

SWINNERTON
Family History



Elizabeth Swynnerton – Secretary of the Swinnerton Society

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The Swinnerton Society

A non-profit making organisation devoted to the welfare of Swynnerton Church and the research and publication of Swinnerton Family Records

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SWINNERTON FAMILY HISTORY

Volume 11. No.11

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Editor - Iain Spencer Swinnerton

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Foreword

THE CHAIRMAN

Elizabeth and I have had a very busy autumn. On Saturday 22nd September, we drove up to Blore Heath, near Market Drayton, to see the annual re-enactment of the Battle of Blore Heath, which was the first battle of the War of the Roses in 1459. The weather was dry, and the field was covered with stands, and coloured tents. Music of the time was played on traditional instruments, and a pig was roasted for the combatants. No blood was spilt in the realistic enactment, but arrows flew through the air, and the two opposing sides once again played out the battle, the Yorkist army defeating the larger, but less professional, Lancastrian army of Lord Audley, who once again was killed.

Opinions are divided as to whether any Swinnertons fought under Lord Audley, but as most of his men were recruited from neighbouring towns and villages, it seems quite possible, as Swynnerton is quite near Blore Heath.

On the 1st September I attended my first meeting of the Federation of Family History Societies at Imperial College, in London. I was one of the few delegates from one-name societies, but the attendance was good, and the discussion lively.

On October 6th Elizabeth and I went to Birmingham for the Swinnerton Society Council Meeting. We were glad to welcome new committee members Mary Vivash and Stuart Limb, and see Geoffrey Swinnerton back looking well after his recent illness.

Our president, Iain Swinnerton was also there, recovering from a boating accident, which had left him with a cracked rib. We were able to conclude the AGM of last June, seeing and accepting the Annual Financial Report, which had not been available in June. Many thanks to Iain and Keith Livesey. Geoffrey Swinnerton agreed to take over the post of Treasurer next year as well as that of Membership Secretary.

You may be interested to know that paintings by Annie Swynnerton, few of which are normally on display, are part of an exhibition at Tate Britain - "Exposed: the Victorian Nude"- on from November 1st to 13th January. Frederick Leighton, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Singer Sargent, Walter Sickert and Gwen John are some of the well-known artists whose work will be exhibited.

Roger Swynnerton

Meet your Council No.3 – Secretary Elizabeth Swynnerton

My wife, Elizabeth, is the daughter of the Rev. Bob Black, an Irish Methodist Minister, and his wife Ida. Because Methodist ministers have to move around regularly, Elizabeth was born in Donegal, which, although in the North of Ireland, is in the South. That's Irish for you! Because this fact is in her passport, Elizabeth is sometimes subjected to close scrutiny by passport officers.

She was educated at Methodist College in Belfast, and soon after took up teaching, for which she has a great natural ability. It happens that Elizabeth is also my second-cousin and on a visit to Ireland with my mother in 1959, I met and became engaged to Elizabeth within a week. We were married in Ireland, and then Elizabeth came to England where she later became the mother of two sons and a daughter. As soon as she could, she returned to teaching. She spent over thirteen years as Head Teacher of Moss Hall School Nursery, a state nursery in Barnet. With the help of excellent staff, she transformed a rather old-fashioned nursery school into a show-piece for the Borough. Now retired, she finds time to be an Elder and Fellowship Secretary of the local Free Church, as well as being Secretary of the Swinnerton Society. She takes a great interest in her family, and three grand-children and, as well, enjoys visits to art galleries and theatres, travelling and reading. She is a yoga enthusiast and joins me in regular swims.

RAS

* * * * *

The Swinnerton Steeplechase.

Visitors to our Gatherings will know that this is the title of the guided tour conducted by the Revd. Brian Swynnerton around Staffordshire and what we call 'Swinnerton Country'.

Good News! At last I have managed to get Brian's notes into a typed form, he has read the proofs and is now looking for suitable illustrations.

It WILL be on sale at the Gathering next year – I promise!

The Other Isle of Man Swinnertons - a reply to Roy Talbot's letter to the editor by Stuart Limb

It was with much amusement that I read Roy's letter pondering that my great, great, great grandmother could have been the Duchess of Malfi or even Queen Victoriain fact anyone except Martha Whittingham! I suppose it is part of the fun of genealogy to put forward theories and have them shot down ! However I have never claimed with any certainty that John Swinnerton and Martha Whittingham were my great, great, great, grandparents just that they were the most likely candidates.

Why do I think this despite what Roy says?

Firstly the Liverpool/Isle of Man connection .

