsham Spotlight

Journal of the Corsham Civic Society  
<http://www.corshamcivicsociety.co.uk>

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Society welcomes new members. Join us to enjoy talks on local subjects, trips to interesting places and the company of local people interested in both the history and future of this lovely Wiltshire town. For membership contact Jean Beech on 01249 713833

## Celebrating 175 years of G.W.R.



*Train emerging from Box Tunnel, an engraving by John Bourne in 1846. Note the early signal on the right with its own 'signalman'.*

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John Maloney, at:  
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## From the Chairman

I am currently typing this paragraph on the longest day of 2016, Monday, June 20<sup>th</sup>, with the window open and listening to the rain falling, another dismal day I'm afraid, but hopefully, warm and sunny days will follow!

This edition of *Spotlight* is just slightly *railway* orientated, not just because of my interests in such things, but on the 30<sup>th</sup> June we shall celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first passenger train to travel from London to Bristol through Corsham station and Box Tunnel. I would think that Brunel, and his fellow Great Western directors, were delighted that after 8 years of planning and hard work, the goal had been achieved of rail travel between two great cities in the United Kingdom, London and Bristol. I'm sure if Isambard Kingdom Brunel were alive today he would be very interested to see the progress being made in electrifying his railway, which should be completed, we are told, by 2018.

In September we are again, as a Society, supporting the nationally organised 'Heritage Open Days' with a programme of events between Thursday, September 8<sup>th</sup> and Sunday, September 11<sup>th</sup>. May I place on record my grateful thanks to Pat Whalley who stepped in as Lead Organiser of our events, at the last moment due my personal family commitments. I hope as many of you as possible will be able to enjoy the programme we have organised this year. Further details are found on the back.

**Michael Rumsey**

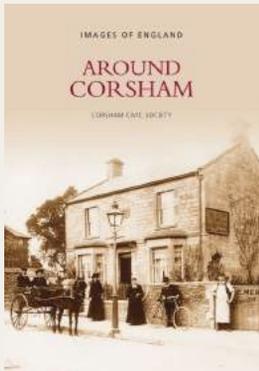
## Membership News

We extend a warm welcome to Linda Brown, John and Olga Wilson who have recently joined the Society.

We are saddened to report the sudden death of Kathleen Tout in March. Our thoughts and condolences go to Michael Tout and his sister Pat and their families. Kathleen was 88 years old and some of you may remember her before she moved to live in Northampton.

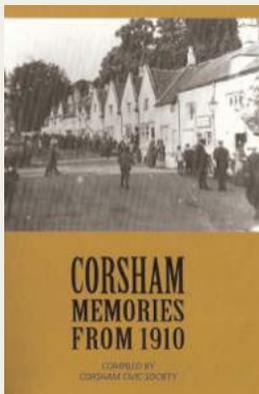
## Civic Society Bookcase

There are a number of books about Corsham and our area, some out of print, others still available. The CCS has published three books over recent years:



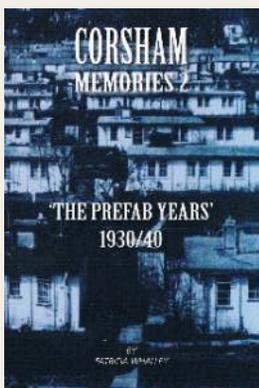
*Around Corsham* compiled by Anne Lock, our President, depicts archive photographs of our town, and many stories of the great and the good of Corsham's past.

Available from Corsham Book Shop or members of the CCS Committee. Price: £12.95.



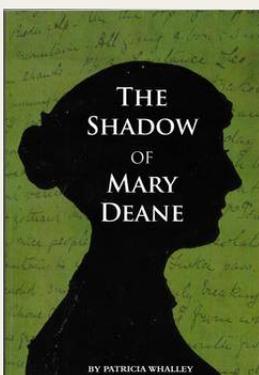
*Corsham Memories from 1910* is a collection of interviews with local people who were born between 1910 and the 1940s. The Society feels it is important to record as much as we can of the town's past and the way people lived.

Available from Corsham Book shop, the Tourist Information office. Price £9.99.



*Corsham Memories II "The Prefab Years 1930/40"* a record of interviews with local people who came to live in Corsham as a result of WWII. Covering the 30/40/50's austerity years when food was in the forefront of most peoples minds!

Available from Corsham Bookshop, the Tourist Information Office, or members of the CCS Committee. Price: £9.99.



*The Shadow of Mary Deane* contains a diary commentary of life in Box, Bath, and the surrounding area during the late 19th Century, and particularly between 1915-1917. The diaries were discovered locally, and one of our member's, Pat Whalley, has researched the family to produce a picture of this Victorian Gentlewoman, her friends and associates in the village.

Available at Corsham Bookshop, and the Tourist Information office. Price £12.00.

## Heritage Open Days: 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> September 2016

All tickets will be available from the Corsham Tourist Office, Arnold House, High Street, Corsham from Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August until Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

### Programme of Events

#### Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> September

##### **Bath Stone Quarry Museum Trust Collection**

5 Masons Wharf,  
Potley Lane Corsham SN13 9FY  
Two visits at 10.30am and 2.30am  
Ten people per session  
Tickets are required

#### Friday 9<sup>th</sup> September

##### **Rudloe Stoneworks**

Potley Lane, Corsham SN13 9RS  
One visit at 12 noon  
Limited to 30 people  
Tickets are required

##### **Dr Negley Harte's Historic walk in the Town**

Starting from the Parish Church Car Park,  
SN13 0BY at 2pm  
Limited to 25 people  
Tickets are required

##### **Illustrated Talk by Ernest Hird on the History of the Lady Margaret Hungerford's Almshouses**

To be held at the Almshouses, Pound Pill,  
SN13 9HT at 2pm and 3.30pm  
Limited to 20 people per session  
Tickets are required

#### Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September

##### **Visit Monks Park Chapel built in 1662**

Monks Lane, Corsham SN13 9PH  
Open between 10am and 1pm  
No tickets required

##### **Dr Negley Harte's Historic walk in the Town**

Starting from the Parish Church Car Park,  
SN13 0BY at 2pm  
Limited to 25 people  
Tickets are required



A Heritage Open Days banner, put up by the Corsham Civic Society, flying over the High Street



Negley's walkers set out on their Historic Walk out by the Parish Church

## The 2016 Corsham Walking Festival

Corsham's third annual walking festival took place over three *mostly fine* days, Friday 17<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> June. I can only say *mostly fine* as the last walk on Friday was caught in a thunderstorm with heavy rain and the final walk of the festival on Sunday, a history tour of the town, which included your Chairman, Michael Rumsey as the expert, also got a little damp.

