

## Stoneleigh History Society AGM Tuesday 24 March 2020

### Chairman's Report

Once again this has been a very busy year and we have maintained a high profile in a variety of ways. We have lost a few members, sadly, and we extend good wishes to those members who have moved away from Stoneleigh or who now find that distance prevents regular attendance at our meetings. In particular, best wishes go to the family of the late Jenny Skidmore. We currently have 41 members and 3 honorary members.

The Chairman would like to thank all those who have helped the Society in so many ways at meetings, from helping with refreshments to sorting out the furniture. Thanks, too, go to all who have attended displays and events, and of course, to committee members whose support and hard work behind the scenes is both considerable and gratefully received!

#### ***Events and Displays***

Whilst we were determining the subject of our 2019 display, an unexpected email set in train a series of exciting developments for the Society. The grandson of William Roseblade, a founder member of the Coventry Society of Watercolour Artists, who died in 1967 and is buried at Stoneleigh, offered us a selection of his grandfather's paintings. These dated from around the 1940s and 1950s and depicted most of the street scenes in the village at that time. We were delighted to own not just the pictures but also the copyright in them, which was later transferred to us. The attendant legalities were handled efficiently and meticulously by David Vaughan.

Twelve "Roseblade" pictures, suitably mounted and described, formed, then, our 2019 display. There are moves afoot to use them to create calendars/cards.

We first showed the paintings at the Duck Race and again at the Heritage Weekend in September, but, their value being relatively high, we needed to "man the stall" to protect them. Wishing to show them throughout the year, we therefore had laminated photocopies made to provide a display while the Chapel is unattended. Until an opportunity arises to show the originals again, they are being kept securely in a museum grade box in acid-free conservation tissue.

The expense of mounting and conserving the pictures has been high, but a further four pictures had been discovered which the Roseblade family suggested we might sell to help our funds, and we duly sold two (in each case to SHS members) which covered our costs and resulted in a significant boost to our finances. Thanks must go to the generous purchasers!

For the first time the Society had a presence at the Leamington History Fair, held in September at All Saints Church, Leamington. It was a useful networking day, but did not result in many sales of our merchandise; as yet no decision has been taken to continue next year.

## ***Research and Publications***

The Churchyard Project has continued to progress: members are encouraged to visit the Burials Database on the Society's website. A decision was taken to omit research into the cremations stones since they are relatively recent and information might therefore be deemed sensitive. There are also some burials in Section D which fall into this category, and therefore only basic information such as birth and death has been recorded. Many enquiries about family history research still come from people around the world, and the church administrator has said how enquiries about burial locations are now much easier for her to answer.

Our booklets have continued to prove popular sales items, and many have also been sold at talks given by the chairman. The Almshouse Residents book and the Stitchers booklet have continued to sell, as have two more Austen-focussed booklets.

A book on the history of Stoneleigh School called *Back to School* was written by the Chairman and published under the auspices of the Society in September 2019. This provided a good opportunity to connect with former pupils of the School and of the 150 copies printed, it was gratifying that about half were sold to people with previous connections to it. Many photographs and memories were provided, though not all in time for publication! The book has almost sold out, and an abbreviated form of it has been written as a booklet; it will also provide the basis of our 2020 display in the Leigh Chapel.

## ***Meetings***

Our **March 2019** meeting, as well as being the AGM, saw a visit from Heidi Meyer, the first female Master of Lord Leycester's Hospital in Warwick. She spoke very informatively about the history of the institution and its current inhabitants.

In **April** we had a most entertaining and in many ways moving presentation from Derek Clarke, who had been one of the original architects overseeing the restoration of the Birmingham Back to Backs. It is not easy to forget his slides showing the parlous condition of the building!

In **May** a large group followed up Derek's talk with a visit to the Back to Backs themselves. The weather was dreadful but we found the houses revealed a fascinating glimpse into housing conditions for the poor of Birmingham in the 1800s and beyond.

Our **June** meeting commemorated the centenary of the "official" end of the Great War in 1919, as Peter James told us about the Peace Riots that year in Coventry and elsewhere. Pete's research revealed, as so often, some surprising facts about a period which we might have thought we knew.

As usual there was no meeting in **July** or **August**.

**September** saw the launch of Sheila Woolf's book on the history of Stoneleigh School (see above.)

**In October** we had two speakers from the Coventry Women's Research Group. They spoke about different aspects of the lives of women in Coventry, principally in the twentieth century. Many of the audience found that memories were evoked of their youth!

Our **November** meeting was a visit from Anne Langley from Stretton on Dunsmore . Anne took us through the history of the Warwick County Asylum, an early reformatory for juveniles which happened to be situated in Stretton. Again, surprising and moving facts were revealed.

Our traditional **December** Christmas Social provided a relaxing opportunity to chat, eat and drink in the Village Hall.

At the beginning of 2020 we broke with tradition and for the first time held a meeting in **January**. The decision was rewarded by a large audience who came to hear Peter James speak about "Salvation and Stoneleigh" – a history of some of the Fardon family in Warwickshire and Gloucestershire.

Our year was completed in **February** with a return visit from Jan Cooper, Chair of the Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society, who spoke entertainingly about John of Gaunt and his building works in Kenilworth, as well as his important family connections.

### ***Personnel and Affiliations***

We continue to be affiliated to the Warwickshire Local History Society, whose meetings are free to us as a consequence, and to the British Association for Local History, which enables us not only to receive publications and information about events of interest, but which also provides us with essential Public Liability Insurance for our meetings and trips.

We look forward in 2020 to another year filled with interesting talks and visits, and to planning for our tenth anniversary in 2021.

**Sheila Woolf, March 2020**