My grandmother was born in the Isle of Man but apart from her we have no proof that any other of our Swinnertons were born there. I can remember a discussion with my late Uncle, Hugh Thompson FRSA, pondering where our branch of the Swinnertons came from and thinking they might have come from Liverpool or the Isle of Man or elsewhere and might even have been illegitimate *because we had no documents concerning them at that time* . I certainly can find no earlier link with the Isle of Man than my great grandparents' wedding in 1885. My grandmother Victoria Swinnerton thought our family came from Staffordshire. She had little to say about her father Joseph Swinnerton except that he liked his ale! I think that it is likely that Joseph Swinnerton met his bride, Mary Hannah Bowling when he went to the Isle of Man on holiday. Her family came from Yorkshire to work there. Certainly Victoria Swinnerton met John Thompson in a holiday romance on the Isle of Man. Arnold Bennett mentions several times in his books the popularity of the Isle of Man as a holiday destination with Stoke people.

Secondly 'cousin Charles'

Joseph and Mary Hannah Swinnerton eventually settled in the hotel trade in the Isle of Man around 1900 when 'cousin' Charles Swynnerton stayed with them. He could have been a paying guest who might or might not have been a distant cousin. It is likely that in a small island the only two families with the same surname would consider themselves as cousins. The fact that my great aunt Frances May Swinnerton called Charles cousin does not prove he was. Her father said in the 1891 Census that he came from Stoke on Trent and I've found my Swinnerton family there in Trent Vale, where Joseph was born in

The other Isle of Man Swinnertons (contd.)

1855. I've found Joseph Swinnerton in the 1861 and 1881 Censuses and trade directories between 1879 and 1882 working as a draper- all in Stoke on Trent. It would be convenient to tie the two Isle of Man families together but the facts speak otherwise. Kinship, yes but close family - I don't think so.

Thirdly the Whittingham theory

I am as certain as I can be from his birth certificate and from census returns in 1891, 1881, and 1861 that my great-grandfather Joseph Swinnerton was born in Trent Vale, Stoke on Trent in 1855.

His parents were John Swinnerton and Hannah Swinnerton formerly Mansfield.

They were married in 1833 at St. Michael's Parish Church Stone and the wedding was witnessed by Thomas Swinnerton (a brother?)

In the 1851 Census for Trent Vale (a small place then) John Swinnerton (born 1810 Hanley) lived at number '126'.

At '133' lived a Martha Swinnerton aged 81 born Newcastle-under-Lyme around 1770 - very probably his mother and very possibly the former Martha Whittingham. Martha Whittingham who was born 1770 Newcastle-u-Lyme. The IGI lists only one Martha Whittingham born around this date who could have married John Swinnerton in 1790.

In the same house in 1851 as Martha Swinnerton were Elizabeth Swinnerton, a daughter aged 30, un-married, born Stoke, a potter's painter and Martha Swinnerton another daughter, un-married, aged 20, a burnisher. They can't be her daughters if their ages are correct as it would mean that Martha (born 1770) gave birth aged 61! They could be her grand-daughters. But if their ages *were* wrongly recorded they could be Elizabeth born 1798 and Martha born 1803 to John Swinnerton and Martha Whittingham. The order of their birth is the same and they might never have married and stayed at home with their mother. There are no records of *their* marriages. They were the only Swinnerton families in Trent Vale and both were in the pottery trade. I think it very likely that they were related and were mother and son (and daughters).

The Hanley registers in 1810 record a John Swinnerton born to a John and Martha Swinnerton.

Now it could be a different Martha - perhaps Martha Duchess of Malfi or Queen Victoria's unknown sister Princess Martha. However unless someone can produce another Martha I choose to think it is probably Martha Whittingham. Absence of records usually means non- conformity but all my Swinnertons (up to the present day) were/are Anglican so unless *my* records were lost I should find what I'm looking for in Parish records of Hanley.

However there was a fire in Hanley Rectory around this time so some records are missing. Annoying isn't it!

The IGI (International Genealogical Index - I know it isn't always reliable) lists the children of John and Martha between 1791 and 1810. *Only one – Thomas Swinnerton born Newcastle under Lyme 1807 has his parents described as John Swinnerton and Martha Whittingham.* All the rest just say Jhn. and Martha. It is confusing but in 1833 at the wedding of John Swinnerton (born 1810) the witness was Thomas Swinnerton. If he was the one born 1807 to John Swinnerton and Martha Whittingham (11 years after Jhn. born 1796 but only 3 years before my John in 1810) then my case is proved. It is quite likely that an older brother would be witness at a younger ones wedding.