Although the final figures are not yet in, it seems that the event attracted nearly 400 participants to the 17 walks and the evening quiz with a buffet. We strive to freshen up the walking programme each year and recognise that people have different reasons for coming to the festival. This year the programme included walks varying from about 1.5 miles up to 15 miles, some just walking for the pleasure of it but others with a theme such as history, geology, wildflowers, mindfulness and not forgetting a walk to keep the children engaged and occupied on a Saturday afternoon! Hopefully something for almost everyone.

The festival was started three years ago with the core objectives of getting local people walking and also attracting walkers from outside of the immediate area so that they might stay for short breaks in the town and thus help to support local businesses. This is such a beautiful area, with some fine walking and it deserves to be explored.

The two photographs are of walkers at Brown's Folly, near Bathford, listening to a presentation by Professor Maurice Tucker, an eminent geologist, whilst another group learns about the architecture of Church Street, Corsham from a Mr Michael Rumsey. We were pleased to be able to describe the latter walk as being fully accessible due to recent alterations to the main gates of The Corsham Court Avenue in Lacock Road.

Do visit us at [www.corshamwalkingfestival.org.uk](http://www.corshamwalkingfestival.org.uk)

**Colin Craddock, Walking Routes Coordinator**



Expert Michael Rumsey, far left, leading a walking group through Church Street in Corsham



Walkers at Brown's Folly, near Bathford, with Maurice Tucker

## **The Coming of the Great Western Railway 175 years ago this Summer**

A railway between Bristol and London was proposed as early as 1824 but it wasn't until 1833 did a committee of interested persons meet in Bristol and form a company called the 'Great Western Railway' and appointed a 27-year engineer named Isambard Kingdom Brunel. I.K. Brunel, together with his father, Sir Marc Brunel, had engineered and built the first tunnel under the river Thames in London, a tunnel still in use today as part of the London underground system. The first Parliamentary bill was defeated but the second was passed in 1835 but there was much debate on the safety of passengers going through Box tunnel, which caused concern at the committee stage of the bill. The main thrust of the attack was, as described, 'on the monstrous and extraordinary, most dangerous and impracticable' tunnel at Box. Luckily Brunel was on hand to give his professional advice that passengers would be safe and not suffocated on their journey through the 3,212 yards underground at Box Hill.

As soon as the Parliamentary bill received Royal Assent, work started on building the line, which was to take 5 years to complete the 118 miles between London Paddington and Bristol Temple Meads. Work on Box tunnel was started early in 1836 with the digging of six permanent and two temporary vertical shafts varying in depth from 300 feet, at the Box end, to 70 feet at the Corsham end as the tunnel was being constructed on an incline of 1 in a 100. Work progressed steadily, but from time to time, some shafts were inundated with water and steam pumps were installed to clear the water and enable work to be continued. Approximately 1,200 men and 100 horses were employed on the tunnel's construction but this was increased to 4,000 men and 300 horses towards the end of construction. A tonne of gunpowder and a tonne of candles were consumed weekly and during the 5-year construction period, more than 100 men were killed in various accidents.

As work on the tunnel was progressing, so was work on getting the line being constructed from Bristol to Bath and London to Chippenham. The first train from Bristol to Bath left at 8am on 30th August 1840, with much flag waving and applause. Some 9 months later, on Monday, 31st May 1841, the first train from London to Chippenham arrived with Brunel and various GWR directors and senior staff who were later entertained to breakfast by the Mayor of Chippenham and certain town worthies. A month later, on Wednesday, 30th June 1841, a train left London, bound for Bristol, and thus became the first train to pass through Corsham and onwards through the tunnel to Bath and Bristol.



**The view from Box Hill overlooking the village and the railway towards Middle Hill tunnel.  
Engraving by John Bourne 1846.**

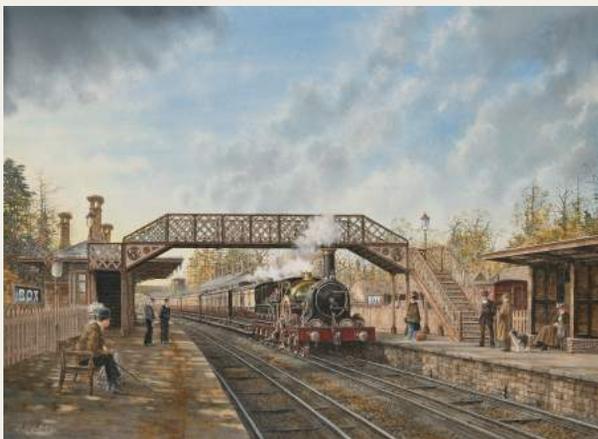
The cost of the tunnel in 1841 was approx. £500,000 or nearly £2,000,000 at today's prices. Other facts and figures include that at the time of building, Box tunnel was the longest tunnel in the country. Out of the 3,212 yards that the tunnel measures, 506 yards remain today in natural stone while the remainder is brick lined. The sun does shine through Box tunnel, but not on Brunel's birthday, April 9th, more probably on either April 6th or 7th and very occasionally on the 10th. The other myth that a secret station lies in the tunnel is certainly a myth but there is an underground lake beneath the tunnel, near to the Corsham end, and Network Rail do have an inflatable dinghy available to allow them to inspect the rail structure above the water. There's only been one accident in the tunnel and that happened on 16th September 1893 when engine no: 3021, 'Wigmore Castle' broke its front axle approaching the Box end of the tunnel and derailed. No one was injured luckily, but the engine was returned to Swindon works and rebuilt, along with other members of the same class to a 4-2-2 formation to become one of the most beautiful class of locomotives ever to emerge from Swindon Works, the 'Dean Singles'.

