

REMEMBER WHEN

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ON THIS DAY

around Swindon

1940: A Price Regulation Committee for the South West was set up as part of a national scheme by the board of trade.

1951: With 19 Swindon Post Office staff off sick due to colds and chills, morning deliveries of mail were late.

1970: Swindon Police issued a warning to householders, especially elderly people, against a bogus official who had been posing as a representative of Swindon corporation.

2010: Six-month-old Evie Wilson was christened in a hand stitched gown which had been worn by six generations – first by her great great great grandfather 142 years ago.

around the world

1773: Captain Cook's Resolution became the first ship to cross the Antarctic Circle.

1852: The independence of the Transvaal Boers was recognised by Britain, with the signing of the Sand River Convention.

1912: English explorer Sir Robert Falcon Scott reached the South Pole. Norwegian Roald Amundsen had beaten him there by one month.

1934: A 500-carat diamond was found near Pretoria in South Africa. It was rumoured to be the stolen half of the famous Cullinan diamond, which was found in 1905.

1939: In Germany, Jews were banned from driving, going to cinemas, theatres or concerts, or working as dentists, vets or pharmacists.

1996: Then-former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi went on trial charged with corruption.

2001: Two women were arrested in Japan after they stripped naked at a fashion show to protest about models wearing leather.

2002: A man with connections to the Al-Qaeda network claimed to have detailed information on the whereabouts of Osama Bin Laden.

2002: Mt Nyiragongo in Goma, Congo, erupted, sending residents of Goma fleeing into neighboring Rwanda. Lava flows destroyed 40 per cent of the town and killed two thirds of its population.

firstbreath

1706: Benjamin Franklin – American President.

1865: Konstantin Stanislavsky – Russian actor and teacher of 'method' acting.

1899: Al Capone, pictured –

American gangster, born in Naples, Italy. Eventually imprisoned on tax evasion charges.

1942: Cassius Clay – former boxer, better known as Muhammad Ali.

1957: Keith Chegwin – television presenter, whose credits include Chuggers Plays Pop and The Big Breakfast.



lastbreath

1874: Chang and Eng Bunker – Siamese twins who never separated and fathered 21.

2001: Gregory Corso – American Beat Generation poet.

2005: Zhao Ziyang – former Chinese Communist Party chief.

BLAZE DESTROYED ABBEY HOME

Fire crews battled for 15 hours

WHEN Blunsdon Abbey was razed to the ground in 1904 the Advertiser described the fire as the most serious conflagration that had ever been recorded in the county.

Blunsdon Abbey was once thought to have been an outpost of the medieval Godstow Nunnery, near Oxford.

However, the property that burned down in the early hours of April 22, 1904 was a Victorian neo-gothic mansion built in 1863 by Thomas Barrett, of Swindon.

Joseph Clayton de Windt bought the Blunsdon estate in 1860 but died in a riding accident before his new home was completed.

The next owner was John Lyall. Following his death at his Guernsey home in 1881, Blunsdon Abbey was advertised by Swindon solicitors Kinneir and Tombs in The Times "To be Sold or Let, Furnished."

Set in 80 acres of land the abbey contained a hall, two reception rooms, conservatory, large dining room, a billiard room, boudoir, children's schoolroom, bathroom, 12 principal bed and dressing rooms and sleeping accommodation for more than 12 servants.

Blunsdon Abbey was then considered to be one of the choicest properties in the county.

At the time of the fire the property was owned by Miss Louisa M Thomas, who had dined at the mansion the previous evening before leaving for her London home.

Her gardener, Mr Dorward and his wife, a visitor by the name of Miss White and a little girl were rescued from the blaze.

The little girl leapt from the building into a blanket while the adults climbed down an improvised ladder.

Three men on their way to work raised the alarm at 4.40am and by 5.30am members of Swindon Fire Brigade were on the scene.

"Wind and fire conspired at first to defeat the onslaught of water, and to the most indifferent ob-



PAST GLORIES Top, a view of Blunsdon Abbey after the fire. Above, staff with a coach and horses and, right, the drawing room, all during the 1870s

Pictures: THE RICHARD S RADWAY COLLECTION – SWINDON LOCAL STUDIES

server it was evident that Blunsdon Abbey was doomed," reported the Advertiser.

With the house lost, fire fighters turned their attention to saving the abbey's valuables.

Despite their brave efforts many treasures were lost, including a priceless collection of books, some unique china and dinner services and a painting by JMW Turner called Scene In Venice.

As news of the fire spread sight-seers began arriving from Swindon in traps and on bicycles and a large police presence were required to control the crowds.

Members of the Swindon Brigade remained at the property until 8 pm on Friday, more than 15 hours after they were called out.

By then the abbey was "reduced well nigh to cinders, with nothing scarcely but the black walls standing."

Early indications were that the fire had been caused by an electrical fuse igniting the curtains in the dining room.



Looters end up in court

WHILE Blunsdon residents helped fight the blaze, five men were found looting the well stocked cellars.

Police noticed bottles of wine circulating among the onlookers and

promptly arrested Alfred Godwin, Sidney Titcombe, Albert Frank Willier, Nelson Harvey and George Peapell, all from Haydon Wick.

Four of the five men appeared before Swindon

Mayor James Hinton at the Police Court that same evening.

The fifth member of the group was in court the next morning.

All five men were bound over until the following Monday.