

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STONELEIGH HISTORY SOCIETY HELD ON 25 APRIL 2017

Present: members of the Society

Apologies for absence: David and Janet Gibson, Rob Orland, Marianne Puxley, Jean Vaughan, Rosemary Jewel-Clark

Welcome: Sheila Woolf welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially new members. She then welcomed Sue Crofts to her new role as SHS Treasurer and thanked Lisa Reay for all her hard work as Treasurer since the formation of the Society.

Sheila reminded everyone that the meeting on 30 May would be held in the church when the SHS display 'Stoneleigh Church: centuries of change and renewal' would be in the Leigh Chapel and the team who had produced 90+ display boards would talk about some of their discoveries. The display would be erected in time for the church 'homecoming' on 21 May. Members were reminded that if they wished to attend events that day, they should contact Jane Taylor jane0891@yahoo.com 01926 858315 so she knew about the likely numbers for refreshments.

The evening's programme was a three-hander.

- 1. The church restoration project:** Sarah Ballinger introduced a display which illustrated some of the most interesting/challenging aspects of the work which had been undertaken since a grant of £210,000 had been received from the English Lottery Fund (after several previous attempts). Work had begun in August 2016. Sarah's role throughout had been publicity and community liaison. As work had proceeded, more and more problems were uncovered e.g. more decaying stonework than had been realised originally, problems with the roof and windows. The contractors had taken great care throughout and there was very little damage or mess. The overall result would mean that the building would be much easier to maintain. Further work was needed when money became available. Meanwhile there were practicalities such as developing a new website for the church. Throughout the project close involvement with the community was required. Sarah paid particular tribute and thanks to the SHS, especially Sheila, for all the support given. Marianne Puxley had designed a leaflet for use with young visitors, Mel Dearing had prepared historic church plans for display in the porch, and Sheila, Pam Baker and Pete James had researched materials for the display in the Leigh Chapel.

Clive Watson described the excellent liaison with the contractor's foreman and praised the excellent quality work undertaken e.g. exact matches of sandstone stonework. Interestingly, some faulty workmanship over the centuries was uncovered e.g. some cavity walls were filled with rubble. The roof was now made of copper (much harder to steal than lead!). The church would be a much more comfortable place to be in the future. Community interest and enthusiasm had been evident throughout the project.

- 2. Samplers:** Sheila had found a sampler kit being sold on the internet in North Carolina which included one by 'Cordelia Leigh, 1878, Stoneleigh Abbey'. The

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owner collected samplers which included her husband's birthday, 3 February, and she also had a sampler dated 3 February 1817 which was also created by Ann Willcox of Stareton who later married James Buswell of Stoneleigh (both are buried in Stoneleigh churchyard and are ancestors of current resident Linda Hancox). This sampler has 'Ann Willcox, aged 10, Stoneleigh School, Warwickshire on it. Mu Fielding of Stoneleigh WI completed both samplers for Sheila. How these two samplers found their way to North Carolina remains a mystery.

- 3. Stare Bridge:** Stare Bridge is a fifteenth century listed building, a historic reminder of industrial archaeology, being used a part of the old wool route from Bristol. It is made of the same sandstone as the fourteenth century gatehouse at Stoneleigh Abbey. Derek Robinson presented a large collection of photographs of Stare Bridge and its surroundings which he had taken through the seasons. Anthony Bianco outlined how the bridge would be impacted during and after the construction of HS2. He and Sheila had met with officials from HS2 Ltd who had given assurances that care would be taken to reduce impact on the surroundings but there were no guarantees, and it was likely that several very ancient trees would be felled. Derek included several photos of the river in flood but there was no evidence that HS2 Ltd. had taken note of the fact that the route crossed a flood plain (also an oversight along many parts of the route!).

Thanks to the speakers, and to Rachel Gill and Sarah Ballinger who provided refreshments.