With the approach of electrification of the main London to Bristol line, much work is needed still to be completed with the installation of a special overhead ramp to allow the trains to take power, through the tunnel, and the upgrading of the various bridge structures for safety reasons, so there is still much to do before the first electrically powered trains appear in the Corsham/Box area.

## Michael Rumsey



'Firefly', a full size replica of Daniel Gooch's famous class of locomotives built at Swindon and probably the engine that brought the first train through Box tunnel in 1841.



A broad gauge express from Bristol to Paddington powering through Box station in 1890. Note the footbridge, which wasn't provided until 1884 after a number of passengers had been killed crossing the line after alighting from their train. The water colour is by the celebrated artist Sean Bolan and appears here by kind permission of the Great Western Society and the artist.



One of William Dean's famous 4-2-2 singles of the mid 1890's emerging from the Corsham end of the tunnel. The tunnel to the right gave access to the stone quarries of the Hartham & Yockney Stone Quarrying Company.

## My Life on the Railways - By Don Rogers

In 1948 I was made redundant at the age of 16 thus ending my career as an Improver Motor Mechanic and this was all because of the then Persian oil crisis with no petrol available except for essential purposes. I went to the Labour Exchange and was offered one or two jobs and both of them were obviously for a tea boy. I declined both! The young lady assistant, barely two years older than me, advised me that the only other work would be a railway engine cleaner, a position usually lasting for only a few weeks before lads returned from other work as 'Engine Cleaners' was very dirty work and had unsocial hours.

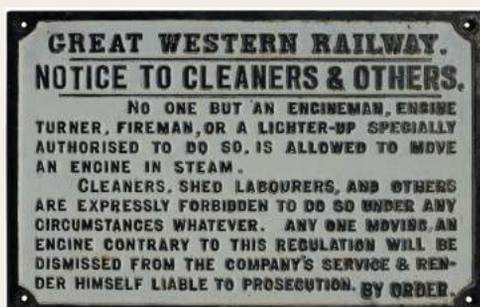


'Young Don'

So I tried for the position of Engine Cleaner and this involved an interview with the Locomotive Superintendent at Bristol and a medical examination at Swindon. Part of that medical examination included sorting out various colours from a huge ball of wool, I found out later that this was to make sure I wasn't colour blind. I passed both examinations and was then issued with overalls and, most important, a cap with the letters GWR, though by then all the railways were nationalised under the heading of British Railways.

After a few weeks learning the tricks of the trade I was, on occasion, utilised as a Fireman on the yard pilots at Chippenham (shunting engines). In the July I was allocated my first mainline turn, Saturday evening banker. The engine waited on the middle road at Chippenham West, standing over the Western Arches, waiting to travel 'light', if necessary, to Box to push the express Bristol to Paddington goods if the load was too heavy for the 1 in a 100 incline through Box Tunnel. 'Banker not required', the signalman shouted through his loud hailer so we took the engine back to the shed and I went home deflated.

The young lady at the Labour Exchange may have been right as I retired after 46 years of footplate service in Dec. 1994, most of it rather more productive than my first trip.



A cast iron railway notice addressing engine cleaners

So my time working with steam engines had begun and following my humiliation on Saturday's no trip to Box and back, I cycled to Lacock to see my girlfriend. Given the ultimatum by her of 'Railways or me', there was no contest. I had a uniform cap with GWR on it and I was not going to surrender that. After the briefest snog, we parted, her back to Woolworths and me back to the engine shed.

A vacancy for a Fireman occurred at Chippenham and me, being senior engine cleaner, was duly promoted, which was unusual to be promoted at the home depot on the Western Region of BR.

The Line of Promotion was strictly adhered to.

1. Starting grade - Engine cleaner
2. Passed - Engine cleaner could be employed as a fireman when required.
3. Fireman.
4. Passenger Fireman (only at depots with Auto trains - push and pull work)
5. Passed Fireman - could be employed as a driver when required.
6. Driver - drivers and firemen had to work for 5 years in the grade before attaining the top rate of pay. Drivers restricted to the yard and shed duties never went beyond the 4 years rate.

## 1950.

My National Service could be deferred no longer so I went off to Bulford for my induction and training. There was much activity in the Far East for which I had to undergo continuation training in jungle warfare around the Wylde valley and river, a most interesting chapter in my life.



1400 Class 0-4-2 tank arriving in Calne with auto trailers



Wilts Yeomanry tanks on their way to Tidworth

## 1952.

I returned to footplate duty and was promoted to Passenger Fireman and in 1953 was further promoted to Passed Fireman, one of the youngest ever to qualify. Most of the 'turns' at Chippenham were worked by 0-6-0 pannier tanks of the 5700 class, some very old and past their sell by date. The elite 'turns' were worked with 0-4-2 1400 class tanks and these could really move. One was clocked doing 80 mph along the straight section between Gloucester and Stonehouse junction, but it only had one trailer to pull at the time! Sometimes a class 4500 or 5500 2-6-2 Prairie tank would appear, especially over the weekends. A tender locomotive was only provided if there was a long engineering turn where water could not be obtained.

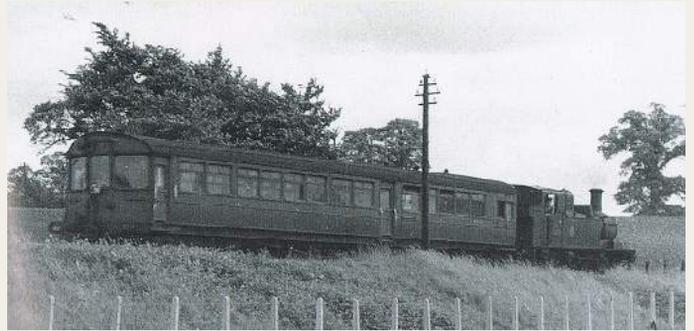
## 1953 onwards.

I spent most of my time at Chippenham on Auto trains that worked the Calne branch and as far as Codford, Frome and Devizes. The Sunday 'turn' also went to Swindon. Typical of an 'Auto' turn was an afternoon working to Westbury where two auto trailers, as the carriages were called, were attached at the chimney end of the loco.

