

## Stoneleigh History Society AGM Tuesday 23 March 2021

### Chairman's report

This year's report is like no other I have written before, and I sincerely hope that such a report will not have to be written again! It has been a struggle to keep the Society going in the event of a series of lockdowns, tiers and social distancing measures in place for a whole year; the village hall remains closed and as I write, it seems that our meetings must continue to be held via Zoom. Nevertheless, our membership has remained loyal and we currently have 40 members and 1 honorary member. We also have three *new* members. It was with sadness that we heard of the death of Vince Taylor, an honorary member owing to his and his wife's extraordinary work some years ago in transcribing all the Stoneleigh School logbooks.

There have, of course, been no events or displays since last March. The church has remained closed and the display about the school's history, prepared in February 2020, has not been exhibited. Similarly, a display on Stoneleigh's WW2 experiences, prepared to be exhibited in the Club on VE Day, remains in wraps. It was good to commemorate the occasion on a beautifully sunny day, however, with a socially-distanced get-together on the village green, when Adrian Clarke played the Last Post and Reveille.

In the absence of events and lectures it was good to become aware of many online talks and festivals to stimulate historical interest.

### Research and Publications

Sadly there has been no possibility of sales of booklets this year, although Kenilworth Books have been kind enough to take a selection for sale there. The book on Stoneleigh School has now sold out but for two copies. Immediately before lockdown, however, a booklet was printed which gave a summary of the key points in the book.

Research into the churchyard burials continues, with requests for information from across the world. These often result in additional knowledge which is added to the database and to our Ancestry site, which continues to grow. Similarly, there have been requests from new residents in the village, for information about the history of their houses. A visit from a couple in Wiltshire (a week prior to the March 2020 lockdown) brought a poignant story: they donated a large portrait of Ada Knight, a Stoneleigh schoolteacher killed on her bicycle days before her wedding in 1933. The portrait is now in the Leigh Chapel. A more unusual donation came in the form of a floorboard, removed from 16, Birmingham Road. On it were pencilled notes and calculations by a mid-nineteenth-century builder! Naturally, he – James Emmanuel Hadley – has now been researched and added to our knowledge-base.

Another interesting development has been the work of local detectorists, who have made a number of interesting finds in the Meadows and elsewhere in the village. Although it has so

far only been possible to see photographs of the finds, we hope to be able to view them properly before too long.

In the absence of meetings - and "filling a gap" - I circulated a newly-researched article I had written called "Faith and Fortune" which examined the stories of Alice, Duchess Dudley, and her sister Katherine, together with their husbands, Robert Dudley and Robert Catesby. A fellow researcher from Ladbroke, Jackie West, has been pursuing the story of Alice and Robert Dudley for a "City of Culture" trail about their lives, and we have been able to share much information with one another. This, together with an article on the stained glass at Stoneleigh Abbey, has now gone to the printers. It is hoped that both will form the basis of small exhibitions at the abbey in future.

Congratulations to SHS member John Purcell, who published a book in October 2020 about industrial history in Coventry, called *Earlsdon's Lost Industrial Heritage*.

### **Meetings**

Between March and August 2020 we held no meetings. This was particularly sad since we had a good programme of speakers lined up. Some of these have agreed to come to us during 2021, although not all are comfortable with Zoom. After some hesitation ourselves, we had a trial meeting at the end of **August** to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VJ Day, when I spoke about my father's experiences as a prisoner of war in the Far East. The technology worked!

Following the success of August's Zoom, Pete James volunteered his services as a presenter for our next meeting, in **September**, and gave a much-appreciated talk on the various visits to Coventry by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.

Undaunted by tiers and restrictions, I published a children's book, *The Eagle and the Phoenix*, on various aspects of the history of Coventry. This provided the basis for our **October** Zoom meeting (and thankfully sales are going extremely well!)

In **November** we held our first Zoom meeting with an outside speaker: Dr Lucy Underwood of Warwick University gave a talk on "The Catholic Experience and aspects of childhood in Warwickshire and beyond."

Sadly it was not possible to hold our usual **December** Social and so meetings were held over until **January** 2021, when an enthusiastic audience followed the intricacies of Bill Crofts' talk on the WUSAT space mission – born in Stoneleigh!

**February's** meeting rounded off this unusual year with a talk postponed from 2020, given by Jill Kashi, a guide at Baddesley Clinton. Her talk on domestic servants there between 1880 and 1923 was thoroughly researched and very entertaining.

The future of our meetings remains highly uncertain, though we have some interesting ones in prospect. Our outing to Maxstoke Castle, postponed from May 2020, might happen sometime later in 2021; it will still not be possible to go in May this year. It is most unfortunate that the pandemic has curtailed plans for our tenth anniversary year, but we hope that a celebratory event in conjunction with both the Stoneleigh Male Voice Choir and the Ladies' Choir will go ahead at the end of September.

Finally I should like to thank all those who have participated in our Zoom meetings and who have helped in other ways, particularly my fellow officers Margaret Wallis and Sue Crofts, and Rob Orland our “go-to” computer guru who has calmly resolved a variety of issues on our website. Let’s hope that we shall all be able to meet again soon.

**Sheila Woolf**

**March 2021**