But why have two children named the same? John the elder bapt. 1796 and John the younger bapt. 1810 have at least a 14 year gap between them. It is possible if John the elder was not baptised at once that the gap could be longer. I have come across in another (unrelated) branch of my family a grandfather bringing up the illegitimate son of his eldest son as his own. That is the grandfather (and grand-mother) was named as the parents. Perhaps this is what happened here? It is also possible that John the elder having left home a 'late addition' to the family was unexpectedly born and the name John used again because it was an important or a favourite name. If so John Swinnerton born 1810 was probably her last son born when she was 41 and she stayed closest to him. After all John born 1796 had probably left home by then. They might have lost touch... they might think that he had died. *He* might belong to a different John and Martha but I don't think so.

So where does that leave my family tree? I still think that my Swinnerton family descends from John the youngest son of John Swinnerton and Martha Whittingham. Why? - because genealogy isn't a science, it is an art relying on the interpretation of records which are based on what people wrote long ago. They are not necessarily all true or accurate. Why one's own parents could even have lied on one's own birth certificate to cover up something nasty! Only DNA can prove relationships. I base my case on a combination of facts and circumstantial evidence. I have no illusions as to my family history but unless someone can produce alternative facts about my Swinnertons then I still think my explanation is more likely than Roy's Malfi theory!

Footnote to the above article.

Recently I went to Stoke on Trent archives to find out some more about Trent Vale. In 1795 Stoke was still described as a village even though it contained

the mother church of the Potteries. Penkhull was a far larger township and Trent Vale a very small residential district with in the 1830s several villa residences. (Greenslade's History of Stoke on Trent).

I searched the 1841 Census returns for Trent Vale which were on only a few pages. I found only two Swinnerton families.

The first living at 126 Trent Vale was 'my' family of John Swinnerton and Hannah Mansfield (my great, great grandparents). By the 1851 Census Martha Swinnerton, as described previously, lived at 126 Trent Vale. 'My' family had moved to 133 – Prospect Row.

In 1841 the only other Swinnerton family living in Trent Vale was Thomas (the witness at my John's wedding in 1833).

Thomas was about 5 years older than my John and was married (2nd marriage) to Hannah (Williams). He was a cratemaker. All these facts tie *him* to the mainline descendants chart and by strong circumstantial evidence link 'my' John Swinnerton born 1810 to this family.

I will continue to search for more evidence.

Editor's Note:

All very interesting and I am sure we shall eventually solve the problem. Looking at it again from my detached viewpoint, the thing I cannot understand is that after 47 years researching into the family history, I have still never found any evidence of any descendants of Joseph Swinnerton who the Revd. Charles Swynnerton, my predecessor as the historian of the family, says was born London 27 July 1902 and John Swinnerton born Newcastle under Lyme 21 Mar 1804 – his uncles and who, he said, died leaving issue!

* * * * *

Stoke-on-Trent is the name given to the six Pottery Towns of Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton, and Longton. They were united in 1910 and in the late 70s were rated the 14th largest city in England. The famous Potteries author Arnold Bennett, the definitive biography of whom was written by Frank Swinnerton, was born in Hanley at what is now called the Five towns Restaurant. Bennett's famous novel *Anna of the Five Towns* only told of the original Five Towns – Fenton was a later addition,

1841 Census Trent Vale				
<i>126 Trent Vale</i>				
John	Swinnerton	Aged 25 **	China Painter	Y
Hannah		23 **		Y
Thomas		7		Y
William *		6		Y
Sarah *		4		Y
John		2		Y
Martha??		5mths		Y
*not present in 1851 Census possibly died (Y = Yes, born Staffs)				
** ages different to 1851 Census... but in 1841 ages were rounded down ... gap is consistent between John Swinnerton and his wife Hannah of 2 years				
1851 Martha Swinnerton lived at this address and the family below had moved to 133				
+25 households from 126 Trent Vale				
Thomas	Swinnerton	Aged 30	Cratemaker	Y
Hannah		30		Y
Charles or James		12	Potter	Y
Benjamin		11	Tilemaker	Y
John		6		Y
Mary		4		Y
Harriett ?		1		Y
Thomas Swinnerton on the mainline descendants chart, son of John Swinnerton and Martha Whittingham, was born in 1807 Stoke married twice, 2 nd time to a Hannah Williams and was a cratemaker. The above Census entry is consistent with this being the same person <i>and</i> living very near to John Swinnerton born approx. 1810. Thomas was a witness at the wedding of John Swinnerton and Hannah Mansfield in 1833 and was almost certainly his brother. This is further substantial circumstantial proof that John Swinnerton, born 1810 belongs in the mainline tree as a son of John Swinnerton and Martha Whittingham .				
HO 107/991 E.D.17 Penkull				

* * * * *

FIRST STEPS IN FAMILY HISTORY - No.1

(Guidance from the Federation of Family History Societies)

Q: Where do I start?

