

# THE BOOK OF SWIMBRIDGE

A North Devon Village in the Twentieth Century

Philip Dalling

SWIMBRIDGE can fairly claim to be one of North Devon's most attractive and most interesting villages, set in a deep valley watered by the Venn Stream and overlooked by rolling hills.

The village itself, grouped around its gem of a parish church, is forever associated with the famous hunting parson, the Rev. John Russell – Parson Jack – and the breed of dog he originated. It stands at the centre of a much wider parish, once one of the largest in Devon.

Although life in the twentieth century was largely centred around agriculture (which remains a vital part of the local economy today) Swimbridge also boasts a considerable industrial heritage, based upon leather tanning, quarrying and mining. The village was fortunate throughout most of the twentieth century to enjoy good transport links, with a railway station on the Barnstaple-Taunton line, and a regular bus service to the market town of Barnstaple, less than 5 miles distant.

The book examines life in Swimbridge during the momentous decades from 1900 to the Millennium, looking back where appropriate to examine the factors that formed the settlement, and forward to see how the village has responded to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

It looks closely at the people of the parish, who made up a varied and fascinating community – gentry, farmers, smallholders, and those who worked in the tannery and quarries, and on the railway line. It records their daily lives at work and play, and examines the major roles played by the churches, the village school – one of the finest in Devon – and the refurbished village hall.

There are stories of triumph and tragedy, both in war and in peace, feuds and friendships, together with fascinating eye-witness accounts of what it was really like to live in Swimbridge throughout a tumultuous century.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

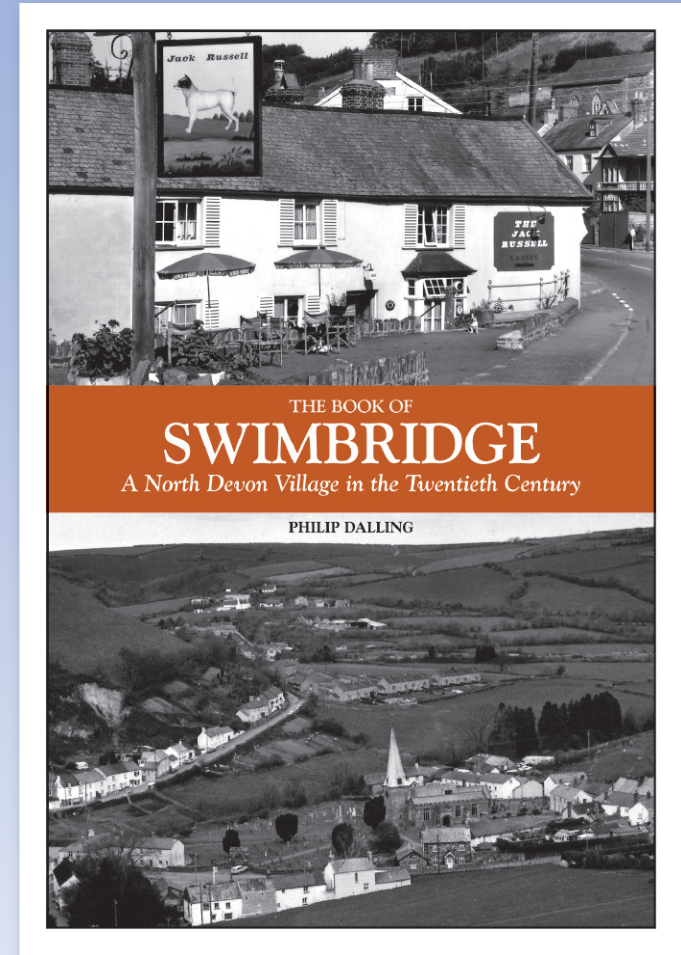
PHILIP DALLING can trace his family's roots in Swimbridge back to the late seventeenth century. He is a journalist and author who has worked on regional newspapers and in media relations for government, industry and higher education. He is a regular contributor to Devon Life magazine.

