

## Christmas Newsletter 2020



**Annus horribilis!** Our little Society seems unimportant in the great scale of things, but it's been sad to have to put all our monthly activities on hold. Nevertheless, things *have* happened! Below is a digest of some of them...you may know of more!



### January

We began our year, unusually, with a meeting in January, and it did not disappoint. Pete James told us much about the Fardon family, from Stoneleigh and way beyond...and it was lovely to have so many guests at our meeting, many of whom were from various branches of the family.



## **February**

We continued our programme with a return visit from Jan Cooper, chair of the Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society, who is an expert on all things Kenilworth. She gave a detailed presentation about John of Gaunt, his connections with our area and his complicated family!

**And so, to Lockdown....**



## **March**

The news of lockdown came just as notes for the AGM were being prepared, and as elections to the committee were needed this was conducted via email. Instead of our talk by Derek Clarke, a story had unfolded about a portrait held in an attic in Wiltshire - it was a picture of Ada Knight, a Stoneleigh school teacher killed on her bicycle just days before her wedding. The owners of the portrait (who knew nothing about the lady) brought it to Stoneleigh and there was just time to install it in the Leigh Chapel along with the rest of our artefacts, before the church closed.



## **April**

As lockdown continued, how were we to occupy our time? Thankfully many websites, theatres, cinemas and festivals streamed their activities online, and many of these were shared.



## **May**

We had prepared a VE Day display to be installed in the Club alongside the village's celebrations. Sadly, it was not possible to mount it, but it was good - on a beautifully sunny day - to commemorate 8 May 1945 with a socially-distanced get-together on the village green, when Adrian Clarke played the last post and reveille. Many villagers were much moved by this.

Also in May the Leamington History Society shared with us the first of several mini-videos they had created. This was "Birth of a Spa Town" - a good initiative, and their video, along with later ones, is still available via You Tube and their website.

We had been scheduled to visit Maxstoke Castle this month. It was particularly galling that the evening in question was hot and sunny, and we couldn't go!



## June

Lockdown was beginning to reveal the researches of people all around the world looking at their Stoneleigh family history. As the summer progressed, enquiries reached us via our website's burial database and our Ancestry site - we learnt more, or were able to help those who wanted to know more. We were also able to work with the church administrator in coordinating our churchyard information; more photographs were added to our database, and as, sadly, more residents died, we were able to update our records of burials.

A large box tomb in the churchyard was beginning to fragment owing to tree disturbance. Our researches into the family background enabled us to write to the diocese about the tomb's significance, and as a result subsequent arrangements were made for preserving the tomb. Unfortunately a very much weathered headstone elsewhere in the churchyard - illegible even in 1981 when the WI did their survey- actually collapsed, though its position continues to be marked.

A previous speaker and Stoneleigh resident, Stuart Green, contacted us with updated details about the war service of his father Alan, who would have been 100 in mid-June. Stuart provided interesting information about activities surrounding the anniversary of Bomber Command.



## **July**

We would not normally have had a meeting in July or August. Filling a gap, however, 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.



## **August**

We were approached by a Kenilworth historian who was suggesting that during lockdown local speakers might record their presentations which could be held in a common “bank” of talks. After a Zoom meeting with a few interested parties the idea did not seem to “have legs” as far as we were concerned, and so was not pursued.

To commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VJ Day we held our first SHS Zoom meeting, when I spoke about my father’s experiences as a prisoner of war in the Far East. The technology worked!



## September

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

The usual September Heritage Days were unable to go ahead. We had planned our 2020 display in the Leigh Chapel to be based on the history of Stoneleigh School, and as with VE Day, the exhibition we had created remained unprinted. As the church has remained closed since March, none of our artefacts have been available, and no booklets have been sold.



## October

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

Another successful video was launched by the Leamington History Society, this time on Victorian Leamington, and this was circulated to SHS members.





## **November**

We held our first Zoom meeting with an outside speaker.

Technical issues with “Zooming” have been tricky at times, and Pete James has been really helpful in attempting to address these. We have now upgraded to Zoom Pro, allowing unlimited time. Similarly, when, this month, the Society’s website appeared to have been hacked (multiple spam emails were arriving!) it was to Rob Orland that we turned, who was, as ever, reassuring and fixed the problem without fuss.

A metal detectorist contacted us, asking permission to survey the Meadows. The Meadows Society gave their permission and a variety of interesting artefacts appeared, including a lead musket ball. I shall be meeting the detectorist in future and hope to secure some objects for the SHS!

Following a great many communications over the year from people interested in Stoneleigh residents from the past, November brought a request for help from the secretary of the Veteran Cycle Club, who wished to know more about Edward Langley Fardon, his intention being to rehabilitate Fardon’s legacy, as a contribution towards the City of Culture. It was good to be able to provide him with our own extensive researches and to put him in touch with various members of the Fardon family.



## **December**

No Christmas Social this year...but we look forward to celebrating our tenth anniversary in 2021.



**Merry Christmas! Here's to us all gathering again in 2021!**

Sheila, December 2020