

The Swindon Village Society

The Swindon Village Society was founded as a Registered Charity by a group of villagers in 1986. The aims of the society were set out then and still remain the same.

- To encourage high standards of planning and architecture in and around the village.
- To educate ourselves and other local people in the history, geography, architecture and natural history of the area.

To do this the society endeavours to :-

- Promote pride and interest in our village and its surroundings.
- Promote research into appropriate subjects.
- Publish papers, reports and other Literature.
- Prepare maps and surveys.
- Hold meetings, lectures and exhibitions.
- Co-operate with the local authority, planning committees and other organisations with similar aims.
- Assist in activities of a charitable nature.
- Raise funds to enable our programme to go forward.

Sadly, most of our founder members are no longer with us and there are few people living in the village now that were even born in Gloucestershire, let alone Swindon Village so they are less interested in the village and its heritage. This means that it is becoming harder to interest people in their surroundings. However, the society still exists and maintains a membership of around 100 people, whose membership fees of £5 for an individual or £10 for a household, fund the society and its activities. This is thanks to a few people who are willing to give up their time to keep the society going by arranging and giving talks, researching and spreading the word that there is a village community hidden behind Sainsbury's and the Kingsditch Industrial Estate.

The Society subscribes to the British Association of Local History and also to the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council but I haven't been able to find out if we have paid these last 2 subscriptions this year.

The society organises 8 meetings a year in the village hall where a speaker comes to entertain and sometimes educate us, followed by refreshments. In April, weather permitting, we go on a walk in the local area where we note all the flora and fauna that we can identify. In June we go to a local

garden to explore and admire, generally followed by refreshments supplied by our host. In August we have a social event at the home of one of our members, usually in the gardens of Swindon Hall (or inside the Hall if it is raining).

In the mid-1990s Hazel Luxton persuaded a group of members to start the Swindon Village History Project under the umbrella of the Swindon Village Society. Again most of our original group of researchers are no longer with us but we have their research and memories recorded. We also have a good collection of maps, mostly thanks to Hazel who worked for many years at the Land Registry. People have been very generous in letting us copy their old photographs of the village and we now have a really good selection.

Starting in 1996, we have published 7 books of research and memories with hopefully more to come. The Society is a member of the Gloucestershire Local History Association and puts on displays at local history events throughout Gloucestershire. We have hosted the annual Local History afternoon in the village, which was well attended and much enjoyed by people from all over Gloucestershire. A few years ago we hosted a family reunion of the Stratford family, some of whose ancestors were, at one time, the Lords of Swindon Manor. Last September more than 50 people attended the event that we put on as part of the Civic Society open days with much positive feedback.

The society runs the book stall at the Swindon Village fete in July every year and have helped to raise money to carry out repairs to St Lawrence's church. Swindon Village is part of Cheltenham when it suits the town but if you are told that St Mary's church, or The Minster as they now call it, is the oldest building in Cheltenham, don't believe it. Parts of our church date back to at least the 12th century and there is not even a part of any building that still exists in the centre of Cheltenham that is older.

The society worked with Cheltenham Borough Council in the creation and review of the Swindon Village Conservation Area and we will continue to work to preserve the heart and character of our village whatever the Government and Local Council throw at us.