*Article continues next page...*



**GWR engine shed like Chippenham's with a Prairie tank, 0-6-0 pannier tanks and 0-4-0 auto engines**



**Auto trailer leading the engine approaching Calne Junction, Chippenham**

We travelled from Westbury to Bradford-on-Avon to pick up hordes of children after their school day was over and then returned to Westbury and on to Codford, disgorging and picking up pupils at every station and halt on the way. It was always hoped that the boys and girls sat in separate trailers to ensure good behaviour! From Codford we travelled to Devizes, detaching the trailers at Westbury on the way. From Devizes, it was back to Westbury via Holt Junction and sometimes on to Frome with empty coaching stock. From Frome, it was back to Westbury and wait for the connecting service from Salisbury and then we returned home to Chippenham. During the dark nights, the guard would be blowing out the lamps on the paths leading to the platforms while the Fireman dealt with those on the platform. On arrival at Chippenham, we would stable the trailers, drive to the shed and book off after quite a busy day of driving and firing.

A good 'turn', that I often worked, as I preferred late 'turns', especially if they finished in time for some personal lubrication as I did, was also eligible for 'short' mileage of 9d per day. Those were the days that sadly disappeared upon the introduction of the diesel multiple units (DMU's). These units are now called 'Heritage Units', and they made many footplate staff redundant, as, after a short time, they became driver only as far as the footplate staffs were concerned. Some of the older drivers could not get the hang of them and retired. I used to get a good night 'turn' as a driver as it was deemed necessary to nurse them at night so they would be ready for the early trains.

A little later a Class 3 diesel locomotive was sent to Chippenham to work the Calne branch goods 'turns', but these were getting smaller with the rapid decline in traffic. By 1960 the promotion system altered so that transfers and applications filled vacancies. I applied for and obtained a position as a driver at Swindon as I thought, quite correctly as it turned out, that Chippenham engine shed would soon be closed. The junior drivers at Swindon worked mainly on the Class 8 shunting locos in the traffic yards and the Class 3's worked in the factory sidings. It was boring, but busy is the best way to describe this. After 3 years or so I, along with 19 others, was made redundant and 'Put Back', meaning I would usually work again as a Fireman, or, as they became known, a 'Second Man'. In 1970 vacancies occurred at the Westbury Depot, I applied for one and became a driver again. Westbury was a mixed traffic depot including the stone trains that were slowly moving the Mendips to the South East for building roads. Some of the trains weighed 4,800 tonnes and were driver only. Eventually, I developed an eyesight problem and was rostered only on Sprinter trains, the successors to the old DMUs. I was now the only 'passenger only' driver at the freight depot until 1994 when I took the opportunity to retire early, the best move I ever made.

I have been happy to have other interests including service in the Territorial Army where I became Quarter Master Sergeant in the 4th Wilts. I eventually joined the Royal Engineers 204 Squadron becoming, once again, the Squadron Quarter Master Sergeant.

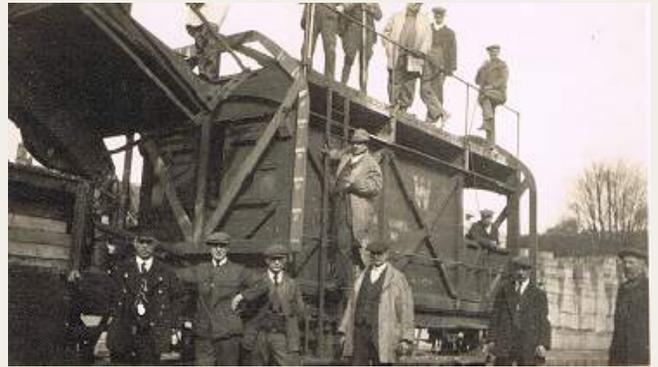
In 1966, following the demise of the 43rd Divisional Engineers I founded the Chippenham ex-Service Club and was allowed to use the TA Centre until new premises could be found. We found premises over Burton's the tailor in Chippenham High Street and stayed there until the rents, following a change of ownership, became impossible to pay as 54p increased to £9.50 per square foot.

I currently survive solving the quick crossword before breakfast, keeping an allotment and getting about as much as possible.

**Don Rogers**

## *Photographs from the Past*

The Rev. Vere Awdry, father of Rev. Wilbert Awdry of 'Thomas the tank engine' fame, moved to Box during the First World War, still grieving for the loss of his eldest son Carol, who was killed in August 1914 at the battle of Mons. Vere Awdry was a railway enthusiast and a photographer and I was indeed fortunate when Wilbert Awdry presented me one day with a small collection of his father's photographs taken in the Box area during the First World War and subsequent years. Here are a few of the photographs with brief descriptions.



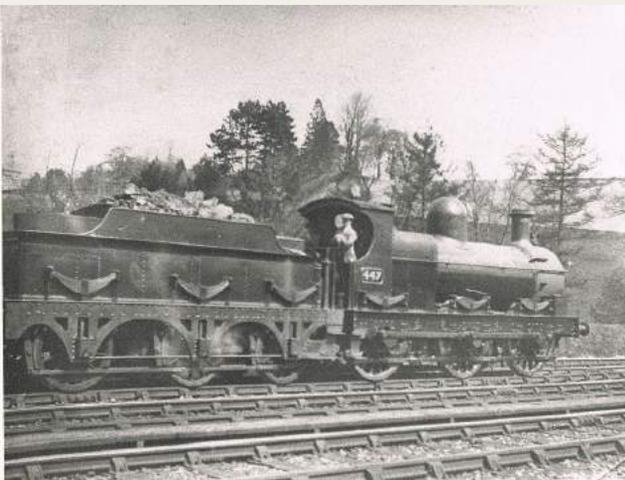
Above we see the annual Box Tunnel inspection with members of the local platelayers gang appearing in the photographs.

To the left, the Box platelayers (with some additional help) relay a set of track between Middle Hill tunnel and Box Station.

Rev. Vere Awdry also enjoyed taking photographs of various trains that passed through Box station. On the left, engine number 3340 'Camel', built at Swindon in 1899, speeds through with an express. 'Camel' was the first 'Bulldog' class to be fitted with a domeless boiler and was withdrawn in June 1934. On the right we have another member of the 'Bulldog' class, there were over 150, of them built, waiting in the siding for an express to pass. Note the busy stone yard on the right of the train.