A. Start with yourself, add your family, your parents, your grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins etc., in fact any relatives you can remember. Question older relatives who can be invaluable in providing knowledge of ancestors you may not know of or have forgotten.

Remembrance Day

I write this after our usual village Remembrance Day service - especially poignant this year coming as it did, exactly two months after the horrific events of September 11 in America. I am sure that, like me, many were thinking of our relatives and friends in that great country with love and affection and, above all, with the greatest sympathy, as well of our war dead. We are only a small village but 35 turned out for our little service first in the church and then outside the front gate by our village memorial where the poppies made a bright splash on a dull November day. Only four left with medals but *tempus fugit*.

As I stood there in the silence, seeing those blood-red poppies, I was reminded of that wonderful poem written by a Canadian doctor, Colonel John McCrae of the Medical Corps as he sheltered in a trench during the second battle of Ypres in 1915.

*In Flanders fields, the poppies grow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place, and in the sky
The larks still bravely singing fly
Scarce heard beneath the guns below.*

*We are the dead, short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders Fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe,
To you from fading hands we throw
The Torch; be yours to hold it high,
If ye break faith with those who died
We shall not sleep, though Poppies
grow in Flanders Fields.*

In January 1918 he was fatally wounded and as he lay dying in a French hospital, it was his wish that the common field poppy of his poem should come to represent the everlasting rest of those who fell in battle which it still does today.

THOMAS SWINNERTON m. ?

b.circa 1786
d.before 1881
Farmer
(TS.158)

JAMES SWINNERTON m. Elizabeth Horton
b.16 Aug 1809
Bridgnorth
d.2 Jan 1894
Glazely, Bridgnorth
Gardener
(JS.183)

30 Dec 1829
at Wednesbury
b.c.1810 Bridgnorth
d.7 Jan 1894
Glazeley

ROBERT SWINNERTON
b.31 Mar 1844
at Colton, Staffs
d.c.1920
Australia
Emigrated bef.1881
(RS.66)

(1) Ellen White
1867
at Stourbridge
b.c.1844 Wordsley
d.1885 Bridgend
aged 41

m. JAMES SWINNERTON m. (2) Sophia Pratt
b.10 Mar 1846
Colton, Staffs
d.1 Dec 1846
Llandeud
(Revd.) JS.185

15 Oct 1889
at Cannock
b.10 Jun 1851
Worfield, Salop
d.20 Feb 1935 Llandeud

JAMES m. Sarah Rowe
SWINNERTON
(b.1868)
Collingbourne
d. 1916
Australia
(JS.184)

ROBERT
SWINNERTON
bp.30 Oct 1870
Collingbourne
d. unkm.1930
Malden
[Revd.] (RS.67)

WILLIAM
SWINNERTON
b.c.1871
Pewsey
3 Sep 1916
Werrington
[Revd.] (WS.65)
(No issue)

m. Isabella
.....
d.6 Apr 1915
Werrington
Devon

FRANCIS
SWINNERTON
b.c.1876
Madeley
(FS.31)

m. ...
MARK
SWINNERTON
b.c.1878
Madeley
d.c.1932
Newport, Gwent
Pharmacist (MS.108)

m. Olive
Sheppard
c.1915
Newport
JOHN C
SWINNERTON
b.c.1879
Dawley Magna
d. unkm. 9 Jul 1953
Newport
[Revd.] (JS.182)

HUMPHREY
SPENCER
SWINNERTON
b..21 Jan 1893
Newport
d.5 Nov 1977
Newport
(HS.68)

m. Elizabeth
Amy
Nelson
28 Jan 1920
b.1898
DOROTHY
SOPHIA
(DS.23)
b.1890
d.1891
Newport

JAMES
SWINNERTON
b. Sydney, Aus.
(JS.181)

(5) Ellen
Elizabeth
(ES.377)
b.1873
Collingbourne

FRANK
SWINNERTON
emigrated
to USA)
d.c.1964

JOHN SWINNERTON
(JS.662)

Son

m.
DORA (DS.24)
b.1916 Newport
m.
Noel W. Green
1940
Pontypool

OLIVE MARY
(OS.7)
b. 1918 Newport

DORIS (DS.25)
b.1920 Newport

EDWARD J.
SWINNERTON
b.1929 Newport
(ES.104)