He is the first cousin of Swimbridge historian Mervyn Dalling and is the custodian of the extensive collection of historical records and photographs amassed by Mervyn during a lifetime of interest in the lives of villagers, past and present. As such, this volume forms a tribute to Mervyn's life and work.

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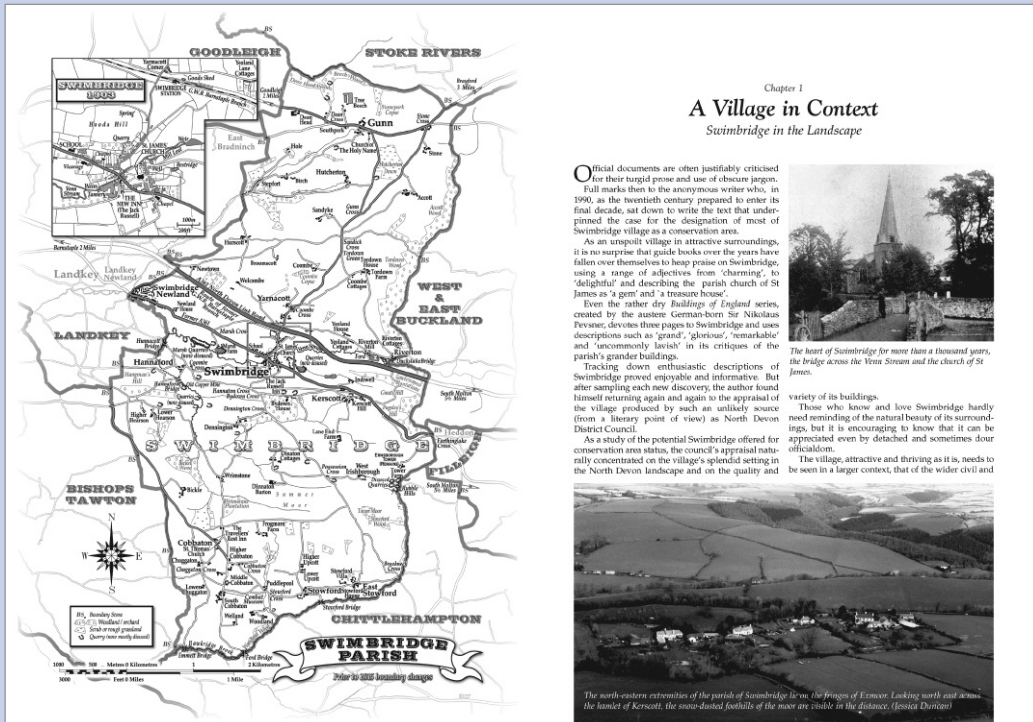
Above, left to right: Charles Henry Balment's butcher's shop in The Square, later run by his son Harry and daughter-in-law Kathlyne; World War Two and the following austerity did not prevent families from enjoying the traditional pleasures of North Devon beaches. Mrs Mary Yeo (left) of Tordown Farm and Mrs Nora Holland of Tordown Cottages enjoy the comfort of deckchairs. Sitting on the sand, l-r, are Patricia Holland, George Snell, Diana Dalling, Leonora Snell and Betty Holland; Tom Snell was mine host at the New Inn when the name was changed to The Jack Russell. He is pictured in 1966 with a dispenser for Watney's Red Barrel, advertising material for the World Cup and a fine example of a Jack Russell terrier on the bar.



Far left: Charles Elworthy's big Humber vehicle transported sackfuls but also carried Home Guard members around Swimbridge parish.

Left: Michael Chapman, son of the then landlord of the Jack Russell, with his Silver Jubilee Mug, as presented to all Swimbridge children in 1977.

Example of a double-page spread.



Swimbridge tannery workforce in 1911. In the centre of the front row is the foreman, John Morrish, with hat and beard.