Here we have a stopping train, headed by an 0-6-0 pannier tank, emerging from Middle Hill tunnel, slowing down, ready to stop at Box station. This was the only station in Box, at the time. The halt at Mill Lane didn't open for business until 31<sup>st</sup> March 1930, years after this photo was taken, which was, probably, in 1917/18. Who is the small child on the right? Wilbert Awdry's daughter and son don't think it's their father.



Here is the Swindon built 'Standard Goods' or the 388 class, no: 447 quietly waiting in the sidings at Box station in 1916. The engine itself was built in July 1868 and was withdrawn from service in August 1916, but that wasn't the end of its career. It was sold to the Railway Operating Department and shipped to Serbia where it worked on the railways there with 5 more engines of the same class, but it didn't return to GWR. Some of the other engines ended up working on the Ottoman Railway, I wonder if 447 did too.

The Civic Society would like to thank all those who have contributed to this edition of Spotlight through either their wonderful written sentiments or personal photographs.

## My First Year in Parliament - Michelle Donelan

*In early May the Civic Society invited local MP for the Chippenham constituency to talk about her impressions and reactions about having been an MP for a year. Although she spoke of some of her campaigns which aim to “benefit the local area”, she maintained this was “not a party political broadcast”.*

She began her address celebrating the Civic Society as “integral” to the community and thanked us for such an opportunity to speak so candidly with her electorate. The change from average person to MP was “life transforming”, “dreamlike”, “surreal” and left her “gobsmacked”. Apparently, a satchel was given to her upon entering Parliament and she was treated as a child, but considering the bickering among both parties lately, this is not very difficult to imagine. Considering the size of Parliament, a map would have greatly helped navigate through the centuries-old site and as her office was quite far away, she would have to be very quick in order to not be late for a vote. During her first PMQs, she described her “legs wobbled and knees shook” as she asked her first question, though since she has had three more. These 30 seconds or so each time was described as crucial, and of most value to a politicians time as a backbench MP is able to raise significant local issues to the highest authority.



**Michelle Donelan MP**

The most frustrating moments came when she would not get picked to speak for debates, like the one concerning assisted dying, despite vying for attention the whole time. Having come from a business background, the whipping process was highly procedural and there was a steep learning curve to be overcome. To achieve her goals and local plan, which can be found on her website, she would first have to attend regular surgeries and house visits to see what was ailing the community, and then spend Monday - Thursday in London medicating it. Her plan includes opening the Corsham station; a common promise and one which her predecessor could not commit to, boosting the campaign concerning the MOD and restoring the declining High Street.



**Donelan speaking at the Pound Arts Centre, accompanied by Michael Rumsey on stage**

After her speech, a quick Q&A found out the highlights of her time as an MP was being elected, taking the oath of allegiance in Parliament and being successful in providing more funding for Wiltshire schools. The low points came when she would have to make tough decisions, but found them rewarding nonetheless. There was confusion when the election of the local police commissioner was raised, mainly as to what they stood for and why they needed to be represented by a political party at all. Although she was for remaining in the EU, she believed we would survive outside and has recently supported Theresa May to achieve this as the next Prime Minister.

**Jujhar Garcha**

## The Demise of the Copenacre Site

We must all have been very relieved to see the demolition of those badly abused buildings take place over the last few months. Just to have the eyesore removed from the entrance to Corsham can only be an asset to how the town might be viewed by passers-by on the A4. The site will become predominately another housing estate, and hopefully, the services currently provided in the town can continue to support its new inhabitants. But perhaps we can just have one last nostalgic look at what this site provided to the town whilst in existence for almost 50 years.

The Royal Naval Stores Depot opened at Copenacre in 1942 at a cost of £308,500 initially to house underwater (SONAR) equipment underground. These old quarries provided a safe and stable environment for electronic stores, and in 1945 another quarry was acquired at Spring (now Spring Park) in Westwells Rd. Between 1951/55 Copenacre was extended to twice its original size, and by 1955 another quarry had been obtained at Monks Park .

This expansion allowed for the storage of hundreds of other items, and also the transfer of many other people from the north, who came in 1959/60 to help run the stores, the testing facilities, and issue the items to the Fleet. To accommodate them a wide housing programme was developed, council estates in Chippenham and Corsham were allocated as 'Admiralty' houses, and Corsham became their home.

In 1962 Copenacre got it's first computer, a massive piece of kit which would be laughed at today, however, it served the site well for 12 years, and there were many subsequent installations until we arrived at the computer systems we recognise today.

By 1966 there was a transfer of Headquarters staff from London and in 1968 another department from Foxhill, Bath, was posted to Corsham. By this time the organisation was one of the largest Government establishments in the country and employed some 1700 people both above and below ground.

Many same family members worked at the Depot for many years. Fathers, Mothers, sons, daughters, aunts and uncles, and in-laws centred their lives around this organisation. It did not do to criticise a colleague - you may be speaking to a relative!

There was one 'blip' in the story when in 1969 there were one or two disastrous fires in other storage facilities in the UK, which highlighted the possible risk to underground storage. An investigation concluded there were risks, and though Copenacre had an excellent fire prevention record, three options were forwarded: a) part storage above ground, b) complete storage above ground, or c) find another above ground MOD site.



The abandoned remains of the Copenacre site



**Copenacre as a Royal Naval Store Depot**

It was known that RAF Hartlebury in Worcester was being vacated, and it was proposed that the 3 sites known as RNSD Copenacre should be transferred to Hartlebury, Worcestershire. This caused an outcry, with many local dignitaries and organisations backing the local unions; the media became interested, and the case was made that Corsham and the surrounding district would be left bereft with the departure of such a large and strong organisation. At the instigation of the then Bishop of Bristol, there was a public enquiry held in 1973, but it was not until October 1974, and after considerable work undertaken by the campaigners, that the decision not to close the Depot was made.

So things quietened down, until July 1991 when the Secretary of State for Defence announced a reduction in the surface and submarine fleets, which would naturally reduce the need for supporting and supplying these vessels – and thus Copenacre was to close by March 1997. Despite renewed efforts by many, the ‘writing was on the wall’, a new office block was to be built at Abbey Wood Bristol, and the underground storage areas were to be closed.