HUMPHREY m. Jean
SPENCER Roderick
SWINNERTON 27 Jan 1968
b. 27 Dec 1921
Newport
(HS.121)

MARY IRIS
SOPHIA
b.15 May 1924
Newport, Mon
(MS.107)
m.
Albert G. Worthy
1947 Newport

ARTHUR JAMES
SWINNERTON
b.1969 Newport
(AS.62)

SHEENA MHAIRI
(SS.67)
b.17 Oct 1973
Newport

THE SWINNERTONS OF BRIDGNORTH, SHROPSHIRE. Table 1

Revised November 2001.

This little branch is remarkable for having produced four clerics in one family.

A letter from long ago and far away

935813

L/Bdr J.Swinnerton
O Battery, 8 Troop
5th Regiment RHA
Secunderabad
Hyderabad State
India Command

13/4/1947

Dear Sir

I have been informed of your request programme for servicemen of the Darlaston district and would be very grateful if you would play for me "Absence Makes The Heart Grow Fonder" dedicated to my wife Mrs F.Swinnerton, 80 Moxley Road, Darlaston, S.Staffs.

Yours sincerely

J.Swinnerton

* * * * *

The Geographical Magazine. February 1998

I read the article with fascinated, squeamish horror. I myself had a horrendous episode of microscopic mites or something after an ill-fated vacation in the Ozarks, and I had to coat my body, neck to toe, with a killer cream the dermatologist prescribed. Worst thing I've been through yet.

ALISON E.SWINNERTON
Angola, New York

(The letter was at the top of a page so I have no idea what the subject matter was which would have been on the previous page).

ANOTHER CHAIRMAN'S LETTER (from the Beresford Family Society's magazine)

"The new lord of the manor of Alstonefield thinks he can walk all over us." These were the words of Agnes de Beresforde back in the year of our Lord 1361. Agnes was the widow of the Aden de Beresforde who became lord of the manor of Beresford and Head of the House of Beresford when his father John died of the Black Death in 1349,

Aden himself died when his son John was still a minor. This young John was abducted from the Beresforde household by Sir Thomas de Swynnerton, lord of the manor of Alstonefield, who believed his own position to include the overlordship of Beresford. Indeed, he was quite convinced that this was so, and that as a result the choice of wife for young John belonged to him, Sir Thomas. In the event Sir Thomas was proved wrong. John married the girl of his choice, Cecilia (Bentley?) and as far as we know everything went well for the couple thereafter.

"The new lord of the manor of Alstonefield thinks he can walk all over us." Those prophetic words of Agnes de Beresforde were uttered once again some 640 years later, and *virtually to the day*, in the summer of 2001. On this occasion, however, neither a Beresford nor a Swinnerton was directly involved. It was a case of the villagers of Alstonefield as a whole being upset with their new lord of the manor, Mr Mark Roberts.

Since the 16th century the lordship of the manor of Alstonefield had been in the hands of the Harpur Crewe family, but when that family died out the trustees decided to put the title up for sale to help towards the cost of death duties. Mr Roberts paid £10,000, we believe, at the auction back in 1999. and he now claims ancient manorial and seigniorial rights over some 25,000 acres of the Staffordshire Moorlands, including all sporting and mineral extraction rights.

An article in the *Daily Mail* (29th Aug 2001) stated that Mr Roberts believes he has a 'superior interest' in such areas as commons and village greens, and the right to hold events such as fairs, markets and car boot sales, as well as having a claim on any swag which is dropped by fleeing thieves (although he is *not* claiming *droit du seigneur* the nobleman's rights as claimed by Sir Thomas de Swynnerton). He does, however, plan to waive his hunting, shooting and fishing rights, but to lease them back to the hunters, shooters and fishers at a rate of £1-50 per acre per annum.

The main reason for the villagers' annoyance is Mr Roberts's claim to own all grass verges. This may affect villagers' entry to their own homes! Along with the title came 400 boxes of dusty documents, and these could offer extensive rights not hitherto realised.

He has ordered Land Registry searches on every unregistered property in his domain, with the result that prospective purchasers of land within the township may already have been dissuaded from following up their offers. It seems that the villagers of Alstonefield are not at all happy with the situation within their lovely little township at the present time.