The unravelling and relocation of so many interconnecting bodies within this massive organisation was considerable, and the impact on the families in the town was surely traumatic. It would take some time to relocate so many people.

The underground facilities were sealed at Hartham, and the land above ground put up for sale, which brings us to the present. The sites at Spring quarry and Monks Park are in new hands.

There is a new MOD facility at Westwells Rd, (locally known as Basil Hill) so Corsham has not quite lost its connection with the Military.

But this was certainly an important chapter in the town’s history.

*Source: The History of RNSD Copenacre by Pat Whalley*

## Corsham - A Garrison Town

### *When did Corsham become a favourite of the military?*

It appears to have started in 1927, when the security at storage sites elsewhere had come into question, and a search was on to find other possible safe storage areas for ammunition. The abundance of the empty underground mines in or near Corsham was identified as just waiting for a new use. But it was not until 1935 that Corsham's suitability really became evident, and was put to the test.

First, the army required storage for ammunition, and the Corsham Ammunition Depot was slowly brought into being. (Locals called it the 'Corsham Ammunition Dump', or just 'The Dump'.)

It was not long before the RAF & Admiralty also expressed an interest in the tunnels, and a whole new storage regime was born.

Having a need to support all this activity, personnel were required to monitor the projects, and so it was natural that the services should set up bases here: Basil Hill Barracks were established in 1936 when a large part of the Pockeridge estate was purchased for the use of the RAOC.

The RAF brought officers from No 10 group to RAF Rudloe Manor mansion in 1940, and the Navy established a 'Leadership Training Establishment' at Royal Arthur, Westwells Rd, in about 1947.

There are many many more facts to be found about the development of the services and their work in the area, but these are well documented elsewhere and are far too detailed to repeat here. Suffice to say that Corsham had a population of 3,754 recorded in 1931, and in 1951 this had almost trebled to 9,268 persons.

*Corsham had become a garrison town.*

It was quite natural to walk down the street and find uniformed men, and women, passing by, sometimes in exercise mode, sometimes marching, or at leisure. The Remembrance Day Services were a joy to behold, bands and marching feet. Everyone came out to watch, if not to actually take part.

However, time marches on, and our map of Corsham has changed considerably. Quarries and bases have closed, buildings have been erased, and we have entered a new era, with the MOD Joint Forces Command at Basil Hill, which encompasses all 3 Services.

It is good that Corsham is still able to make a contribution to the defence of the realm.



The new era MOD site at Basil Hill

### Pat Whalley

*Sources: Secret Underground Cities by Nick McCamley.  
Second World War Secret Bunkers by Nick McCamley.  
Corsham Facts & Folklore by Pat Whalley.*

## 'Young' Pickwickians - Part One

### Introduction

I should start by making clear that 'young' in this context actually means 'newcomers' to Pickwick. My wife, Cath, and I moved to 12 Pickwick at the end of January 2015. We had previously lived for nearly 40 years in Herne Hill, South London. Having recently retired, we moved to the area to be near our daughter, Anna, and family who live in Chippenham.

We have spent our careers in archaeology, both at Museum of London: Cath for 40 years, latterly in its Archaeological Archive Research Centre, and myself for 19 years, latterly as Principal Excavations Officer, City of London. We were involved in major archaeological excavations and published books and articles about the results. In 1989, I was made a Freeman of the City of London for "services to the archaeology of the City of London". I also worked as Deputy Project Director, Stonehenge New Visitor Centre project for English Heritage (2001-2005), a version of which opened in 2013. Recently, Cath was presented with the Ralph Merrifield Award 2015 by the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society *for long service to London's Archaeology*.

### Background and History

When Cath and I were staying in Chippenham, looking for a new home in North Wiltshire, the owner of the rather listed B&B house in which we stayed showed us a history of the house researched by Ellen Leslie [[www.ellenleslie.com](http://www.ellenleslie.com)]. We were very impressed with the contents, writing, images and excellent layout of Ellen's research report and so when we bought our house in Corsham it quickly occurred to us to contact her and commission a history: the details that follow are taken from that report.

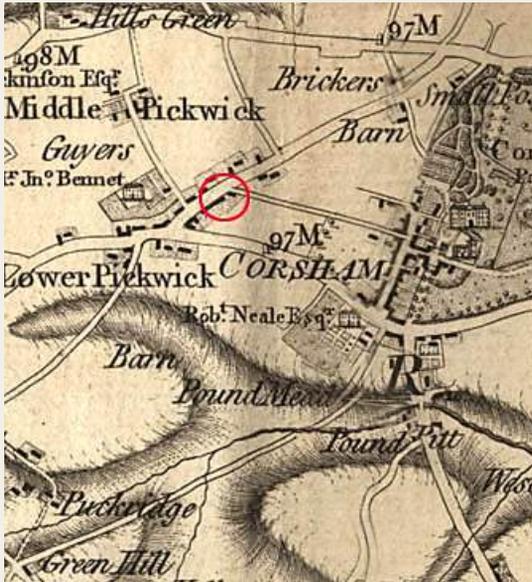
12 Pickwick is an early-mid 18th-century rubble stone semi-detached house, part of a pair with 14 Pickwick. The house comprises two storeys plus an attic and a small cellar. The internal layout is in keeping with houses of its period. There is an earlier kitchen block, probably dating to the 17th century. 12 and 14 Pickwick were listed with a group value of Grade II in December 1960 [[www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/en-315330-12-and-14-pickwick-corsha...](http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/en-315330-12-and-14-pickwick-corsha...)]. The properties are located on the south side of the Bath Road within the Pickwick Conservation Area.

Although now part of Corsham, Pickwick was once a separate settlement. The name derives from Anglo-Saxon pic (meaning a peak or pointed hill) and wic (village). The Wiltshire Hundred Roll of 1273 refers to a "William de Pikewicke". Pickwick is located on the north-west boundary of Corsham, on the A4, traditionally known as The Bath Road. Historically it was the direct route from London to Bath since Roman times.



Nos 12 & 14 Pickwick [2015]

In the 17th century the rural areas around Chippenham, including Pickwick and Corsham became popular locations for dissenters or non-conformist sects and denominations; none more so than the Society of Friends, otherwise known as Quakers. In the early 18th century Quakers began to settle in Pickwick and remained an important part of the community for several centuries. It is the Quaker link that played an important part in the history of 12 Pickwick as well.