And Agnes de Beresforde thought she and her son John had problems

THE SWINNERTON FOUNDATION

The first I knew about this was when I received a lovely postcard from our member Mrs Muriel Swinnerton accompanying her subscription. The inscription on the card read *Spiti Valley from Ki Monastery. Sold in aid of the Swinnerton Foundation.* © Joan Swinnerton. Naturally, I was intrigued – having been an avid collector of anything to do with the Swinnertons for nearly 50 years, I wanted to know more. The next postcard was of the actual monastery itself, a truly spectacular building as you can see and explained that the Foundation was set up to help the women in Spiti which is in Northern India to produce their embroideries and to fulfil their potential instead of always being water-carriers etc.

On asking for more information for this journal because I was sure that the family at large would be just as interested as me, Mrs Swinnerton wrote:

At long last I have some information about my daughter-in-law's "activities". She is just back from Afghanistan and Southern Russia – having been to Spiti, China and Tibet.

The enclosed was published in an in-service magazine belonging to an airline whose employees had heard of her hospital etc. In her odd days of being in England she has been busy replying to the many kind enquiries she has had as a result of this publication.

You will be interested to know that the craft centre and the work for the women – to raise their standard of living – is called the SWINNERTON Centre. Everything to do with the Hospital is in her professional name of Pollock – she married my son five years ago – and her Foster Home address is that of his office and he deals with things while she is away.

You will see from the photograph what type of territory it is – very bleak and very cold in the winter months.

I hope that you will enjoy reading about another member of the Swinnerton family.

Indeed I did and I was so impressed with what Joan was doing and trying to achieve that I took it along to our last Council meeting. Council were equally impressed and voted a first donation of £50 to support the work. If any members would like to also support her efforts, I will be delighted to pass on any donations. Please make your cheque out to "The Swinnerton Foundation" not to the society.

The Swinnerton Foundation (Continued).

Making a Difference

GOOD MEDICINE

When Englishwoman Joan Pollock visited a small community in the Himalayas, she was inspired by the people—and concerned for their health. With a little money and a lot of energy, she has since helped build the region's first hospital.

TEXT / Diana Bentley

ILLUSTRATION / Gregory Manchess

SPITI VALLEY IN THE HIMALAYAS is about as close to the heavens as human habitation can get. At 12,500 feet above sea level, baked by the sun in summer, encased in ice in winter, the valley is home to 10,000 people. Seventeen years ago, Englishwoman Joan Pollock arrived in this lofty region of India for the first time. A former nurse, she was a travel guide at the time and was leading a tour. Later she returned to visit her son, a medical student, who was working in the neighboring valley town of Manali. ¶ That was when she heard about the needs of the people of Spiti Valley. The nearest place where medical treatment was available was Manali, which is 13 hours away by auto over unreliable roads. Often the valley was completely inaccessible. ¶ A year later, while visiting the valley, which stretches for about 300 kilometers in the Tibetan plateau, Pollock found the hardships suffered by its inhabitants as striking as the desolate beauty of the region. "It was a medieval society," she recalls. "There were no old people. Women died in childbirth; there were many problems with children's health. People were worn out by living. But they are lovely, and I was welcomed into every house." ¶ Over the years, working alone in London, Pollock arranged to take volunteer doctors and pharmacists to the valley, and she raised money in hopes of building a hospital. Now, through her efforts, a small, eight-bed hospital is complete. People come from afar for treatment at the facility nestled under a rocky precipice in Kaza, the valley's capital. ¶ But Pollock's work continues. She coordinated the production, sale, and distribution of local handicrafts to help provide revenue for the hospital. And she built a craft center, providing looms and spinning wheels for local women. On the heels of that success, the valley residents have asked her to help them finance construction of a nursery school. ¶ To outsiders, the amount of money needed for such projects may appear modest, but the obstacles are great. Once a month, the women of the village of Mane in the valley fast and pray. They include Pollock in their prayers because she has not only helped change their lives but has also proved how much one person can do. ►►

The Swinnerton Foundation (continued)

Q: How did you recognise the need in this part of India?

A: As a travel guide, I led a group to the Himalayan region in 1984. When one traveller sprained her ankle, I took her to the Lady Willingdon Mission Hospital in Manali—the nearest big town to the Spiti Valley. Then, in 1991, my son, a medical student, went to Manali for training. The doctor teaching him, Laji Varghese, said the valley needed a hospital. “What’s stopping you from having one?” I asked. “Money!” he replied. “I’ll find the money—you build the hospital,” I said. It was a flippant remark at the time. But I came back to London and started fundraising.

“The biggest challenge for our work in the Himalayas is getting things there. Because of the geography of the place, it took one year to get the hospital window frames.”

Q: What was the valley’s pre-hospital state of health and medical service?

A: It was subsistence living. The snow starts in October and lasts till April. The temperature can go to 40 degrees below. Animals are brought inside and people essentially go into hibernation. In summer, a few crops are grown. You see a huge incidence of child illness—lack of hearing, tuberculosis, skin diseases, and cancer. There were few elderly people. It was noticeable that these people have very high pain thresholds. Before the hospital was built, one man who had a large hole in his leg that went to the bone walked 30 kilometres to one of our mobile clinics.

Q: How did you raise money for the hospital?

A: We didn’t really know what it would cost, so we did it on an ad hoc basis. I printed Christmas cards and sold them. I gave lunches in school and church halls. Later, people who’d visited the valley talked about it, and we had slides and craft stalls. My son took photos of building materials and medical equipment and we displayed them with prices at functions. People could buy a door, lights, or an operating table. Some women who came to my lunches staged their own coffee parties to raise money. Doctors who’ve worked there give talks and raise money, too. Everyone gets involved—it gives people something to work for. Other people hear about the effort through the grapevine and respond. The Italian Embassy in India donated a generator; the Swedish Embassy gave a greenhouse for the roof for summer.

Q: How did you plan and build the hospital?

A: Laji drew up the plans. I opened a charity bank account, and each year I’d take out what I’d raised—about \$7,000—and give it to Laji for construction and equipment. Much of this is naturally done on trust. Laji gives the money to Jeet Singh, a government administrator and one of the chief people in

The Swinnerton Foundation (continued)

the valley who organised the local work. The town of Kaza gave the land for the hospital.

Q: How long did the project take?

A: From spring to autumn, Jeer organised the local men who worked as volunteers on the construction. It was done gradually each year. By 1997 the outside, built with stones from the river, was complete. Then I raised money for the inside and for equipment.

Q: How were you able to staff a hospital there?

A: Laji had also said, “Bring me doctors,” so I got some doctors and a pharmacist who wanted to volunteer. For several years before the hospital was complete, I took three to six doctors and a pharmacist each year for three weeks. We stayed with the locals and did clinics out of the back of a jeep or in people’s houses. The doctors often received free medical supplies from drug companies, and an airline gave us free cargo space.

Q: How did things evolve after the initial period?

A: After five years, I let local doctors take over. It’s good for the people to do it themselves. The year after that, I took four schoolgirls, and we did school hygiene clinics, which we called Operation Scrub, showing children how to keep their hair and bodies clean. Now people in London collect shampoos, soaps, combs, and toothpaste from hotels, and I deliver them each year. The hospital became like a younger sister to the Lady Willingdon Hospital in Manali that is run by the Christian Mission. Now Lady Willingdon sends a doctor and surgeon to the valley hospital once a month. Dates are fixed for surgery and there’s a long list—sometimes 20 cases a day. Operations are done with ether. It’s cheap, and we don’t have sophisticated anesthetics. There’s a nurse who oversees what we call the intensive care room. Otherwise, families look after the patients.

Q: What was the genesis of the craft project?

A: The women of the valley weave shawls with beautiful geometric patterns and make distinctive dresses and jewellery—a part of their Tibetan tradition. I discovered the local crafts when I saw a beautiful shawl and tried to buy it. It was promised to someone else, but suddenly everyone was offering me shawls. I thought a craft centre and more spinning wheels and looms would help keep the traditions alive and help empower local women. It also gives them an income, as the Spiti Valley

As a great trekking center that’s becoming increasingly popular. I want every village to have a spinning wheel—they speed up the spinning. Now there are nine out there and the women pass them around. The craft centre in the town of Lari was finished last year and the women were thrilled.

Q: What comes next?

A: Last summer I was approached to raise the money for a nursery school to serve the 40 children in the village of Mane. There aren’t many schools in the valley, and few

children attend. Teachers come from Delhi for 10 months of the year. There's no equipment—no chalk, blackboards, chairs, or tables. Children sit on the ground. We'll have a stone building and, hopefully, proper equipment. It will be for children up to 8. After that they go to a government school. One local girl wants to be a teacher, so we're paying for her training. She'll be the first teacher from the valley. Like the hospital, everything must be done by degrees. We'll start with \$7000 for the building and then get equipment

Q: What are the biggest challenges in completing these projects?

A: The biggest challenge is getting things there. Because of the geography of the place, it took one year to get the hospital window frames. Staffing isn't so bad, but the hospital accommodation is basic for the doctors, and the local diet is limited. There haven't been any problems having a Christian hospital in a Buddhist valley. His Holiness the Dalai Lama was there for a ceremony at a monastery. He's very supportive of the hospital.