**The 1773 Drury Map is the earliest known to show the existence of 12 Pickwick (within the red circle) although the individual buildings cannot be discerned.**

The history of the area has many family threads that are woven into the fabric of Pickwick life, going back centuries; families such as the Mitchells, Hulberts and Goldneys. These families can be found in the area in the 17th century and later. Pickwick and the general Corsham area were places where families set down well-established roots. Research found the Mitchell (Michell) family, who were Quakers, were involved in many aspects of local life over several generations. Another example was the Goldney family. Records show this Quaker family being part of Pickwick life in the mid-19th century, living at Beechfield House. However, in 1918 Frederick Goldney bought the Pickwick estate from the Dickson-Poynder family, who were not Quakers. This estate remained in their possession, including 12 and 14 Pickwick, for another 30 years.

Another local family, with even deeper roots than the Goldneys or Mitchells, was the Hulbert family. Their most successful role in the life of the community was establishing the brewery at Pickwick; next to 12 Pickwick. The Pickwick Brewery was established in 1804 by William and Robert Hulbert. In 1841 the business and the copyhold was put up for sale. However, the Hulberts retained ownership of the business in the end, until nearly the 1860s. Sir John Dickson-Poynder bought the freehold of the Brewery in the 1850s when his family purchased the Hartham Estate.

In 1865 Thomas Hulbert went into business with Henry Padbury Manning at the brewery and in 1870. Local man Isaac Belcher bought the business and in 1875 he formed a partnership with Samuel Hale Smith. Twelve years later the partnership was dissolved. By 1889 Thomas Pearson Stevens ran the Pickwick Brewery. In 1909 the premises were leased by the Dickson-Poynder Estate to Wilkins Bros & Hudson Ltd, originally of Bradford-on-Avon. Having acquired the lease the new brewery owners set about modernising the place and in 1910 advertised the old plant for sale. Wilkins Bros. & Hudson Ltd were later bought by Ushers Wiltshire Brewery Ltd in 1919. The business in Pickwick closed in the 1920s and there ended over 100 years of the Pickwick Brewery. 12 Pickwick was connected to the brewery from about 1871 to the 1920s.

By the 1950s, the brewery yard was occupied by E S Cole and Partners as a storage and scrap metal business. However, the daily activities of the business were considered a nuisance to the community, particularly as the entrance to the yard next to 12 Pickwick was too narrow for large vehicles to access.

*Article continues next page...*

As a result, another access point was used around the back of 12-20 Pickwick. Records show that this access proved to be an equal nuisance. As a result, it was agreed in 1953 between E S Cole & Partners and the Calne and Chippenham District Council to demolish part of the old malthouse between 12 Pickwick and the brewery yard to provide wider main road access to the lot. Later the Brewery site was a boat building works and today, renamed Lancefield Place, is a mixed use site for residential and small businesses.

Identifying 12 Pickwick in historical documents proved challenging as the earliest identified use of the house number is the 1948 sale by the Goldney Estate. Prior to that, it appears to have had neither formal name nor number. Therefore, it has been Tithe maps - in particular, those of 1756 and 1822 - and the accompanying records, as well as the census returns that have enabled the house to be tracked in time and the occupants of the house identified.

One key finding of 12 Pickwick is that while its history does overlap for a number of years with the neighbouring Pickwick Brewery, 12 Pickwick was not constructed as part of the adjacent brewery business. Evidentially, 12 Pickwick was constructed prior to the mid-18th century. A paper trail of documentary evidence from the tithe records reveals 12 and 14 Pickwick were already built by 1756. In that year the property was owned by Edward Michell (Mitchell) a Quaker, sometime Elder of that Society and a Coroner of Corsham as well. It is not known if he lived in 12 Pickwick but he was certainly the owner. By 1800 the property was owned by Sarah Mitchell and after her death in 1806 Susannah Mitchell owned the freehold on the building. It is likely that these women were close relatives of Edward Mitchell. While it was not unheard of for women to inherit and hold property in their own right in this period, the Quaker approach to equality between the sexes seems to have been the case here.

By examining tithe maps, awards and other related documents it is known that Dr Rev William Rance Sainsbury was a tenant at 12 Pickwick from the early 1800s until his death there in 1849. Rev Sainsbury, a 'Man of the Cloth', was a very long-standing and popular member of the Pickwick community. Records show that in 1832 Rev Timothy Conyers, who lived at Guyers House in Pickwick until his death in 1850, held the freehold of the property. In his lifetime he was also a friend of Rev Sainsbury as well as a witness to his will.

Rev Sainsbury was not a wealthy man and the will reveals another local friend, Gabriel Goldney, a Quaker, and future owner of Pickwick, had lent Rev Sainsbury certain amounts of money. It is not known how much, but enough that virtually all of his estate was left to Goldney to settle the debt, except for a total of £15 being left to three female servants and provision to his sister. According to Rev Sainsbury's will he was The Clerk of Corsham. He also appears to have been a very popular man, with his death announced in favourable words.

**DEATHS.**—The Rev. William Rance Sainsbury, long a much respected inhabitant of Pickwick, Wilts, in the 80th year of his age. This venerable clergyman was distinguished by much Christian mildness and benignity of character, and his loss will be much lamented by numerous friends, especially by the widow, the orphan, and the destitute, whom his bounty relieved liberally from slender means--

Fig 14: Bristol Times and Mirror 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1849