Communication is a nightmare. I don't speak Hindi, though I understand some. Mostly we get by with sign language. There are few phones, and often they don't work. The postman comes once or twice a week and passes on message through the Marian hospital. But there's a fantastic bush telegraph system. Let someone in the Manali hospital know that you're coming out on the first of July and someone will meet you on the road!

Q: Why have you decided to work alone?

A: If I'd established a formal charity, the administration costs would have been much too high. I am only raising about \$7,000 a year. On the positive side, I've cut out the red tape. All my time is given free, and I pay my own travel costs, as have the doctors and students who've gone out. The money raised goes to the projects with no deductions at all. But running something on your own isn't for everyone. Also, unless you are a registered charity, contributions aren't tax deductible. And since everything is done on trust, you must keep your integrity.

Q: Are there any other advantages to this approach?

A: What I've found is that there's tremendous grassroots support. There are a lot of retired people, like doctors, and students who want to contribute. And the support goes beyond specific projects—my mother-in-law knits wool vests for the local children. There are many opportunities for people in the West to contribute to the Third World. It's very rewarding, and I've had no negative experiences. I get very supportive letters from old-age pensioners including donations of £5. I write to everyone who includes an address. This ensures that what you do has a personal touch—that's the essence of it.
/END/

Diana Bentley is a London-based writer

JOAN POLLOCK
41 Woodford Square
London W14 8DP

August 2001

Dear Friends,

Having recently returned from Spiti I would like to bring you up to date with their news. This year my son Richard accompanied me who was great for me and I think he enjoyed every minute of our trip.

The valley is changing as more Westerners come in and Indians come to do trade this always has a good and bad effect. But for us the work goes on. Richard, being an engineer, was a great help in measuring up for the pump and the school. On our return to Delhi we were able to give Col. S.S.Singh (retired) the necessary information and measurements for the pump to be installed before the snows come this autumn.

The craft centre is now taking shape and the women of the valley have found a new enthusiasm for their spinning and weaving. We now have 9 spinning wheels in the valley spread out among the villages and this has cut down the time of spinning enormously.

Your money will be put towards THREE PROJECTS

At the small 8-bed hospital in Kaza the capital town of the Valley a three-room extension is being built. This will offer extra space as an intensive care unit to provide better care to patients post operatively. A surgeon works at this high Himalayan hospital for 2 weeks out of 4 during the summer months. Some 10 to 15 operations are performed daily. Traditionally the relatives look after the patients and a trained nurse is there to oversee their immediate care. Your money will go towards this building.

Our second project is the installation of a pump to elevate drinking water to the village of Mane. Up to now the women and children carry every drop of water in plastic cans of various sizes up a height of 120 metres over a distance of only 150 metres from the spring to the village. With your help we hope to have the pump installed before the winter snows come.

The third project is to build a small primary school for 40 children in a village of 480 people. At present they have their classes sitting outside on the ground with no shade from the hot sun. In the long winter they huddle in dark overcrowded rooms with no heating or equipment. We hope to build the school next spring if we receive sufficient funds. We are very fortunate in that Pinewood School, Nr Swindon has decided to take on "Spiti" as its charity project for next year. They hope to raise enough money to build the school in Mane village, which is very exciting. We need to keep up the good work as there will be furniture and equipment to buy, so your help is much appreciated and still needed.

On behalf of the Spiti people I would like to thank you again for your wonderful support.

With best wishes

Joan

Family Photographs

Our member David Swinnerton of Middlesborough, a regular correspondent, wrote to send me some more newspaper cuttings of a family in his area who appear to be in and out of trouble quite frequently (you have to take the rough with the smooth in family history!).

He also said how much he enjoyed seeing the photograph of the Membership Secretary on the cover of the Journal – it was very pleasing to be able to visualise what was once just a name of indeterminate age! He made the point that over the years, I would have met the majority of our members but those who are unable to attend meetings or live in foreign countries will have been unable to do so.

He went on to say that he wondered whether it would be worthwhile appealing to our members to send in a photograph of themselves for our records and for future publications. "The majority of people always seem to have spare passport photographs as the machine gives you four".

"And, if further, they could write on the back a bit of information about themselves such as colour of hair, eyes, height, weight (!) and age when the photograph was taken, it would be a valuable archive for the future.

We do have a photograph collection, of course, which I have compiled over the years but it is mainly of our ancestors. A brave man - David has sent one of himself to start the ball rolling – what do you think?



* * * * *

Genealogy - where you confuse the dead and irritate the living!
(quoted by the Cave Family History Society)

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