*Article continues next page...*



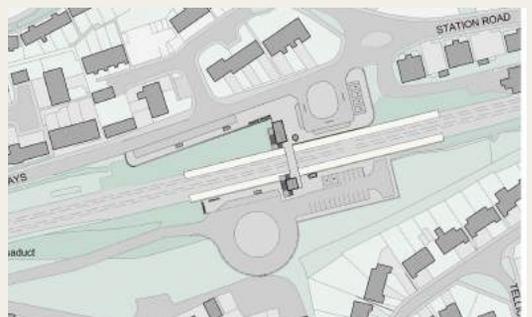
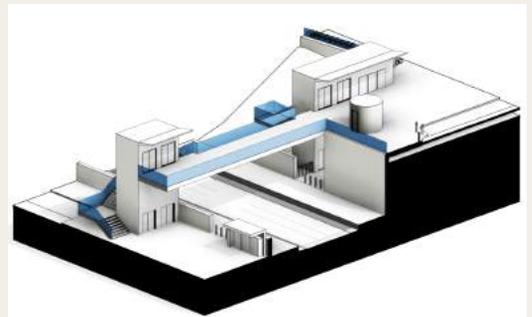
Paul Johnson's presentation was based on the work undertaken by SLC, the consultants appointed by the Gateway Town Team who had found the provision of a station at Corsham achievable, their work having taken the project to Stage 2 of Network Rail's GRIP process, GRIP being an acronym for "Guide to Rail Investment Process", eight stages through which any scheme, large or small, must progress. These being:

*1) Output Definition 2) Feasibility 3) Option Selection 4) Single Option Development 5) Detailed Design 6) Construction, Testing and Commission 7) Scheme Handback 8) Project Close Out.*

Target dates of 2018 and 2026 were mentioned, the first particularly dependent upon Wiltshire Council working with the West of England Partnership team on MetroWest Phase 1, and prepared to contribute financially to the scheme which would see the new Bristol Temple Meads service continuing past Bathampton to Chippenham's bay platform. A longer-term solution was the return of the Bristol/Oxford passenger service. Graphics were shown of the station design envisaged by the consultants (see right).

A number of those present raised their concerns about the lack of sufficient parking provision, their fear being that vehicles would be left on nearby residential streets. Paul pointed to their experience of Melksham Station (with free parking available) where most passengers walked, even from as far afield as Bowerhill on the opposite side of town.

Anne urged people to get involved with the Neighbourhood Plan as through this they could seek provision of resident's parking zones to ensure the document took account of the need for these as plans for the station progressed. Concerns were also expressed about the feasibility of using Pound Mead for a dedicated rail link bus, given the narrowness of this street since the building of the Tramways development. It provides, along with Stokes Road, pedestrian access to Corsham Junior School and many would need convincing that the running of a bus would not prove a danger to young children. Throughout his presentation, Paul Johnson was able to refer to the success of the two hourly Melksham TransWilts services that all but met its fifth-year passenger target within the first eighteen months of operation. That success owing much to the dedication of the team, one member having undertaken the task of delivering a timetable to every household in Melksham!



**Graphics of the stations design envisaged by the consultants**

Paul Johnson also referred to the work TransWilts were undertaking with Wilton Town Council on the reopening of their station, plus Royal Wootton Bassett, which he felt could well prove beneficial to the reopening of Corsham Station given that both require a local service. Paul made clear that the new electric Hitachi 800 would not serve our station, although the lower running costs of electrification could make any new station more viable.

The Q&A ended with Paul encouraging his audience to join TransWilts as a “Friend of Corsham Station”. The cost per year is £5 but between April and August, a 50% discount applies, to which one adds an initial joining fee of £2. This membership ensures friends are kept up to date with all the latest information. It will also act as an indicator of the level of residents’ interest in supporting our Gateway Town Team’s initiative. Please visit [www.transwilts.org](http://www.transwilts.org) and click the “Friends” icon to join. We hope you will take advantage of the April-August offer and why not tell your friends via Facebook and Twitter that you have done so!

Anne Lock

## *Friday, August 19th 2016 - Cream Tea Day*

This year’s ‘Cream Tea’ will again take place at number 24, Lypiatt Road, Corsham, at the kind invitation of Victoria and Peter Blake. It will commence at 3pm, concluding at 5pm, and all members and friends are warmly invited. There is a charge of £5 per person and all the proceeds are being donated to charity. If anyone would like to make and bring along a cake or cakes, that will be much appreciated. If you would like to attend, would you be kind enough to telephone Joan Maciver on 01225 812225, by Wednesday, August 17<sup>th</sup> so she has some idea of numbers to cater for. We look forward to seeing you on the 19<sup>th</sup>.



# Do you know where you can see these date plates in Corsham?



1) Corsham Cricket Club



2) The High Street



3) Mansion House Stables



4) South Street



5) Corner of Priory Street



6) The Roman Catholic Church



7) Hartham Park (Cross Keys Gate)



8-10) 3 Houses at the west end of Priory Street



11) Gastard Church



12) Former Roebuck Inn



13) Corsham Estate



14) Hartham Estate House at Hartham

## CORSHAM CIVIC SOCIETY 2016

All meetings at the Pound Arts Centre (telephone 01249 701628) at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated. Members £2, Non-Members £5, this includes free tea or coffee or £1 off a glass of wine. Guests are very welcome.

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| 22 July: | James Methuen-Campbell<br>Author, Musicologist and Lord of the Manor of Corsham<br><b>'Trees in Our Midst'</b>  |
| 19 Aug:  | Summer Cream Tea (members only).  |
| 30 Sept: | Julian Orbach<br>Editor working on the 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed. of Pevsner's <i>Buildings of Wiltshire</i><br><b>'The Buildings of Corsham'</b>  |
| 5 Oct:   | A guided tour of the Westonbirt Arboretum by our member Jim Ball, of Corsham and Rome. Tickets required.  |
| 28 Oct:  | Dr. Virginia Bainbridge<br>Former Editor of the <i>Victoria County History of Wiltshire</i> , and<br>Director of the Wiltshire Manorial Records Project<br><b>'Governing Wiltshire: Almost a Thousand Years of Manorial Records, 1086-1922'</b> |
| 25 Nov:  | Martin Head<br>'Director of Content, Corsham Institute'<br><b>'The Corsham Digital Hub'</b>   |

Corsham Civic Society was founded in 1963 to represent the people of Corsham in all aspects of conservation, preservation and the promotion of this delightful Wiltshire town. The Society is a registered charity, a member of ASHTAV (Association of Small and Historic Towns & Villages of the UK). It is our aim to promote high standards of planning and architecture, to create a wider awareness amongst the local population of environmental issues, the geography, history, natural history and architecture of the area, and to secure the preservation, protection and improvement of features of public amenity and historical interest, in Corsham and the surrounding countryside.